

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 452

Ximena said nothing. She slumped into the chair, covering her face as tears streamed down uncontrollably. In that moment, she wasn't **the** strong, commanding woman everyone knew—just a helpless mother, overwhelmed by pain,

Zora, spoiled and coddled all her life, had never been so much as scolded by her mother. And now—her mother had struck her. For someone else. It ignited a firestorm of rage within her.

Grabbing Ximena's hair, Zora shook her violently. "Why are you crying?! You slapped me and now you're crying?! How could I have such a pathetic excuse for a mother?!"

"Stop it!"

Caitlin's voice cut through the hallway. She had just returned and caught Zora mid-tantrum.

"Caitlin?"

Zora paused but didn't drop her defiant tone. "This is between me and my mother. Stay out of **it!**"

“I don’t care what your personal drama is. But this is a hospital, and you’re standing outside an emergency room. Have some decency and keep your voice down.”

Caitlin glanced sharply at her before turning to Ximena. “There’s no point hiding it anymore. She has the right to know.”

Indeed, Ximena had been keeping the truth from her daughter for years. But now, there was no more room to run. It was time.

“What truth? What have you been hiding from me?” Zora demanded.

Ximena wiped her tears, drew in a shaky breath, and looked at her daughter with glassy eyes.

“Zora... Zeke is your brother. Your biological brother.”

“My brother?”

Zora stood there, stunned into silence, eyes locked on her mother’s face.

Memories flooded her mind—every odd, emotional reaction her mother had shown when Zeke’s name was mentioned. The conflicted stares, the pained silence—it all made sense now. Not because of some scandalous affair, but because she had been looking at her own son.

Zeke was her brother.

A half-brother, but a brother nonetheless.

Suddenly, Zora broke into a bizarre, almost hysterical laugh. “Hah! Zeke is my brother? My actual brother? Why didn’t you tell me this earlier, Mom? You should’ve told me sooner!”

Her tone shifted from rage to jubilation. The moment she realized her brother was the CEO of SY Capital Partners, Zora saw it as a golden

ticket.

She had been trying to cozy up to Zeke, even considered seducing him. Thank god she hadn’t. That could’ve been a disaster.

Now, this truth only served to benefit her A powerful brother? That was a win.

Ximena was taken aback by how quickly her daughter flipped. “Zora... I never told you because I didn’t know how. I was afraid **of what you’d** think... You’re not angry with me?”

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Chapter 452

“Angry? Of course not! I’m thrilled! I have a brother now. And not just any brother, a successful one?”

Zora embraced the revelation with open arms, leaving Ximena somewhat relieved.

But with her newfound confidence, Zora turned to Caitlin with a sneer. “Now that we’ve cleared things up—Zeke is my brother. You don’t

need to be here anymore. You can go.”

“Fine. I’ll leave after I confirm he’s okay.”

A few minutes later, the emergency room doors swung open. Ximena and Zora rushed forward.

“Doctor, how is the patient?”

“We’ve removed the bullet. He’s stable, but he’ll need to remain hospitalized for a while.”

“Thank you so much, doctor.”

Zora grinned. “Thank god! My brother’s going to be fine!”

Caitlin watched them, nodded to herself, and then quietly turned to leave.

Zora caught a glimpse of her retreating figure and sneered triumphantly. “That’s right—walk away. You’ve lost this round.”

On her way back to TIG, Caitlin called Sebastian and learned that Tyler had interrogated the shooter. The man was another mercenary lured by Black Wolf Fortress’s bounty. It only confirmed what they already knew: until that threat was eliminated, peace was out of the question.

At TIG headquarters, Caitlin returned to the boardroom. CEO Garrett followed her inside.

“Caitlin, if it weren’t for your foresight—using Wade’s designs—we would’ve been destroyed today.”

He was genuinely impressed with her ability to anticipate the crisis.

“I’m not a prophet, Garrett. I just know how Zora operates.”

Caitlin had merely predicted Zora might make a move. But how the design was actually leaked? That still needed answers.

“Have we found the mole?”

“We’re still investigating quietly. Once we confirm the source, you’ll know immediately.”

Caitlin sank into her leather chair, thinking. “Bring all the designers from the creative department to my office.”

“Right away.”

A few minutes later, twelve designers stood assembled. Among them were Justin and Wade.

“Jonathan,” Caitlin called.

“Caitlin...”

The two exchanged greetings, but her eyes soon narrowed at the sight of bruises on Justin and Wade’s faces.

“What happened to you two?”

Justin averted his gaze with a scowl. Wade kept his head down.

Chapter 452

Peyton, another designer, jumped in to explain. “They got into a fight over the design leak.”

“A **fight**?” Caitlin’s brow furrowed. “Why?”

Justin’s anger flared again. “Because I think Wade leaked my design.”

“I didn’t!” Wade blurted, clearly frustrated.

“Do you have proof?” Caitlin asked, calm but direct.

“He had the most to gain! A few days ago, I saw him taking a shady phone call, then hanging around the office after everyone left. When I came back from lunch, my computer had been tampered with. I didn’t think much of it then, but now? After what happened? I think he copied my files.”

“I didn’t touch his computer. I didn’t leak anything,” Wade replied, his voice tight.

“Enough,” Caitlin cut them off.

She took a few slow steps, then stopped and turned to face the group.

“There’s no doubt Justin’s design was leaked. That much is certain. But as for *who* did it... well, the person responsible already knows.”

Her tone turned steely.

“Whoever betrayed this company—once I find out who you are—don’t expect mercy.”

She let the silence hang heavy in the room.

“You can all leave. In ten minutes, I’ll tell you who the mole is.”

AD

Billionsaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 453

Everyone exchanged glances before quietly leaving the CEO’s office. From the looks of it, Justin could be ruled **out** as **the** leak. **If** he were the mote, he wouldn’t have been so persistent in confronting Wade or been so consumed with frustration.

His open but indignant expression had said it all—he wasn’t guilty.

Caitlin returned to her desk and opened her laptop. Not long after, James walked in.

“We’ve found the leak. It’s her.”

James had arrived early at TIG at Caitlin's request and had already conducted a full audit of the company's surveillance and network systems. His investigation had pinpointed a suspect.

"It was her?"

The answer genuinely surprised Caitlin, but after reviewing the evidence, everything made sense.

"Good. Let's head to the design center."

With James accompanying her, Caitlin walked into the design department. The atmosphere was tense and quiet. Everyone was nervously waiting for the promised ten minutes, but as the sound of high heels echoed down the hallway, they realized Caitlin had arrived early.

Everyone turned to face her as she stepped inside.

"Caitlin, did you find out who it was?" Justin asked, the one most desperate for answers.

"I did. And it's truly disappointing."

Caitlin's sharp gaze swept over each designer before landing squarely on Peyton. Peyton flinched but tried her best to maintain a composed expression.

“It was you, wasn’t it, Peyton?”

The words dropped like a bomb. The entire room erupted in gasps. All eyes turned toward Peyton in disbelief.

Peyton—the friendly, well-liked designer. Beautiful, experienced, talented. Back when the company was still LIG, most of the chosen design plans had been hers.

Everyone had considered her the most promising star in the department.

“Peyton, why? Why would you do this?” Justin stared at her, devastated. She was more than just a colleague—she had mentored him, guided him. He had seen her as a teammate.

“Yeah, Peyton, how could you betray the company like this?”

“What did you gain from leaking the designs? Do you even understand what this means?”

The room was alive with disbelief and accusations.

Peyton shook her head. “I didn’t leak anything! Caitlin, I didn’t betray the company. You’ve got it wrong!”

Her voice trembled with panic, but she refused to admit the truth.

“There’s always evidence,” Caitlin said calmly. “This office is under constant surveillance.”

“Then show me the evidence! When did I ever leak his designs?”

Peyton stood her ground, emboldened by her belief that she had already deleted the incriminating footage.

“Bring in Curtis from security,” Caitlin ordered.

Moments later, James returned with Curtis, the security guard in charge of surveillance. Curtis looked visibly nervous and avoided Caitlin’s

gaze.

“Tell the truth, Curtis,” Caitlin demanded, her tone sharp and unyielding.

Curtis began to shake, cold sweat forming on his back. “Caitlin, I swear I didn’t do anything. Peyton said she dropped something and **needed** to check the cameras. I let her in, but I had no idea what she was really doing.”

“Curtis! When did I ever go to security to check footage? Don’t frame me!” Peyton shot back.

But James stepped forward, plugged a USB drive into a computer, and projected the footage onto the wall. The video, edited for clarity, clearly showed Peyton leaving the design center, visiting Curtis, and accessing the security footage.

The evidence spoke for itself. Peyton’s face paled.

Caitlin continued, “I know you have some computer skills. You deleted part of the design center’s security footage. You pretended to return for something during lunch, but instead, you opened Justin’s computer and copied his design files.

“You thought that by erasing the footage, you’d be safe. But you forgot—computers remember everything.”

James played another clip: the very moment Peyton copied Justin’s designs. The silence in the room was deafening.

“It really was you...”

Justin’s voice broke. He looked at Peyton—the colleague, the mentor—now exposed as a traitor.

t you?”

“And there’s more,” Caitlin said. “We traced where the files went. You gave them to Joshua, didn’t
y

Joshua let

At the mention of that name, everyone stiffened. Joshua, the former deputy general manager, had
been let go when LIG became TIG. What was Peyton doing with him?

Peyton remained silent, but her complexion turned ghostly. She was on the brink of collapse.

Caitlin dropped a stack of photos in front of her. “You’ve been living

Joshua for a while. He used you

to

steal our plans.

“You were always one of our lead designers. We chose your work many times. But this time, I
picked Justin’s design—and you couldn’t accept

1. it.

“You did this out of spite. Out of jealousy. Out of love for a man who only used you.”

Caitlin’s voice sharpened.

“Did Joshua promise to help you land a position at XEG? Maybe even open a design firm in your name one day?”

Peyton couldn’t hold back anymore. Tears welled in her eyes.

“You’re a fool to believe him,” Caitlin said coldly. “He’s got nothing. He’ll never give you a future. He’ll only drag you into hell.

“Peyton, do you know? Even though I didn’t pick your design for this show, it didn’t mean I didn’t believe in you.

Chapter 453

“**On** the contrary, **Garrett and** I had already agreed **to promote you to** chief designer—after this launch

Peyton’s eyes widened in shock.

Garrett stepped into the room. “**It’s** true. Caitlin had already signed the proposal. Here, see for yourself.”

He handed her the document. The title and Caitlin’s signature were clear as day. Peyton read the date—before the launch.

