

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

In the underground lab, Zeke arrived and ordered his men to drag Samir out of the holding cell.

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The moment Samir was brought out, he shouted excitedly, “Is the leader here to take me back? I told you—I’m the real son of the leader! None of you have the right to touch me!”

“The leader is taking you back, alright,” one of the guards sneered. “We’re just helping *you* on your way.”

They escorted him into the lab, where Samir saw Zeke again. He immediately started yelling, “Zeke! Let me go! Maybe I’ll even speak up for you to the leader if you behave!”

His arrogance was laughable in Zeke’s eyes.

“Don’t worry about that,” Zeke said calmly. “You wanted to return to Graystone, didn’t you? I’ll make *sure* you do.”

Samir smirked, thinking he had won. Once he was back in Graystone, he’d make sure to feed Zeke to the wolves. His father wouldn’t let this betrayal go unpunished.

But that smugness didn’t last long.

The guards shoved him onto a metal table. Lab techs in white coats filed in.

Zeke stood and looked down at him coldly. “There’s something you should know. Pierrick is already in hell. Shadow Moon Pavilion’s US division has officially been reformed under a new name—Lightwing. From now on, I have no ties to Shadow Moon

Pavilion.”

“What? You traitor! The leader will never forgive you!”

Samir screamed and thrashed on the table.

“Whether he forgives me or not isn’t your *concern*.”

Zeke turned and walked to the door. Before leaving, he gave a chilling order.

“Make it clean. I want both of his hands turned into specimens. We’ll send them to Zorro as a gift. Make them pretty... and don’t forget to carve his name on them.”

There was no more reason to keep Samir alive—especially after what happened to Alicia.

*Yes, sir.”

“No... don’t.., nooo-!”

Zeke hadn’t been gone long before the lab was filled with gut-wrenching screams.

There are fates worse than death—and Samir was about to experience all of them.

Zorro could’ve never imagined that his carefully groomed killing machine would one day be slaughtered by the very person he sought to replace.

Zeke wished he could be there to witness Zorro’s reaction—when a father receives his son’s severed hands.

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18:43 Mon, 25 Aug

The next evening, news arrived at The Vanderbilt Family that James and King had returned to New York.

Caitlin had been waiting anxiously. The moment she heard the sound of car engines outside, she rushed out the front door.

Sebastian and Federico were right behind her.

Soon enough, James and King stepped out of the car. Then, a third man followed—a rugged, disheveled figure who looked exactly like the version of Ashfall from the video: the classic drifter artist look, with unkempt hair, a messy beard, and skin tanned bronze by sun and wind.

He looked older than expected. Though Federico had said Ashfall was around thirty-five, his weather-worn face made him seem closer to fifty. A life of wandering had clearly taken its toll.

“We brought him back,” James reported.

“Thank you, Harrison. Thank you, King,” Caitlin said gratefully, her gaze landing on Ashfall.

Federico stepped forward with a smile. “My old friend. It’s been a long time—you’ve gotten even more carefree.”

Ashfall grinned. “Thanks for remembering me. Thanks to you, I even got to fly first class.”

“That wasn’t my doing,” Federico said with a chuckle. “It was Trinity who made all the arrangements. She sent people to bring you back herself. Shows how important this is to her. Come, let me make the introductions.”

Federico introduced Caitlin to Ashfall. As soon as he laid eyes on her, Ashfall was stunned.

No wonder she had asked about the woman in the painting *Despair*. Now that he saw her in person, the resemblance was

uncanny.

“Hello, Mr. Ashfall. I’m really sorry to have dragged you all this way,” Caitlin said, extending her hand.

Ashfall hesitated. “My hands are filthy. Let’s skip the handshake. I’ve been briefed on everything. If there’s a chance I can help you find your mother, I’ll do my best.”

Caitlin thanked him again. Sebastian turned to James and said, "Why don't you take Mr. Ashfall to freshen up first?"

James gestured. "This way, please."

"Great, I could use a good wash. Lead the way."

After Ashfall was taken away, he eventually returned—clean—shaven, hair tied back, wearing fresh clothes. He looked like a whole new person. There was something refined about him now, and underneath the layers of grime had been a surprisingly handsome

man.

"Trinity, I'm clean now. Can we shake hands for real?"

He walked into the room with a smile and extended his hand. Caitlin took it warmly.

"Welcome, artist."

"Artist is a stretch. I'm more like a free spirit, a wanderer."

They all sat down and chatted. Ashfall had been all over the world and had countless stories. He spoke passionately and effortlessly, holding everyone's attention.

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Eventually, the conversation turned to Caitlin's mother.

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Ashfall began describing how he had painted 'Despair while living in the capital city of A Nation, St. Sanctum.

"You're saying that you painted 'Despair back when you were in St. Sanctum? And if the woman in the painting is really my mother, then she must've been held inside that building you described?"

"That's right. But the memory is hazy."

"I understand," Caitlin said. "That's why I'd like you to go back with us—to retrace your steps in St. Sanctum. I know it'll take some of your time."