Her hands trembled as she stared at the paper. The reality hit her like a truck. Regret and shame overtook her. She collapsed **onto the floor** sobbing uncontrollably.

“I’m sorry... I’m so sorry, Caitlin. I made a terrible mistake...”

“You did,” Caitlin said. “And you’ll face the consequences. But I need you to do one more thing for me.”

“What is it?” Peyton asked, tears streaming down her face.

AD

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“Come to my office,” Caitlin said flatly before turning and walking out of the design center. Peyton wiped her tears, **stood** up, and followed.

behind.

As soon as they left, the entire design center exploded with thatter.

Justin glanced at Wade, his guilt evident. He stepped forward and apologized, “Wade, I’m sorry. I was wrong about you. If you want, **I’ll** let you punch me back.”

Wade shook his head. “Forget it. I can’t blame you. If I were in your shoes, I’d probably react the same way.”

Wade’s calm and understanding only made Justin feel worse. “Thanks, man. From now on, we’re friends—same team, same goals.”

The two shook hands, settling their differences. It was a merging of old and new talent, finally finding common ground.

Meanwhile, Peyton followed Caitlin, her heart heavy with dread. She had no idea what Caitlin wanted from her.

“Caitlin...”

“Are you still living with Joshua?” Caitlin asked coolly.

“No... not anymore, but he still visits often...” Peyton looked down as she spoke.

“You really thought he loved you? He used you. You became his weapon. Someone who truly loves you would never push you to betray yourself. Learn from this, Peyton.”

Peyton could only cry harder.

“Tears won’t fix this. You leaked sensitive company information, caused substantial losses. This could land you in jail.”

Peyton’s sobs grew louder. “Please, Caitlin... I’m begging you. My parents only have me. If I go to prison, there’s no one to care for them.”

“I know your mother is chronically ill. For her sake, I won’t pursue legal action. But you’ll be dismissed from TIG. That’s the best I can offer.”

Peyton bowed her head in tears. “Thank you, Caitlin... Thank you...”

“Enough crying. I know Joshua put you up to this. I know jealousy got the better of you. But now, I need you to do one more thing—help me draw him out. He’s going to answer for everything. Will you help me?”

That was Caitlin’s plan: use Peyton to bait Joshua into showing his face.

She had let him go after the LIG fallout, thinking he’d stay quiet. Clearly, he hadn’t learned his lesson. And now, she wouldn’t hold back.

“Yes. I’ll do it.”

Peyton agreed. She had finally woken up. Joshua’s so-called love had always been selfish—cold, calculated, and manipulative.

At the hospital, Zeke had been moved into a private room post-surgery. He was still unconscious. Ximena sat at his bedside, gently holding his hand, watching over him in silence.

This was the only time she could be near him, could study his face up close and feel a mother’s love.

A **ringtone broke the silence. Zora** glanced at her **phone. “Mom, stay here with him. I need to handle something**

“Okay.”

Ximena didn't say much. She'd left company affairs to Zora for the time being.

Zora stepped out of the hospital and took the call. "Alright, I'll meet you at the café near the office."

She returned to XEG and headed straight for a small nearby café. Inside, a man in a baseball cap waited discreetly.

Seeing her arrive, Joshua removed his hat and greeted her politely. "Ms. Harris."

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Not at all."

Once seated, Joshua got to the point. "Zora, I've done what you asked. XEG's product launch was a success. I believe it's **time for you to hold** up your end of the deal."

Zora smiled. "Yes. I'm satisfied with the results. As promised, you'll be compensated. The finance team will wire the money today."

But Joshua wasn't interested in the payout. His eyes glinted with ambition. "Actually, Zora... the money isn't important. What I really **want is** a position. I was once VP at LIG. I have the skills and experience. Give me a chance, and I'll help XEG reach even greater heights."

Zora saw right through him. He wasn't just hungry—he was ravenous. But she also knew he had value, especially with his inside knowledge

of LIG.

"Why didn't you say so earlier? Fine. If you were VP at LIG, you can keep that title at XEG. Same salary, same status. Can you start tomorrow?"

Joshua's eyes lit up. A million-dollar salary and an executive title? He was all in. "Absolutely! Thank you, Zora. I'll be there first thing **in the**

morning."

Pleased with the deal, Joshua left the café and called his mother.

"Mom, I got the job! I'm starting at XEG tomorrow as VP."

He hadn't even asked for it at first—it was her suggestion. Skip the quick cash, aim for long-term power.

“I knew it. My son is destined for greatness,” Megan beamed over the phone.

“Alright, I’ll tell you more when I get home.”

He hung up and was about to head back when his phone rang again—Peyton.

“Peyton? What’s up?”

“I took the day off. Everything went according to plan. We should celebrate. I made a nice dinner—come over.”

Joshua didn’t hesitate. “Sure, I’ll be right there!”

About forty minutes later, he arrived at Peyton’s place with a bottle of red wine in hand. She opened the door and let him in.

He set the wine down and tried to embrace her, but she pushed him away.

“What’s wrong, Peyton?”

Chapter 454

Then he saw her eyes—cold, unreadable,

“Caitlin knows everything. That you made me steal the designs,”

As she spoke, she glanced into the apartment.

Joshua followed her gaze—just in time to see Caitlin stepping out of the next *room*.

His breath caught in his throat. “Caitlin?”

Panic set in. He bolted for the door.

“Joshua! Don’t move!” Caitlin snapped.

AD

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 455

Joshua Instantly realized what had happened—Peyton had betrayed him. She had told Caitlin everything of **course** Cailin would comet

him now.

He bolted toward the front door, only to find Sebastian standing outside, his eyes cold and sharp. A row of black suited bodyguards flanked either side, completely blocking any escape.

Slamming the door shut, Joshua turned around and shouted, “You bitch! You set me up!”

yourself and maybe she’ll let you go!” Peyton pleaded, trying to **salvage the**

“We were both in the wrong. Caitlin’s here how situation.

explain

“Explain? You think I’m going

beg?” Joshua snarled, his eyes wild. “What did she offer you, huh? You whore! You lured me here!?”

His words cut deep. Peyton stared at him, devastated. She had given everything to him, only to realize too late how terribly wrong she’d been.

Joshua lunged and wrapped a hand around her neck. Peyton gasped, struggling for air. “Let go...”

“Joshua! Let her go!” Caitlin’s voice rang out, sharp and commanding.

But Joshua tightened his grip, then quickly shifted to wrap his arm around Peyton’s neck, holding her in a chokehold.

“Tell your people to back off!” he barked. A flick of his wrist revealed a folding knife, its blade now pressed against Peyton’s neck.

“Please... don’t...” Peyton trembled, tears streaming down her pale face.

He had gone feral. Caitlin’s heart pounded. Things could go very wrong, very fast.

“Joshua, you know what this is now, don’t you? Corporate espionage—stealing company secrets—that’s a serious crime. And now **you’ve** escalated to kidnapping. If anyone gets hurt, your charges double

Caitlin tried reasoning with him, giving him a way out.

But Joshua was too far gone. He shook his head violently. “You did this! You ruined everything! You took LIG away, pushed me to the edge. What else was I supposed to do?”

“You can still fix this. Let Peyton go and we’ll talk.”

“I don’t believe a word you say!” Joshua shouted, his voice hoarse.

Sebastian, listening from outside, kicked the door open. His eyes landed on Joshua, still holding Peyton at knifepoint.

“Let her go!” he barked...

“Get back! All of you, back off!” Joshua screamed.

Caitlin quickly gave Sebastian a signal. “Back off. Let him through.”

Sebastian understood immediately. He signaled his men to stand down and moved aside, opening a path.

Seeing a way out, Joshua began dragging Peyton toward the door.

But just as he crossed the threshold, Caitlin moved in a flash. With one swift, precise kick, she knocked the knife clean **from his hand. T**

Chapter 455

blade spun through the air and Caitlin **caught** it mid **flight**

Before Joshua could even register what had happened, Sebastian lunged and tackled him to the ground.

Their coordination was flawless. Peyton stumbled free and collapsed, sobbing uncontrollably.

Tyler nished in and forced Joshua to the ground, restraining him. The man howled like a wild animal. "Let me go! You bastar-des You se me up!"

"You think we're the schemers?" Caitlin spat. "You were fired. You had no right to sneak back in, use Peyton, and leak our **designs** to the competition. You're lucky we don't throw you out a window."

With that, she delivered a swift kick to his stomach.

Joshua groaned in pain as Tyler and the others delivered a few him away.”

They stopped, bound Joshua, and dragged him out.

well-placed blows before Caitlin raised her hand. “That’s enough. **Take**

An hour later, news exploded online: TIG had filed a lawsuit against XEG for copyright infringement.

The legal department had issued a formal cease and desist letter, demanding XEG stop using the “Majestic Elegance” design theme, or **face** full prosecution.

The news shot to the top of trending searches. According to reports, TIG was claiming ownership of the “Majestic Elegance” theme, originally designed by their in-house talent, Justin.

Justin had submitted multiple concept drafts and sample sketches. Internal meeting records showed TIG had selected the theme weeks in

advance.

In an interview clip, Justin expressed his anger, stating his creative work had been shamelessly stolen. “All I want is justice,” he said, clearly

emotional.

As reporters and guests recalled the eerily similar themes from both companies’ launch events, the pieces began falling into place.

Public opinion swung hard. Netizens rallied behind TIG, demanding answers from XEG.

At XEG headquarters, the public relations team scrambled. Ximena was unreachable, her phone turned off. Zora, currently acting CEO, was nowhere to be found either.

The PR director had tried to reach her, but Zora and Jillian were relaxing at The Peninsula Spa. Her phone was in her locker.

Faced with the crisis, the team followed emergency protocol and issued a vague statement: “XEG has never engaged in plagiarism or design theft. Any claims to the contrary are baseless slander. Legal action will be taken if these attacks continue.”

At the spa, Zora and Jillian were being pampered in luxury.

Jillian had been holding something in for a while. Finally, she worked up the courage to

yours?”

ask, “Zora, were **the** Majestic Elegance designs really

“Of course,” Zora replied breezily. “I just wanted to promote you, so I told people you did them. They belong to the company anyway—**don’t**

worry.”

Chapter 455

“But Caitlin **said** their designer **came up** with the same theme. How’s that possible?”

zora laughed it off, “ignore her. She’s just bitter because we outshined them. Now she’s trying to stir up trouble.

Jillian wasn’t totally convinced, but let it go.

Back at XEG, with no response from leadership, an assistant was sent to the hospital to find Ximena.

After being briefed, Ximena immediately turned her phone back on—and saw the incoming storm. Furious, she called Zora

Zora and Jillian had just finished dressing and were heading out for shopping when her phone buzzed,

She answered casually. “Hey Mom, what’s up?”

“You idiot! Get your ass back to the office now!” Ximena barked, her voice filled with icy fury.

Zora’s heart dropped. Something was very, very wrong.

AD

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 456

Zora left The Peninsula Spa with Jillian, and after parting ways, she rushed back to the company. She hadn't checked her phone the entire time she was at the spa and had no idea what was happening outside.

Storming into the CEO's office, she found her mother already waiting.

"Mom, what's going on? Why did you call me back in such a hurry?"

Without saying a word, Ximena turned around and slapped her across the face.

Smack!

Zora was stunned. She couldn't understand why her mother had suddenly hit her.

"What was that for? I just pulled off the company's product launch and the celebration party. You could at least acknowledge my hard work instead of hitting me!"

She was feeling ambitious, eager to prove herself—and now, instead of praise, she was getting punished.

"You want to know why I hit you? I handed you control of the company, trusted you to manage things, and what did you do with that responsibility? Were you planning to bring down the entire corporation?"

Ximena shoved a newspaper in front of her.

“Your so-called launch event—using stolen designs from TIG? Now they’ve gone public with the evidence and even filed a lawsuit. Do you have any idea how much this mistake could cost us? Tens of millions—maybe more!”

Zora glanced at the headline and scoffed.

“Mom, how can you just take Caitlin’s side like that? Maybe she’s the one trying to sabotage us. Why would you believe her over me?”

Ximena was at her wit’s end with Zora’s stubbornness.

“They have evidence. What do you have? How do you expect the public to believe your side when you’ve got nothing to show for it?”

But Zora wasn’t backing down. Her pride wouldn’t let her admit fault.

Just then, Ximena’s assistant entered the office.

“Ximena, there’s been a development. TIG has already identified the person responsible for the leak. It was Joshua, the former VP of LIG. He’s confessed everything in an interview and said that...”

The assistant hesitated, glancing at Zora.

Ximena turned on the wall-mounted projector. The news broadcast showed Joshua being taken away in handcuffs—and in the interview, he named Zora as the one who instructed him.

Watching the footage, Zora’s face turned livid.

“Mom! It wasn’t like that! He came to me, said he had ideas and wanted to help. I didn’t tell him to steal anything! He tricked me!”

“You fool!” Ximena snapped. “Your recklessness got us into this mess!”

Zora, cornered and angry, shot back, “Aren’t you the one who taught me to do whatever it takes to win?”

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The words hit Ximena like a dagger. She had once been that kind **of** person, but not **anymore** she had changed. **And** she no longer

fight Caitlin.

“That was the old me. Listen to me now—don’t compete with Caitlin. You’re not her match,”

Zora sneered. “So now you’ve given up too?”

But she couldn’t let go of her obsession.

“Fine, Mom. I’ll fix this. And after that, I’ll take over the company properly. I’m not afraid of a head-on clash with Caitlin.”

Ximena sighed deeply. Maybe it was time Zora learned the hard way.

“Then start by handling the mess you created.”

Zora issued a public statement claiming the incident was an unfortunate accident, that the company had been deceived by Joshua, and formally apologized to TIG. She also agreed to full compensation.

Joshua was thrown under the bus, made the scapegoat for everything.

After legal negotiations, TIG retained full rights to the “Majestic Elegance” collection and received a twenty-million-dollar settlement. But XEG’s losses extended far beyond that—their stock prices and public image took a serious hit.

In contrast, TIG came out stronger than ever.

With the situation under control, Caitlin handed the legal follow-up to her team and went with Sebastian to visit Zeke in the hospital.

Hospital Room.

Zeke had just woken up. Seeing Ximena by his bedside, he immediately pulled his hand away.

“What are you doing here? Who said you could come? Get out!”

“Zeke, you’re hurt... Let me take care of you.”

“I don’t need your help! I said get out!”

He wanted nothing to do with her. Ximena swallowed her pain and nodded.

“Fine, I’ll go. Just... don’t get too worked up. Watch your injury.”

She walked out, head bowed. She would endure anything for *her* son—even rejection.

Zeke tried to sit up, but the pain in his arm was unbearable, and he collapsed back onto the pillow.

Moments later, the door opened again.

“I told you to leave!”

“It’s me.”

Zora walked in, heels,clicking against the floor. She ignored his anger and stood in front of him, locking eyes.

Zeke’s expression turned cold.

Chapter 456

“What do you want, Miss Harris?”

I know everything about our relationship.”

Zora sat down beside him, eyes gleaming.

“I can’t believe it... we’re siblings. You’re my brother.”

Zeke turned away, silent. He had never once acknowledged her, and he had no intention of starting now.

“Maybe it’s fate,” Zora went on. “Now I’m not alone anymore. I have family.”

Then she leaned in and asked softly, “You’re still in love with Caitlin, aren’t you?”

“Don’t call me that,” Zeke said sharply, eyes narrowing.

Zora smiled, undeterred. “Don’t be so cold. You’re my brother, after all. How about I help you win Caitlin back?”

AD

Comment

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 457

“Don’t **you** dare try anything! I’m warning you—if you hurt her, I’ll kill you!”

Zeke grabbed Zora’s wrist, his face twisted in pain as the sudden movement pulled at his injury. His eyes burned with anger as he **glared** at

her

He didn’t want Zora interfering with Caitlin—not to harm her, not to help win her back. He’d let go. He finally understood that loving someone didn’t mean possessing them. Watching her be happy was enough.

Zora yanked her hand free, her face turning cold.

“I just don’t get it. What’s so great about her that you’d defend her like this? I’m your sister—your blood. And she’s what? A stranger! Am I still

not better than her?”

“Don’t compare yourself to her. You’re not even in the same league.”

Zeke’s words were sharp and ruthless, and they stabbed straight through her pride.

“You’re such a fool!” Zora snapped. “You’d give her your heart, your life—do you really think she’ll be grateful? Think she’ll accept you? Love you? She’s already in another man’s arms! That kind of woman—why would you still throw yourself at her like this? One day, she’ll destroy you!”

The hatred in Zora’s heart deepened. He was her brother—if only he’d stand on her side and use the power of SY Capital Partners to back her up, they could crush Caitlin together.

But no—he just had to be this stubborn.

“Get out,” Zeke said through gritted teeth. “I don’t need you here.”

Zora realized she couldn’t change his mind and turned to leave.

Her mother was still waiting outside, but Zora didn't care anymore. Let her wait if she wanted.

As she stepped into the elevator, the doors opened—and she ran straight into Caitlin.

The moment she saw her, Zora's expression turned dark.

“What are you doing here?”

“Visiting Mr. Preston,” Caitlin replied simply.

“You don't need to fake concern. He's my brother. My mom and I are here—he doesn't need you.”

“Even if Zeke is your brother, you don't get to decide who's in his life.”

Caitlin's eyes were calm, her tone cool. “And who I visit? None of your business.”

“Hmph.”

Zora sneered. “Caitlin, you’re cunning. You sent Joshua, didn’t you? Just to trap us. That move of yours—downright vicious.”

Thinking back on it, she began to believe Joshua was part of Caitlin’s setup all along.

“You really think I planned all that? No, Zora—you chose to take shortcuts. You wanted to beat me, so you gambled. **And** you lost. **That’s on**

Chapter 457

you. Don’t blame me for being ruthless. Business is war. **If you** go **soft on your** enemies, you’re just hurting yourself. **I’m no** pu mena

Zora wasn’t backing down, her tone still full of fire.

“You just wait. My mom’s handing the company over to me. Once I’m CEO, FII beat you with my own strength*”

“Bring it on,” Caitlin replied, “I’ll be ready.”

The two women locked eyes, the air around them thick with tension.

Just then, the elevator opened again, and Sebastian stepped out. Seeing the standoff, he didn't even acknowledge Zora. He walked **straight** over, gently placing an arm around Caitlin's shoulder.

"I'm here," he said softly. "Let's go."

They walked right past Zora as if she didn't exist. Sebastian didn't spare her a glance, treating her like air.

Zora stared after them, fury burning in her chest. One day, she swore, she'd destroy Caitlin and tear them apart.

Inside the hospital, Caitlin and Sebastian reached the room and found Ximena standing nearby.

"Mr. Vanderbilt, Caitlin," Ximena greeted them politely.

Caitlin nodded, and Ximena spoke again, her voice apologetic.

"I just found out about the product launch incident. I've already scolded Zóra. I'm sorry for all the trouble she's caused you."

"No need to apologize," Caitlin replied. "TIG didn't lose anything. Your company's the one taking the hit."

Ximena sighed.

“I don’t care much about the company anymore. I’ve left everything to Zora. If she messes up again, don’t hold back. Teach her a lesson—she needs to grow up.”

It was clear Ximena was preparing for her own end, tying up loose ends before her death. She knew she wouldn’t be around much longer, and she could only hope her daughter would learn before it was too late.

Caitlin and Sebastian entered the room. Zeke heard their voices and turned his head.

“Caitlin...”

“How are you feeling?” she asked, walking to his bedside with Sebastian beside her. “We came to see you.”

Zeke forced a smile. “Thanks.”

“I should be the one thanking you,” Sebastian said sincerely. “If you hadn’t stepped in, I might’ve been the one shot. You saved me.”

“I didn’t do it for you. I just didn’t want Caitlin to get hurt.”

Zeke’s words were blunt, but honest—and a bit awkward. Silence settled over the room.

Caitlin broke the tension with a smile.

“Come to think of it, the last time you got shot was for me too. And now again? You really are unlucky.”

“Maybe I’ve got the makings of a human shield,” Zeke joked bitterly.

212’

Chapter 457

His self-deprecation lightened the mood. Caitlin laughed, and seeing her smile, Zeke **laughed too.** **He’d** finally realized that bein hen **wasn’t so** bad after all,

“**You know,** Caitlin,” Zeke said. “You never used to smile. But now, you laugh all the time. It’s nice, I think only Sebastian can **truly make happy.** I wish you both the **best.**”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow. “Seriously? No more rivalry?”

“I mean, look at me,” Zeke said with a shrug. “What kind of rival ends up in the hospital every time? Even the universe is telling me **to quit**.”

Sebastian nodded and hugged Caitlin closer.

“Then rest up. I guess I’m the tougher one—I’ll be the one to protect her.”

Both Caitlin and Sebastian could feel Zeke had truly changed. He was no longer the obsessive man from before. It was time to **bring him to** their side for real.