“No problem. When do we leave?”

Caitlin was surprised at how eager he sounded. “I’m thinking tomorrow.”

“I’ll come with you,” Sebastian offered.

No. One of us has to stay behind to protect the family.”

Caitlin gently rejected him. Sebastian’s status made him a target. It was far safer for him to remain in New York, where he was protected by his own territory.

Besides, if they both left, it would leave their family wide open to attack.

“But how can I let you go alone?”

“With James, I won’t be alone.”

James stood up. “I’m going. It’s my responsibility to help find our mother.”

Caitlin nodded. “Exactly. With him by my side, I’ll be fine. I’ll also disguise myself—we won’t be traveling as ourselves.”

At that, Federico spoke up with an idea. “Actually, I just remembered something. The Royal Philharmonic is scheduled to perform

next in St. Sanctum. We’ve been invited by the royal family of A Nation. Trinity, why don’t you come with us under the identity of my assistant, Esme? I can escort *you* to A Nation myself.”

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Caitlin thought it over carefully and decided Federico’s plan would work. “Alright. This way, everything will seem natural.”,

Sebastian, however, still wasn’t comfortable. “Let Tyler and King go with you. They can help protect you. Otherwise, I won’t be at

ease.”

“Okay.”

With that, the plan was set in motion. Everyone began preparing for the trip the next day. To ensure everything went smoothly, Sebastian arranged a private jet for them.

The next morning, the group was ready to depart. Before leaving, Caitlin made a point to see Beatrice, Eliza, and the rest of the family. She also went to say goodbye to her children.

“Mommy, where are you going?” Patricia clung to Caitlin’s neck.

“Mommy is going on a work trip with Federico. I’ll be back soon. You have to be good while I’m gone, alright?” Caitlin kissed her daughter’s cheek.

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Her sons were used to short separations from their mother, but Patricia was different. Her daughter couldn’t bear to be apart from

her.

“I don’t want Mommy to go on a trip...” Patricia held on tighter and refused to let go.

Caitlin tried gently pulling away, but her daughter wouldn't budge. Molly stepped in to help.

"Patricia, want me to take you out to play? Let Mommy go do her work, okay? Be a good girl."

But Patricia still wouldn't give in. Then Sebastian had a better idea.

"Patricia, how about Daddy takes you and your brothers to see Kyle? He's competing in that model-building contest today, remember? You promised to cheer him on. We can't be late!"

That caught Patricia's attention. She *looked* up, eyes wide, then nodded eagerly. "Okay! I want to cheer for Kyle!"

Sebastian successfully led the children away, waving back at Caitlin. She tucked away her emotions and called everyone to depart.

James, Tyler, King, Federico, and Ashfall all headed to the hotel where the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was staying. There, they met with the orchestra's director and explained that Caitlin would be joining the trip to A Nation to look for her mother. The director agreed without hesitation.

Soon, Caitlin reappeared in a new outfit. Gone was her sharp, commanding aura—she now looked like a low-key assistant, complete with black-rimmed glasses.

“How do I look?” she asked with a grin.

“You look so different I wouldn’t even recognize you if you didn’t say your name,” Federico laughed. “From now on, you’re my assistant–Esme.”

“Perfect. Let’s go.”

James, Tyler, and King also changed into simple, utilitarian clothes to pass as backstage crew.

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Everything was ready. They headed to the airport, boarded the plane without issue, and took off on schedule.

After several hours in the air, they landed at the capital city’s international airport in A Nation–St. Sanctum.

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Traveling alongside the orchestra, they disembarked together. The royal family had arranged transportation, and soon they were all driven to the St. Sanctum National Hotel.

Once they were settled in, Caitlin asked Ashfall to lead the way to where he had painted “Despair” years ago, hoping it would lead to clues about her mother.

Ashfall had last been to St. Sanctum three years ago. The city had changed dramatically—skyscrapers had sprung up everywhere, and everything looked more modern and developed than before.

No one could be sure whether Ashfall could still recognize the places he once knew.

Since they didn’t know how far they’d have to walk, James rented a small car for them to follow Ashfall through the city.

Ashfall walked the streets slowly, trying to trigger memories from years past.

St. Sanctum was beautiful, bursting with flowers in every direction.

It was Caitlin’s first time in A Nation. Gazing out the car window, she noticed trees blooming with purple flowers and asked, “What kind of flowers are those? They look like heather.”

Federico nodded. “That’s exactly what they are. Heather is the official flower of St. Sanctum. We came at just the right time—it’s peak blooming season in September.”

“They’re lovely.”

They took in the city’s scenery while scanning buildings for anything familiar. King drove at a slow pace, trailing Ashfall carefully.

Ashfall crossed several streets on foot, gradually remembering where he had set up his art stand. He even found the old convenience store where he remembered selling *Despair*. From there, he continued onward, following the route from his past.

According to the signs, they were now approaching Central Square—St. Sanctum’s political heart, where the royal palace was

located.