Then Caitlin leaned in slightly and said,

“Zeke, there’s something you still don’t know. The truth about your past...

Do you want to hear it?”

AD

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 458

“**My past?** is it really necessary **to talk** about it? If she sent you to play mediator, don’t bother.”

The moment the topic came up, Zeke tensed, his voice turning cold and resistant. He could already guess what was **coming** Ximena probably crafted some sob story about how she had no choice but to abandon him. Who’d believe a word of that?

Sebastian gave his shoulder a firm pat.

“Don’t be so quick to shut down. It might not be what you think. Who knows, it could change your perspective. Let Caitlin talk **to you**.”

Sebastian made space for them, showing he fully trusted Caitlin and no longer saw Zeke as a threat.

Now alone in the room, Zeke looked at Caitlin with a bitter smile.

“What is there to say about my past? Don’t listen to her lies. I don’t believe anything that woman says.”

Caitlin let out a soft sigh.

“Zeke, this isn’t about believing or not. Some truths you simply have to know.”

“Hmph. What truth?”

He was ready to hear what nonsense Ximena had told Caitlin.

“Do you know about the death contract Ximena signed when she left Shadow Moon Pavilion?”
Caitlin asked.

“do. Everyone has to sign it. You were the only exception.”

As far as Zeke knew, no one had ever left Shadow Moon Pavilion without signing that contract—except Caitlin.

“Do you know what her condition was for signing it?”

Zeke didn’t answer. Of course he knew. He just didn’t want to talk about it.

“I think you do. Her condition... was you. Because you’re her son, you were used as the leverage to control her.”

Zeke let out a sarcastic laugh.

“She brought it on herself. Who else is to blame?”

If she hadn’t betrayed his father, she wouldn’t have been expelled from Shadow Moon Pavilion and forced to sign that death contract. She

only had herself to blame.

Caitlin could feel how deeply Zeke despised Ximena. His hatred ran bone-deep.

“It’s not about blame right now. Think about this—why would Zorro use you as a bargaining chip in that contract? Sure, you’re Ximena’s weakness, but you’re also his son. Why use his own child to threaten someone?”

Caitlin’s question made Zeke pause. He’d never thought about that—not because he couldn’t, but because he never wanted to revisit that dark, twisted childhood.

“If I were Ximena, would I be afraid of that kind of threat? Would I truly believe Zorro would kill his own son just to control me?”

“And even if I did believe it—why take such a pointless step? Anyone could see that was a losing move. So why did he still **do it**?”

Chapter 458

“If Ximena really was as heartless as **you** think, she could’ve just walked **away**, She **could’ve** refused the death contract, cut side. kill **whoever he** wanted—It wouldn’t have been her problem. Why would she still be afraid?”

Caitlin’s words hit like hammer blows.

The room went completely silent. Zeke followed her line of questioning, turning the thoughts over in his mind. She was trying **to open** his mind, shake loose the truth. But he wasn’t someone easily swayed.

“What’s the point in saying all this? A woman who betrayed her husband and abandoned her child deserves to rot in hell. She’s a waste **of** space in this world.”

“What if I told you... Ximena never abandoned you or betrayed anyone?”

Zeke’s eyes narrowed. His expression said it all—he didn’t believe a word of it.

“I know it’s hard to accept. You’ve built your beliefs for over twenty years. I’m not asking you to change overnight. I’m just saying, not everything you see is real. Not everything you hear is true. The truth is something you have to search for with your heart.”

“The truth? And what is that, exactly? A joke?”

Zeke laughed bitterly. His very existence was already a cruel joke. And now she wanted to dig up old scars and dissect them?

“The truth is... you’re not Zorro’s biological son.”

The words landed like a bomb.

Zeke’s entire body jolted. His eyes widened in shock, then quickly filled with fury.

“So what, are you saying I’m the bastard child from her affair? You think I’ll accept that as the ‘truth’?”

Furious, Zeke pushed himself up despite the pain, tearing out the IV needle and tossing it aside.

“Zeke, calm down!”

Caitlin grabbed his shoulders, trying to steady him.

“You’re not a bastard! You weren’t born from an affair! You don’t know the full story because at that time... you were still in her womb.

“Zorro forced Ximena to marry him. But when she did, she was already pregnant. You were her child with the man she truly loved.

“You’ve seen that man before—he was Dean. The man Zorro hacked to pieces. Dean was your real father.”

Zeke froze.

Caitlin’s words hit him like a gong, echoing endlessly through his mind.

Buzzing filled his ears. His mind went blank.

Caitlin let go of him gently, continuing,

“I know it’s hard to believe, but it’s the truth. Zorro is the one who murdered your father.

“Why do you think your childhood was so dark and twisted? Why was Zorro always so cruel to you? Because he knew. He knew **you weren’t**

his son. But he kept you alive—for one reason only. To use you against Ximena.”

Zeke lay back in the hospital bed, staring at the ceiling, eyes hollow.

213

Chapter 458

The buzzing in his head slowly faded, and memories from his childhood rose to the surface **memories** he’d **buried** deep

He remembered playing alone in a corner. He’d heard voices and seen Dean come **to Ximena**, holding her **tightly, saying** they **should** en away together.

But Ximena was terrified. She couldn’t leave. She knew Zorro would kill them both if they tried. She begged Dean to leave.

Dean refused to abandon her.

They cried in each other's arms, only for Zorro to barge in moments later.

Zeke remembered it all from his small hiding spot—Dean being butchered before his eyes, Ximena dragged away, screaming.

Zorro had lifted Zeke by the collar and forced him to look at the mangled body.

“This is your mother's lover,” he'd said. “Remember this. This is what happens to traitors.”

The trauma had broken him, worsening his already fragile mental state.

And now Caitlin was telling him none of it was what it seemed?

Zeke felt like he was reliving that day all over again. His eyes turned bloodshot His whole body trembled.

“No... no... I don't believe it...”

“There's one simple way to prove what I said,” Caitlin said gently. “Take a DNA test with Zorro. See for yourself whether or not he's really your father. The results won't lie.”

She stared into his crimson eyes, challenging him.

“What’s the matter? Are you scared? Or is this just an act—deep down, you can’t give up that title of ‘Count’s son,’ can you?”

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 459

Zeke could tolerate ridicule and slander from others, but the one thing he couldn’t stomach was being doubted—especially by Caithn

Like swearing a blood oath, he clenched his fists tightly.

“Who said I was scared? Who said I care about the damn title of Count’s son? You think I treasure that?”

“I know you don’t. If you did, you wouldn’t have cut ties with Zorro and come to me.”

Caitlin exhaled deeply.

“Zeke, I said all this because I see you as a friend. I believe you can tell right from wrong, that you’re nothing like Zorro. That’s why I don’t

want you to be blinded or manipulated.”

She said she believed in him.

Something about those words, the way she said them, hit Zeke straight in the chest. Her sincerity struck a chord.

He was silent for a long time, but finally, he nodded.

“Alright. Give me some time. I’ll get the truth.”

Caitlin let out a breath of relief.

“Good. Focus on recovering. You can deal with it after you’re discharged.”

Just as she stood up, Zeke grabbed her wrist. He looked hesitant, conflicted.

“What is it? Is there something else you want to tell me?”

“Caitlin... I want to say I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“I’ve kept something from you.”

Zeke had to come clean. If Caitlin ever found out on her own, it could drive a permanent wedge between them.

“What is it?”

“Freya’s death... I ordered Sienna and Teresa to do it.”

Silence fell like a guillotine in the room. The air froze. Zeke’s heart pounded in his throat.

It had taken everything in him to confess this. He was terrified—terrified that Caitlin would never forgive him.

“I already suspected it. There’s *no* way Sienna and Teresa acted without your involvement. They never named you, but I knew it was you.

“Zeke, you weren’t born evil. Zorro molded you into someone twisted. The person you should’ve killed long ago... is him.

“But your hands are already soaked in blood. If you want a shot at peace in this life, then start redeeming yourself.”

Caitlin wasn’t just forgiving him—she was recruiting him. She wanted Zeke on her side, in her army. It was the only way she could ever overthrow Shadow Moon Pavilion and take Zorro down.

1/3

“Thank **you**... thank **you**, **Caitlin**. I will find out the truth.”

Tears slid down his cheeks. Zeke was overwhelmed. The thing he feared most didn't happen. Caitlin didn't **abandon him**, instead she **offered** him something he never expected: warmth, redemption, and a future.

“Get some rest. I'll go call a nurse.”

Caitlin nodded to him and walked out of the room. Soon, a nurse came in to reattach his IV.

Ximena returned to the room as well. Though Zeke still refused to speak to her, he no longer told her to get out. Caitlin's words **had already** started to soften something inside him. Only when he confirmed the truth for himself could he accept a new reality.

Caitlin and Sebastian left the hospital together. Once in the car, she let out a long sigh.

“Convincing that stubborn mute must've been tough,” Sebastian said, taking her hand in his.

“It's hard to change someone's worldview once they're grown. But at least we have a shot now. We still have one month left. Let's use **it**

wisely.

“Step one was getting Ximena on our side and reaching Zeke. That’s done. Step two—dismantle Zorro’s influence in Graystone.”

From the moment Caitlin shattered Shadow Moon Pavilion’s rules, to Zeke cutting ties with Zorro for her, to Zinnia’s silent allegiance—it all pointed to one thing: Zorro wouldn’t sit still much longer.

A man who’d schemed for decades over the *Yun’s Aromatic Codex* was capable of anything.

But Caitlin wasn’t the type to wait for the storm to hit. She would strike first.

Before Zorro made a move, she would deliver a blow he’d never recover from.

And Sebastian would be her unshakable support. Together, they would stand against the weight of Shadow Moon Pavilion.

Later that day, Caitlin arranged to meet Wendy at Queen11 Shopping Center. Sebastian drove her there.

“Drop me at the mall entrance and head back to the office. Wendy and I made plans.”

Caitlin had already changed outfits and altered her makeup in the car. She looked like an ordinary-frankly, unattractive-woman.

“Alright. I’ll handle things at the East Gate. But tonight, you owe me a reward.”

“Mmhmm.”

As the car pulled up outside Queen11, Caitlin reached for the door but Sebastian pulled her back.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

She looked into his intense eyes and smiled.

“Don’t you think I look hideous like this?”

“My wife could never look hideous. Even in ugly makeup, you leave every other woman **in** the dust.”

He leaned in for a kiss. Caitlin cupped his face and gave him a peck.

“**Happy** now?”

“Not even close.”

He kissed her deeply, lingering, not wanting to let her go.

Finally, he released her.

“Alright. Go.”

Caitlin waved goodbye and turned to walk away.

From the backseat, Sebastian watched her graceful figure disappear into the mall.

“That’s my wife.”

Tyler, driving in the front, rolled his eyes so hard it hurt. Everyone knew that was his wife. Mr. Vanderbilt might as well wave a flag and announce it on the news.

At the entrance of Queen11, Caitlin spotted Wendy waiting. But when Caitlin walked right up to her, *Wendy* didn’t even recognize her.

Wendy checked her phone again. Caitlin had texted saying she'd arrived, but... where was she?

“Wendy! I’m here!”

Wendy jumped at the tap on her shoulder. She turned around and stared.

“Oh my god—Caitlin? That’s really you?”

Caitlin held back a laugh and nodded.

“Jesus, what did you do to yourself? If *you* hadn’t spoken, I never would’ve recognized you.”

Wendy gave her a full once-over and looked genuinely horrified.

“What are you even wearing? What’s with the makeup? You look like a walking disaster.”

“Today, I’m playing your ugly sidekick. Let’s go.”

As they headed inside, Wendy hooked her arm around Caitlin's.

“With you around, I feel ten times hotter already.”

They wandered into the mall together. But Caitlin wasn't here just for retail therapy with her best friend.

She had another reason for being here—one far more important

AD

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 460

Word had reached Caitlin that a VERA store in Queen11 Shopping Center was quiet, unannounced visit to Investigate personally.

discriminating against customers, so she decided to make a

She hadn't brought any executives or company staff along—doing so would only skew the experience. To see the real picture of how **her** brand was operating on the ground, she needed to go in as an ordinary shopper.

She and Wendy entered the VERA boutique on the fourth floor. As soon as they stepped in, what she'd heard proved true. A woman wearing a manager's badge gave them a glance but didn't say a word of greeting.

That alone was a red flag. Caitlin and Wendy walked in and tried to browse some clothes, only to be stopped.

"Excuse me," said the manager curtly, "VERA is a high-end luxury brand. These clothes aren't cheap. Be careful—if you damage anything, you probably can't afford it."

Caitlin narrowed her eyes at the woman's name tag.

"You're the store manager?"

Piper puffed out her chest and lifted her chin.

"That's right. I'm the manager here."

“Great. I’ll just take a look around.”

Caitlin gave her a pointed look and walked deeper into the store. Piper, thinking she was just another broke browser, didn’t bother wasting energy on her.

She also gave Wendy, who had walked in behind Caitlin, a quick once-over with barely disguised contempt.

Wendy was makeup-free, wearing jeans and a basic T-shirt—clearly not dressed like someone with money. Though she’d been here once before with Caitlin, who would remember someone that plain?

In Piper’s eyes, these two weren’t worth treating as customers. She turned and walked away.

Wendy followed Caitlin through the boutique, listening as the manager and another sales associate began mocking them from a short

distance away.

“Look at those two nobodies,” Piper scoffed. “You just know they’re not buying anything. I’m more worried they’ll dirty the clothes.”

Toni, another employee, chimed in.

“Should I go find a way to get them to leave?”

“Forget it. Let them look. It’s not like they can afford anything. Broke chicks like that just come to window shop.”

As she spoke, Piper picked up a compact and checked her reflection.

“You look amazing, boss,” Toni flattered her “I heard you’re getting promoted to district manager next month. Congrats in advance!”

Piper beamed.

“It’s just a rumor—nothing official yet.”

19:46 Fri, 15 Aug (INE

Chapter 460

“**Everyone’s** talking about **it**. No way it’s wrong.”

Their smug conversation carried right to Caitlin's ears. If she hadn't come personally, she never would've known **how rotten the customer** service in her own store had become.

The last time she'd visited, she'd come as herself, and the staff had rolled out the red carpet. Now, disguised as a nobody, **she** could see the truth for herself—and it was eye-opening.

Wendy rolled her eyes hard. Those two were about to get what they deserved.

Just then, a newer employee walked in, dragging a large box full of new

merchandise.

"Toni, can you give me a hand?" asked Ulyana.

Toni didn't move. Piper snapped at her instead.

"Ulyana, seriously? You can't handle that much? Hurry it up—how long does it take to move inventory?"

With no help, Ulyana struggled to haul the box **to** the stockroom. When she returned to the floor and saw Caitlin and Wendy still browsing, she approached them warmly.

“If there’s anything you’d like to try on, please feel free to ask! I’d be happy to help,” she said, smiling.

But Piper pulled her aside and hissed,

“Are you dense? You can’t tell what kind of people they are? What if they ruin the clothes? You want to let them try things on?”

“But... customers are supposed to come first-”

“Shut up. I don’t need you teaching me my job.”

At that moment, Caitlin walked up to the counter.

“By the way, I heard VERA gives out complimentary handbags. Do you still have any? My friend and I would like to get one.”

“We-” Ulyana started to answer, but Piper cut her off.

“No. We’re all out.”

Toni chimed in,

“Sorry, we’ve run out of those. You might want to try another location.”

Before Caitlin could respond, the door opened again and two well-dressed women walked in.

Piper and Toni’s attitudes flipped instantly. Seeing the women in designer dresses and luxury handbags, they rushed forward to greet them like royalty.

“Welcome to VERA, ladies! What an honor to have you

Caitlin recognized one of them—Jillian, Nolan’s sister.

here!”

Jillian, now the lead designer at XEG, had to know that VERA was Caitlin’s personal brand. So what was she doing **here, knowing full well who** owned the place?

The tall woman in the red bodycon dress was unfamiliar to Caitlin, but Wendy recognized her immediately—Reese Nguyen, special **assistant**

at Benjamin's company,

Rumor had it Reese came from a powerful background and had connections in both the corporate and underground worlds. **She'd** given Wendy a hard time more than once.

Jillian had come out of jealousy and suspicion. Zora had told her VERA was Caitlin's private brand, and she found that hard to believe. **She** was here to confirm it herself, her eyes scanning the clothing with open disdain.

Piper shadowed her closely, fawning and fidgeting like a wannabe servant.

Reese spotted Wendy almost immediately. Her eyes narrowed as she approached.

"Wendy? What are you doing here?"

Wendy looked at her calmly.

"Shopping. Problem?"

"You? Don't make me laugh. You don't look like someone who can afford anything here. But I guess with your thick skin, maybe Benjamin throws you a bone now and then.

“Still, I’m warning you—stay away from him. Quit finding ways to show up around him.

“Someone like you? Benjamin would never want a fat, pathetic mess. Got it?”

Reese stared at her like she was dirt. She saw herself as superior—educated, well—connected, and beautiful. To chase Benjamin, she’d hidden her identity and used her connections to land a job in The Jones Family’s company.

But no matter what she did, Wendy always seemed to be around Benjamin. She had no idea how Wendy managed it, but she knew she wanted her gone.

Wendy’s blood boiled. The words “fat mess” hit her like a knife. The pain and rage surged through her chest.

She glared at Reese and snapped,

“Who the hell are you calling fat?”

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

The argument between Wendy and Reese quickly drew Caitlin's attention. She stepped over, eyes fixed on the **arrogant woman** wanting to see exactly what she intended to do. Bullying her best friend? Not happening.

"Oh, are you not?" Reese sneered. "Have you looked in a mirror lately? With all that fat hanging off you, it's honestly disgusting"

To drive the insult home, she flaunted her A4-sized waistline, clearly proud of her figure.

Wendy was furious. She didn't want to waste breath on someone like Reese, and she definitely didn't want to relive those childhood days of being mocked for her weight. She'd worked hard to slim down and had already made progress. Why did Reese still have to tear her down?

"Miss Nguyen," Wendy snapped, "Did you forget to brush your teeth before leaving the house? Your mouth stinks. Sure, you've got a decent body, but your personality is straight-up garbage. Know that?"

"How dare you call me garbage?!" Reese's delicate face twisted in fury. She raised her hand to slap Wendy—but before it could land, a hand clamped firmly around her wrist.

"What the hell are you doing? Let go!" Reese shouted.

Caitlin, face calm and unreadable, didn't let go. Her voice was cold and sharp.

“Picking fights and throwing insults wasn’t enough? You’re actually going to hit someone now? What exactly are you trying to do—**why** are you bullying my friend?”

Her voice was deeper than usual, slightly altered. Even when Jillian looked over, she didn’t recognize Caitlin’s voice.

Reese yanked her arm back and barked,

“Who the hell are you? What business is it of yours? Butt-ugly people really do love making a scene!”

Smack!

Caitlin slapped her across the face without hesitation.

Reese clutched her cheek, stunned.

“You... you hit me!”

“And that’s me going easy on you. Try touching my friend again—I dare you.”

Caitlin's stare was sharp enough to cut, her presence intense enough to crush. Reese, for a moment, actually backed off.

"What happened? Reese, she hit you?" Jillian hurried over, alarmed.

"It was her! This ugly bitch hit me," Reese fumed, glaring daggers at Caitlin.

Wendy stood nearby, internally laughing. Reese really was digging her own grave. Calling Caitlin ugly? If she knew that "ugly" woman was **the** same Caitlin hailed by men all over New York as the most stunning woman in the city, she might just die on the spot from embarrassment.

Jillian jumped to Reese's defense.

"What is wrong with you? You can't just go around hitting people! Do you even know who she is?"

"Don't care," Caitlin said, her voice flat and low.

"You've got a hell of a mouth on you."

Jillian **was** startled by how much this supposedly “ugly woman’s” attitude reminded her of Caitlin. Still, she **couldn’t connect** the don woman was dressed like a thrift store reject and looked hideous. No way they were the same person.

“**Don’t** bother arguing with them, Jillian,” Reese said venomously. “You people have no idea who you’re messing with. My cousin is one of **the** most powerful prosecutors in New York. You so much as breathe wrong, and I’ll have you arrested in minutes. Believe me?”

“Nope.”

“Fine! You asked for it.” Reese whipped out her phone and began calling her cousin..

Caitlin exchanged a quick glance with Wendy, silently reassuring her. Wendy wasn’t afraid. She’d seen what Caitlin could do. If **Reese** and her crew wanted to start something, they’d end up regretting it.

Piper, worried the scene was escalating too far, rushed over to smooth things out.

“Ladies, please! Let’s all calm down. Why don’t we head to our VIP lounge and cool off a bit? I’ll take care of everything”

She ushered Reese and Jillian into the VIP section and signaled Toni to bring tea and snacks.

Then she turned back to Caitlin and Wendy, her tone much less polite.

“You two–this situation is your fault. You didn’t buy anything and now you’ve offended our guests. I’m going to have to ask you to apologize and leave immediately. Otherwise, I’ll call security.”

“We’re not apologizing, and we’re not leaving,” Caitlin said coolly. “In fact, we’ll be staying a while. I’m curious to see how impressive her so- called cousin really is.”

She turned to Wendy and casually resumed browsing the racks.

Piper realized she couldn’t force them out, so she focused on pampering the VIP guests. She pulled out two fancy VERA-branded gift handbags and presented them to Jillian and Reese.

“These are complimentary handbags we’ve prepared for our valued customers. Please accept them as a token of our sincere apologies. Don’t let those nobodies ruin your day.”

!

Jillian and Reese accepted the gifts but tossed them aside without a second glance.

Seeing this, Caitlin strolled up to Piper and asked,

“Weren’t you just saying there were no free handbags left? How come they got some, but I didn’t?”

Piper didn't even try to hide her disdain.

“Our handbags are reserved for guests with the right status and elegance. These ladies clearly meet that standard. You? You'd probably carry

it into some tacky little dump and ruin our brand image. People like you don't deserve anything from VERA.”

Caitlin mentally took note. Excellent. She's doing a thorough job demolishing her own career. Even if I wanted to help her, I couldn't.

“And discriminating against customers like this—you're not worried people might complain?” Caitlin pressed.

Piper scoffed.

“Complain? About what? You don't even know who owns VERA, do you? Our founder's based overseas. You think someone like **you can even** reach her?”

She had no idea Caitlin was **Kayla**—the **founder** and owner of **VERA**. Her smug **tone dripped with arrogance**.

Caitlin played along, browsing as if nothing had happened. Piper, afraid they might steal something, **quietly ordered Toni** to keep an eye on

them.

Back in the VIP area, Reese had finished calling her cousin and was now hunting for a way to frame Caitlin and Wendy. **Her eyes landed** on the delicate bracelet on her wrist—and inspiration struck.

Other customers started to trickle in, and the store staff became busy tending to them.

Meanwhile, Caitlin found a beautiful outfit and held it up to Wendy, motioning for her to try it on.

Just then, Reese marched over and snatched the outfit from her hands.

“Please. Like she could ever fit into this. Someone her size? This outfit’s not made for cows—it’s made for me“. Right, Jillian?”

“That’s right. It suits you perfectly!” Jillian smirked.

“Great! I’ll take it. Sales associate—bring me a receipt!”

Caitlin opened her mouth to respond, but then Reese spotted someone outside the store and lit up.

“Virgil! Over here!”

Two men stepped into the boutique.

“Reese, what’s going on?” one of them asked.

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 462

Chapter 462

“**Virgil**, you’re finally here! Someone tried to walk all over me you’ve got to stand up for me!”

Reese rushed to her cousin, grabbing his arm and spilling her grievances.

“**Oh?** Who’s messing with my cousin?” **Virgil** asked, eyes narrowing.

“It’s them! That fat one and that ugly one!” Reese pointed straight at Wendy and Caitlin. “That ugly freak even slapped me! Look at my face—it’s still swollen!”

Virgil turned to get a look at the accused. Caitlin and Wendy both faced the two men calmly. Caitlin immediately recognized one of them—Virgil. She remembered him from the Black Hawk case. He was the prosecutor who’d insisted on transferring the suspect to his office, only for Black Hawk to escape and injure several officers. Virgil had taken a lot of heat for that.

So Reese’s cousin was “him“. Small world.

“What happened here? Why would you hit my cousin?” Virgil asked sternly.

“She had it coming,” Caitlin said coolly.

Reese immediately fanned the flames. “Did you hear that, Virgil? She doesn’t even feel guilty! Arrest them already!”

Virgil frowned. “Reese, that’s not how this works. At best, this is a civil dispute. There’s no grounds for arrest.”

Reese clearly expected that response. “What if I said they stole something from me? Theft is criminal, isn’t **it**?”

Virgil nodded. "Yes, theft is a crime. The police can arrest suspects in that

ase."

"Then I think the ugly one stole my bracelet!" Reese pointed dramatically at Caitlin.

Caitlin almost laughed. "When exactly did I steal your bracelet?"

"Yeah, when did my friend steal anything? Don't you dare frame us!" Wendy snapped.

"I was wearing it when I came in, and now it's gone," Reese claimed, with complete confidence. "She grabbed my wrist earlier—she must've swiped it then. And they've been lurking around the store, not buying anything, clearly just waiting for a chance to steal!"

Caitlin rolled her eyes. Reese's performance was almost impressive. She did recall grabbing Reese's wrist earlier—and now, yes, the bracelet was indeed gone. Still...

"I didn't steal anything," Caitlin said icily. "If your bracelet's missing, maybe try looking for it before making wild accusations."

“I looked “everywhere. It’s not here,” Reese insisted. She clung to Virgil’s arm like a lifeline. “I’m telling you, they’re hiding it. That bracelet was a birthday gift from my dad—very expensive!”

Virgil took a firm tone. “If you did take the bracelet, return it now. Apologize, and I’ll let this go. But if you keep denying it and we find out you’ve hidden it, my colleague here is a plainclothes officer. He’ll have no choice but to take you in for questioning.”

Reese smirked and tilted her chin smugly at Wendy. She knew she had the upper hand.

Jillian folded her arms, watching like it was reality TV. She’d never liked Wendy, and this was pure entertainment.

Piper stood nearby with the other staff, not daring to interfere with a prosecutor on-site

Caitlin exhaled calmly. “I didn’t steal anything, and I have nothing to return. Apologize? Don’t count on it.”

“She won’t admit it, obviously,” Reese çút in. “But if you search their bags and pockets, I bet you’ll find it!”

Although civilians **aren’t allowed** to conduct searches, the plainclothes officer stepped forward, flashed his Badge, and asked calthin and wakes **cooperate**.

“Fine. Go ahead,” Caitlin said, curious to see what kind of trick they had up their sleeve.

Toni was called over to assist. She started with the bags—nothing. Then she moved to a physical search, starting with Wendy. Still nothing **But** when she reached Caitlin, something unexpected happened.

She pulled a sparkling diamond bracelet out of Caitlin's coat pocket.

Toni looked genuinely surprised. Her expression clearly said, "I knew something was off about you two?"

"What the hell?" Wendy gasped when she saw the bracelet.

Caitlin's eyes narrowed. That moment when Reese had brushed against her again, coming over to snatch the dress—was that when she slipped **the** bracelet into her pocket?

Reese snatched the bracelet from Toni's hand and shouted, "That's mine! Virgil, *you* see this, right? Caught red-handed! What more do you need?"

"I've got nothing to say," Caitlin muttered with a bitter smirk.

"She's lying! Virgil, have your friend arrest them both! I'm sure they're part of a shoplifting ring. Who knows what else they've stolen?"

The plainclothes officer stepped forward. “Ladies, you’re suspected of theft. I’ll need you to come with me for questioning. Please cooperate.”

Caitlin’s voice dropped to a chilling whisper. “Are you sure I stole that bracelet? Because if you arrest me... I hope you’re prepared for **the** consequences.”

“We’re just doing our job. The evidence speaks for itself. Any objections can be addressed at the station.”

Just as the officer was about to move in, Ulyana, the quiet store clerk, finally stepped forward.

“Officer! She didn’t steal anything!” she cried out.

Every eye in the store turned to her.

“Ulyana!” Piper hissed, signaling her to keep her mouth shut.

Intimidated, Ulyana looked down—but then took a deep breath and lifted her chin. “I’m not lying. I saw everything.”

Virgil asked, “What exactly did you see?”

“I saw this woman- -” Ulyana pointed to Reese “-arguing with them earlier. After that, she secretly slipped her bracelet into the lady’s coat pocket and then accused her of stealing it.”

Because she’d been ignored and sidelined all day, Ulyana had the perfect vantage point to see everything unfold.

“You’re lying!” Reese screamed and slapped Ulyana hard across the face.

“I’m not lying...” Ulyana whispered, holding back tears as she touched her cheek.

Reese, desperate, barked at Virgil and his colleague, “She’s clearly working with them! You should arrest them now before they make a scene!”

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 463

“Enough!”

Virgil had had it. Once he understood what really happened, his tone turned sharp as he scolded Reese. “If this was just your little prank, you’d better apologize and let it go. My partner and I have more important things to handle—we’re short on time.”

He glanced at his watch, clearly done with the nonsense.

“I... Virgil, I...” Reese fumbled, flustered now that her plan had been completely derailed by a single honest store clerk. With Virgil clearly not taking her side, her fury started bubbling over.

“That’s enough. Drop it!”

Virgil turned to Caitlin and Wendy and gave a polite nod. “Ladies, I apologize on my cousin’s behalf. She’s a bit... impulsive. She was wrong today, and hope you’ll accept my apology for her behavior.”

With that, Virgil and the plainclothes officer made a swift exit.

“Virgil! Wait! Virgil—!”

Reese called out, but her cousin was already gone.

With her backup gone, Reese turned her wrath on Ulyana. “This is all your fault! You cursed, nosy rat!”

She raised her hand to strike again, but Caitlin immediately stepped forward and grabbed her wrist.

“Looking to pick a fight? At least go after the right person.”

Caitlin’s gaze was icy, her voice sharp. After everything, she’d seen enough to recognize Ulyana’s rare integrity. The girl had guts.

Reese yanked her arm back and glared daggers at them. “Fine! You win today. Let’s **go**, Jillian!”

The two women stormed out of the VERA store, arms linked, but they didn’t get far before-

“Stop right there!”

The shout rang out behind them.

Reese whirled around, her flawless face twisted in rage. “What now?!”

“You picked the fight, made false accusations, and now you think you can just walk away without apologizing?”

Caitlin's voice was calm but firm, her stare as sharp as a blade.

Reese folded her arms, scoffing. "Apologize? To you two country bumpkins? Dream on."

Just then, a chilling male voice cut in from the side.

"Who's dreaming?"

Everyone froze. They turned to see Benjamin striding in, hands in his pockets, sunglasses on, suit perfectly tailored, oozing a dangerously cool aura.

Wendy instinctively shrank back a little, lowering her head.

"Benjamin!" Jillian greeted him, immediately walking over.

Reese's eyes lit up like fireworks. She rushed to him, reaching for his arm. "Benjamin! What a surprise to see you here!"

***Since** when do I need **your** permission to go anywhere?"

Denjamin coolly brushed her off, his gaze sliding right past her straight to Wendy.

Wendy turned her head, avoiding his eyes.

Caitlin took note. “So if really is something between Benjamin and Wendy... Let’s see where this goes.

“What’s going on here? What’s with all the noise?” Benjamin asked.

Reese, eager to cover her tracks, answered quickly, “Just a little misunderstanding. It’s all cleared up now. We were about to leave, **but** they’re **sit** making a fuss.”

Wendy muttered, “You mean you tried to frame my friend for theft and think you can just walk away without apologizing?”

Reese threw her a sharp glare.

Benjamin, unfazed, said calmly, “Then you should apologize.”

“Benjamin...” Reese tried her usual coy

act.

“Apologize now,” Benjamin snapped, cutting her off.

Startled, Reese hesitated.

“Don’t make me look bad. Apologize, or you can pack your things and leave Jones Group first thing tomorrow.”

Reese turned pale. She couldn’t afford to lose her job—not after all the effort her family put in to place her there.

”

...I’m sorry,” she mumbled.

Caitlin raised an eyebrow. “That didn’t sound very sincere.”

Benjamin pulled off his sunglasses, his tone biting. “Did you forget **to** eat today? Or are you part mosquito? That little buzz was supposed to be an apology?”

Wendy struggled not to laugh, but the moment she met Benjamin’s glare, she swallowed it back.

Surrounded by curious onlookers, Reese felt humiliated. She gritted her teeth and raised her voice. "I'm sorry. Is that better?"

"Still not good enough. What kind of assistant are you? An apology should be heartfelt—with a perfect ninety-degree bow. Do it again."

Benjamin had fully committed to the performance, coaching her on apology etiquette. Even Jillian was stunned.

Caitlin had to bite her lip to keep from laughing. *None of Sebastian's brothers are normal, clearly.*

Reese's eyes brimmed with tears, but unwilling to disobey, she gave a deep bow and apologized again.

"There you go! Now that's how a proper assistant behaves. Learn your manners!" Benjamin said with mock encouragement.

Wendy took the opportunity to chime in. "Also, you called me a fat cow earlier. Don't you think that deserves an apology too?"

Reese's eyes burned with rage. If glares could kill...

Benjamin's tone darkened, voice like a whip. "Excuse me? That kind of language? From a well-educated young lady like you, **from The Nguyen Family?**"

Reese stammered, "I...I didn't mean-

"Apologize. Use the method I just taught you!"

Benjamin ordered coldly.

Wendy **was** almost **touched**, "Finally, he's acting like a decent human being again."

But **then-**

"And one more thing! 'Fat cow' is a nickname 'only I'm allowed to use. No one else gets to say it. Got that?"

"...Seriously?"

All her goodwill instantly evaporated.

Reese, out of options, gave Wendy a begrudging bow and another apology.

“Enough. Get out of here.” Benjamin waved her and Jillian off like flies.

As they turned to go, Reese remembered something. She pulled out two movie tickets. “Oh, Benjamin, the tickets you asked me to get the movie stars in a little over an hour. Are we going now or later?”

Benjamin took the tickets, checked the time, and nodded. “Now.”

Reese’s eyes lit up. She gave Jillian a secret look-**See? He asked me to buy tickets for a reason!**

But Benjamin walked right past her. Straight to Wendy.

He grabbed her wrist and pulled her along. “Come on, Pudding. Movie time with me.”

“Hey—wait—”

Wendy was stunned, looking helplessly at Caitlin.

Caitlin just smiled and waved. "Go on. Have fun."

Benjamin dragged a flustered Wendy away.

Reese stood frozen, dumbfounded. *He asked her to buy tickets... but not for her?!*

Caitlin gave Reese a glance as cold as ice. She looked at her the way one might glance at a clown in a circus—amused but unimpressed. Then **she** walked right past them.

Not long after, she returned to *the* store—this time back in her usual look, elegant and striking, flanked by a pair of bodyguards.

She exuded cold, commanding queen energy as she strode straight toward VERA's entrance.

Time to settle accounts.

The queen had arrived-

Let t

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 464

As Caltin and her team strode through the main entrance of the VERA store, Jittian caught sight of her and whispered in shark, “Vicer de camí e

From?”

“Who’s Caitlin?” Berte asked, craning her neck to look.

“There! She just walked into the VERA store!” Jillian pointed.

“it I’d known she was the designer behind VERA, I never would’ve bought this dress,” Peese muttered, glaring at the shopping bag in her hand. Hul pier frown quickly shifted into a scheming smile.

An idea hit her.

She shared her plan with Jillian, who hesitated. “That might be a little much...”

“What’s the problem? This is perfect. I want her to pay!”

Meanwhile, inside the store, the moment Caitlin entered, the store manager Piper and two employees looked visibly shocked Piper recognized Cardin from a previous visit and quickly rushed forward with a bright smile.

“Welcome to VERA! Miss Caitlin, such a pleasure to see you again!”

Not knowing Caitlin’s true identity as the designer Kayla, Piper only saw her as a high-spending VIP client—someone who bought with no hesitation. Customers like her were the holy grail of commission earnings.

Toni quickly joined the flattery train, and even Ulyana stepped forward, only to be elbowed aside by Toni.

“What new arrivals do you have?”

Caitlin’s eyes calmly swept across the display racks as her bodyguards remained stationed at the entrance.

Piper and Toni began enthusiastically recommending pieces.

Caitlin raised a brow. “Didn’t you just have these same styles last time I came in? No new stock?”

She already knew the answer—it was her brand, after all. Her schedule had been so packed that she hadn't had time to design new pieces, so updates had been delayed.

“We’re about to release our next collection,” Piper explained quickly. “For now, these are our signature classics. VERA’s designs always lead the trend.”

Piper then invited her to relax in the VIP lounge so they could personally bring over selected pieces.

Toni chimed in eagerly. “Would you like a complimentary VERA handbag today, Miss Caitlin? We’ve just gotten a fresh batch.”

Perfect customer service—on the surface.

But just under an hour ago, these same two women had looked down their noses at her and Wendy when she was in disguise. Caitlin couldn't help but marvel at the hypocrisy.

Two-faced liars, through and through.

She declined their offers and turned a steely gaze on Piper. “Store Manager Piper, discrimination against customers, ostracizing new staff, and completely ignoring the brand’s customer service policies? As of today, your role as store manager is officially over.”

Piper froze. "Excuse me? Caitlin, what do you mean?"

"Exactly what it sounds like. You're fired."

Charter 464

„ruwd) by “your“?” Mper stared at her in disbelief. “But Calfin, you’re just a bustomsar hay en vind his way

you

“Oh, I’m a **customer, yes**. But I also happen to know that the manager at VERA‘ Owen 11 store has been reported for discriminating a cano That’s you, isn’t it?”

I don’t know what you’ve heard,” Piper replied quickly, nervous. “But I assure you, we treat all customers like royalty, **we would never** depend

“Oh? That’s strange. A friend of mine visited this store earlier and was denied hasic courtesy, insulted, and refused a free gift. They were muchni, ‘country bumpkins. Sounds pretty discriminatory to me.”

Suddenly, it clicked. Piper's face went pale. Those two "nobodies" earlier were Caitlin's friends?

"This must be a misunderstanding," she tried to recover, pasting on a smile. "If they had just mentioned your name, we would've treated them with the utmost respect."

"So you're saying if a customer 'doesn't drop a VIP name, they don't deserve respect?" Caitlin shot back coldly. That's your idea of proper customer service? Honestly, with values like yours, you have no business managing a VERA store."

Her voice grew sharper with every word.

Piper realized she was trying to defend the indefensible. But Caitlin clearly wasn't just any customer, and she was hell-bent on holding her accountable.

"Caitlin, we treated you like a VIP," she said with a forced smile. "If you're not here to shop and are just here to cause trouble, please don't interfere with my work. My position was appointed by headquarters—it's not something *you* can just take away."

Toni quickly jumped in, trying to play mediator. "Caitlin, if we upset your friends earlier, maybe we can make it up to them? Please, take a couple of free handbags as our apology?"

Caitlin narrowed her eyes. "You think this is about a few handbags?"

Her gaze sliced through the room like a blade. “Do you have any idea how damaging your behavior has been to the VERA brand? People like **“you”** **are** what tarnish everything we built.”

Piper struggled to keep her composure. “Miss Caitlin, we value you greatly. But please, could we discuss this privately? You’re blocking the entrance with your bodyguards and disrupting our business.”

“So what?”

“If you insist on this,” Piper said through gritted teeth, “we’ll have no choice but to escalate this to mall management.”

“Perfect. Go ahead. Call them.”

Caitlin didn’t budge.

Out of options, Piper and *Toni* made the call.

Ulyana gently approached Caitlin. “Would *you* like to sit down while we wait? I’ll bring you some water.”

Her kindness stood out, especially compared to her coworkers. Caitlin nodded and took a seat on the lounge sofa.

Moments later, the mall's operations director, Mike, arrived with several executives. Piper quickly filled him in, then gestured **at** Caitlin seated nearby.

"That's her—Caitlin. She came in to defend her friend, started making accusations, and now she's threatening to have me fired. **Please**, Mike, you have **to** help me out."

But the moment Mike laid eyes on Caitlin, he gasped—and then shouted:

"Are you blind?! Do you even know who she is?!"

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 465

"**Isn't** she just Caitlin?"

Piper knew who Caitlin **was**—Sebastian's ex-wife—but so what? Why was Mike looking so shaken?

"Are you out of your mind? Do you know she's from VERA headquarters?"

Mike was well aware of Caitlin's identity. He had seen her during internal meetings. She wasn't just a designer she was the founder of VERA

"From headquarters? What, she's HR or something?" Piper finally began to sense something was off. Was Caitlin someone high up in **H2**, and **that's** w

she dared to fire her?

"Not just HR. The entire VERA brand belongs to her! She's the owner!"

Mike rushed forward with a deep bow. "Caitlin, I sincerely apologize. It's our failure in oversight."

"It certainly is," Caitlin said coolly, though the aura she projected was enough to send chills through the room. "Your recommendation brought in store employees with such poor conduct. Are you trying to destroy my brand's reputation?"

Piper's mind went blank. She turned to look at Caitlin and saw Mike and the other executives bowing in respect.

She was the owner?

Impossible. How?

An icy jolt ran up Piper's spine. Her legs went weak.

Toni was just as stunned. Neither of them had ever imagined the VERA boss would be this young, elegant woman. They had assumed the owner was some foreigner.

Ulyana stood in awe, not just shocked but overwhelmed with admiration. Caitlin had built a globally recognized brand and owned her own corporation. She was everything women dreamed of becoming.

Mike cleared his throat. "Caitlin, how would you like us to proceed?"

Caitlin looked directly at Piper. "Fire her. She's unfit to be the store manager."

Without hesitation, Mike turned to Piper. "You're no longer the manager of this store. Pack your things and report to HR for termination."

Piper's face turned deathly pale. Her legs gave out and she collapsed to the ground.

Caitlin's eyes landed on Toni next. "Fire her too."

“Of course!”

Mike waved Toni off like a fly. Toni broke into tears and dropped to her knees in front of Caitlin. “Please! Caitlin, I beg you, just give me one more chance I’ll do better! Please!”

Piper followed suit, sobbing and crawling over to plead. “Caitlin, I was wrong. Please forgive me. I’ll change—I swear! I’ll treat every customer the same from now on. Please don’t fire me!”

“People don’t change so easily. It’s not about second chances. It’s that I can’t trust you anymore.”

Caitlin’s voice was cold and resolute. “You two are out. I’ll have two trained staff sent from HQ. As for the store manager role—Ulyana **will take over.**”

“What?” Ulyana gasped, unable to believe what she’d just heard. She had just started here, and now she was being promoted **to manager?**

chapter 465

Piper and **Toni** were **equally shocked**. **They** hadn’t expected Caitlin to hand the position to a newbie

“**Caitlin**, you can’t make **her store manager**) She hasn’t even passed **her** probation period!” **Toni protested**

“Ulyana may be new,” Caitlin replied calmly, “but she has proven herself through her actions. **She** treats every customer with **respect** with a smile, and upholds our brand’s values. When my friend was being accused of theft, she was the only one who stood up **for the brigh**, that’s integrity. That’s what you both lack. That’s why I chose her.”

Her words left Piper and Toni speechless. Ulyana, on the other hand, was moved to tears.

Coming from a humble background, always being ignored at work, this recognition meant everything to be praised and promoted by **Caitlin herself** **fele** like a dream.

Mike clapped first. “Congratulations, Ulyana You’re the new store manager. You’d better thank Caitlin!”

“Thank you, Caitlin! Thank you so much!” Ulyana said tearfully. The promotion meant more than just status—it meant a better salary, and she **had** a family to support. Caitlin had just changed her life.

Mike barked out, “Piper, Toni, what are you waiting **for?**”

The two were left with no choice but to pack up and leave in disgrace.

For Piper, the blow was devastating, Her dreams of being promoted to district manager were shattered.

As they walked out of VERA, fuming, Piper muttered, “It must’ve been Ulyana. She probably ratted us out to HQ to get that promotion!”

Toni added, “We should expose them. Post everything online. Let the public tear them apart. If we’re going down, they’re coming with us!”

But Piper had more sense. “Are you insane? If this goes public, we’ll be the ones humiliated. Don’t forget—she has those recordings of us talking **trash**.”

Toni hesitated. As much as they hated it, they couldn’t risk getting exposed. Caitlin had them dead to rights.

Back inside, Ulyana changed into her manager’s uniform. Two new staff members arrived from HQ to stabilize operations, and everything quickly returned to order.

Mike and the executives took their leave. Caitlin stayed behind to help guide the staff in reorganizing the store displays.

Customers began trickling back in. Everything was falling into place.

Just as Caitlin received a message from Sebastian and was about to leave, Jillian and Reese walked back into the store.

Ulyana and the others greeted them warmly, but Reese marched straight to the counter and slammed her shopping bag down with a loud thud.

The sound made several customers glance over.

Reese scowled. “What the hell are you people selling?”

Caitlin turned her gaze toward the counter. Ulyana quickly stepped forward. “Miss Nguyen, is something wrong?”

“See for yourself.” Reese crossed her arms, face full of disdain.

Jillian stepped in to explain, “My friend just bought this dress for \$100,000 from your store earlier. But now it’s got issues.”

“What kind of issues?”

“The quality is crap!” Reese snapped. “I barely wore it and look—completely ruined! I want a refund!”

Ulyana pulled out the dress and examined it. “Miss Nguyen, this appears to be torn by force. The damage looks intentional—it **doesn’t reflect a quality** issue.”

Chapter 465

“What do **you** mean it’s not quality related? Look at this garbage you’re selling! You pass this off as high end? You **think** this is Grassy

Reese glared. “If you don’t give me a refund, I’ll post this all over the internet and get your store shut down!”

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 466

Because of Reese’s outburst, two groups of customers who had just entered the store gathered around to watch the commotions,

As it afraid there wasn’t enough chaos, Reese turned to the crowd and shouted, “Take a good look, everyone! This is what VEBA is selling? About all garbage! I wore it once and it tore like this? They actually charged me a hundred grand for this? What kind of crap designer made thi

Not only was she badmouthing VERA, she was also dragging Caitlin into it.

The onlookers glanced at the tom dress and started murmuring in surprise.

“Is it really that bad?”

“That rip looks pretty serious. Can VERA’s materials really be that poor?”

“I’ve never had that issue. I’ve always liked VERA. I shop here all the time and haven’t had anything like this happen.”

“Which design is it? Isn’t that the classic style they had in the display window? I’ve been thinking about buying it too. If the quality’s this bad, they forges

it.”

The crowd was clearly swayed, whispering amongst themselves.

“Let me take a look.”

Caitlin, seeing that Reese was clearly stirring up trouble on purpose, walked over and picked up the dress. Just one glance, and she saw through the

trick.

“Miss Nguyen, this dress is not from VERA.”

Standing to the side, Jillian mentally clicked her tongue. Caitlin’s eye for detail was no joke.

“What do you mean it’s not from your store?” Reese scoffed. “Look at this bag! The tag! The receipt! I bought this dress not even an hour ago. And now you’re saying you won’t take responsibility?”

“If the dress were ours, we’d absolutely take responsibility. But if it’s not, we won’t.”

Caitlin held the dress up and continued, “This is a counterfeit. I can tell with one look. Because I’m the designer of VERA. I know every fabric, every

stitch.”

As she revealed her identity, the crowd collectively gasped and their impression of her instantly shifted.

“She’s Caitlin? She’s actually the designer of VERA?”

“Oh my god, she’s incredible!”

“Not only is she stunning, but she’s ridiculously talented. If I were a guy, I’d be chasing her too.”

The bystanders were in awe, now even more curious to see how this would end.

Reese, hearing the flattery around her, rolled her eyes. Were these people hired just to praise Caitlin?

“Who’s to say your store isn’t selling fakes? What if your staff is swapping out real products for counterfeits behind your back?”

Caitlin answered firmly, “That may happen in some places, but not in VERA.”

“And how are you going to prove this dress isn’t from your store?”

Reese tilted her chin, her smirk full of disdain. Her expression screamed arrogance.

Chapter 4ub

“It can prove this is a counterfeit and not a VERA original, then Miel **Prguyen**, for Trying **to** fatur
a take 200 Skasitakiny Bert Tilver compensate is ten times the damages and apologize poldy ly
to **the** stoTÉ.

Caitlin looked her dead in the eyes. “Do you have the guts to accept that deal?”

Reese exchanged a look with Jillian but didn’t respond. Caitlin pressed again, “Or are you afraid
you won’t be able to afford

“Why would I be afraid?”

Reese sneered, clearly confident in her wealth. “Fine. I agree. Let’s see how you twist your way out
of this.”

Caitlin picked up the counterfeit piece, then asked Ulyana to bring out the same design from their
stock for comparison

Once Ulyana returned, Caitlin held both dresses up side by side.

“As you can see, they look similar at first glance, but if you look closely, you’ll notice differences in the fabric.”

She held them out for the customers to feel. “Go ahead. Just touch the material. You’ll see the difference for yourselves.”

The crowd reached out to feel the fabrics. It was subtle, but the real piece was clearly more refined in texture.

“You feel that? That’s what sets our fabric apart. VERA’s textiles are specially commissioned from dedicated suppliers. This counterfeit doesn’t hold a candle to it.”

Reese touched both as well, scoffing, “I can’t tell any difference. You’re just making excuses. Admit the flaw and stop acting clever.”

how

Jillian kept her eyes on Caitlin, waiting to see she’d resolve the situation. Was she really as brilliant as everyone claimed?

Caitlin ignored the provocation and went on, “Now, look at the labels. Ours are precisely crafted with clean edges. The counterfeit label has fraying and a much rougher finish.”

Customers nodded. Now that they were looking closely, the differences were apparent.

“So again, this dress is not from our store,” Caitlin concluded.

Reese laughed coldly. “You think just saying all this makes it true? I bought it from your store. My friend Jillian was there. So was your staff-”

She pointed at Ulyana. “That one. She saw me buy it. So how are you saying it’s fake?”

Jillian chimed in, “If there’s any doubt, check the store cameras., Reese really did pay \ \$100,000 for it.”

Caitlin wasn’t foolish. Surveillance footage would only show Reese purchasing a dress—**it** couldn’t prove the switch happened after she left.

“Yeah! Pull the tapes!” Reese slapped her hand on the counter. Ulyana hesitated, looking to Caitlin, unsure what to do.

Just then, a deep, commanding voice cut through the store.

“No need to check the cameras.”

Everyone turned toward the entrance, drawn by the icy tone.

Caitlin instantly recognized Sebastian's voice. She turned to see him striding into the store, surrounded by his team like a storm rolling in.

His arrival caused a stir among the crowd, especially the female shoppers.

"It's Sebastian!"

"Mr. Vanderbilt is really here?"

Chapter 466

"He **looks** even **better up** closer"

He **must** be here for Caitlin, right?"

Jillian instinctively ducked behind the others. Reese, on the other hand, stiffened as

the

felt his intense aura bearing down on her

Sebastian walked straight to Caitlin and the others, his sharp eyes landing on Reese.

“You’re the one making a scene?”

His gaze was so cold, Reese felt like her face had been sliced open.

Still, she forced herself to respond. “Mr. Vanderbilt, I’m not causing trouble. I bought a fake dress from this store, and I’m just trying to protect **my** rights **as a** customer!”

“This one?” Sebastian picked up the torn dress. Reese gave a hesitant nod.

“You really had the nerve to bring a fake into a legit store and pretend it’s ours?”

“I didn’t fake anything! They sold me a counterfeit!” she insisted.

Sebastian’s voice dropped, his tone lethal. “You’re going to sit here and smear my wife’s brand? Tyler! Bring the evidence.”

Sebastian had arrived—ready to defend his wife with zero tolerance for slander.