They noticed a crowd gathering along the sidewalks, and the center of the road was completely blocked off. Signs marked it as a no-vehicle zone.

“No vehicles allowed? Is there some kind of event today? Why are all these people waiting by the street?” Caitlin asked.

Tyler quickly looked up the local news and replied, “Looks like today is a royal procession. The citizens are all waiting for the royal convoy to pass.”

“Should we back off a bit?” Caitlin suggested.

Before anyone could respond, King had to hit the brakes—their car was stopped by police officers stationed ahead.

Ashfall, walking nearby, was also halted.

“Stop! Today is a royal inspection. All vehicles must stay off the main avenue! Everyone in the car, step out and present your ID!”

As part of security protocol, officers were checking everyone’s identity.

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Caitlin and the others got out of the car and handed over their IDs.

When the officer read Federico’s passport, his eyes widened. “Sir, are you the world-famous pianist, Mr. Colli?”

“That’s me.”

“It’s an honor to meet you! We heard the royal family invited the European Royal Philharmonic. I had no idea you were with them! What a privilege!”

The officer respectfully returned Federico's documents and offered, "Would you like me to inform the palace of your arrival? They could extend an invitation right away."

"No need. We're just sightseeing today. We'll officially enter the palace for tonight's performance."

"Understood! You won't be able to take the vehicle, but you're welcome to proceed on foot."

They were given clearance to walk, but Caitlin had no interest in the procession. Her focus was entirely on finding her mother.

"Let's not go in. We'll take another route."

"Agreed. Let's go around."

They decided to detour. Still, their timing had placed them right near the grand procession. From their position, they had a clear view as the royal convoy exited the square.

The crowd erupted in cheers as the royal vehicles passed. It was a grand, festive spectacle.

Caitlin and the others paused briefly to watch. At the front of the convoy was a gleaming, extended Bentley limousine with an open sunroof. Standing in it was a man who radiated charisma and authority.

He wore a royal uniform, a ceremonial hat, and a sash adorned with medals. He waved to the people on both sides of the street.

Caitlin looked at the man and turned to Federico. “Is that the King of A Nation?”

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“No, no,” Federico said, shaking his head. “That should be Prince Magnus Leifsen, the Crown Prince of A Nation. From what I know, the king has limited mobility, so most public appearances and diplomatic events are handled by the prince.”

Caitlin nodded in understanding. She wasn't particularly interested in royal gossip. “Mr. Ashfall, let's go around and keep moving.”

The group left St. Sanctum's central square, turned down a side street, and continued their search.

As they followed Ashfall's lead, their car slowly left the city's bustling center behind and entered the suburbs.

When the road became too narrow, they got out and continued on foot.

Though the streets looked familiar, much of the area had been redeveloped. *Some* sections were still under construction, and it seemed like many of the old buildings had been demolished.

After all, the place where Ashfall had painted *Despair* was originally a very old structure.

Ashfall eventually recognized a river and a stone bridge nearby. “This is it!.I remember this river—and that bridge! The building must’ve been right around here!”

Hearing that they were close, Caitlin’s heart pounded with anticipation, Everyone began searching the area.

“Ashfall, which building exactly did you paint back then?” Caitlin asked.

“Follow me!”

Ashfall led them through a maze of alleys, twisting and turning until they reached the exact spot from his memory.

But instead of the structure he remembered, they were faced with a pile of rubble.

“It was right here... The building is gone!”

Ashfall stood frozen, staring at the ruins. Caitlin and the others approached, taking in the scene—shattered granite walls, twisted rusted metal sticking out, and patches of overgrown weeds. It looked like the site had been abandoned for quite some time.

“If the building is gone... then what about my mother?” Caitlin’s voice trembled.

Her hope shattered in an instant, and her eyes began to redden with tears.

James, though also overcome by a deep sadness, did his best to comfort her, “Maybe she was moved somewhere else. Just because the building’s gone doesn’t mean she’s gone. There’s still a chance she’s alive.”

Federico gently patted Caitlin’s shoulder. “Don’t lose hope, Trinity. Let’s ask around—maybe the site was relocated.”

Caitlin nodded. “Okay. Let’s see if we can find someone who knows who owned the property.”

They started asking nearby residents. Eventually, they learned that the old building had been called the Flowerstone Tower- named for its construction using a mixture of granite and talc.

It had been demolished earlier in the year in a controlled explosion. A development company had purchased the surrounding land for a large-scale project called “Outer City”

The company’s name was ScandBuild.

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Back in the car, they discussed their next move.

“Let’s go ask the developer directly,” Federico suggested. “See if they remember anything.”

“That’s what I was thinking too,” Caitlin said.

“I’ll drop you off at the hotel first,” James added. “Then Tyler and I will go to ScandBuild and investigate.”

“Alright. Let’s head back.”

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They returned to the hotel and had a quick meal. James and Tyler then left to find ScandBuild, while King stayed behind to protect

Caitlin.

Meanwhile, Caitlin accompanied Federico to the orchestra's hotel. The palace had already sent word that they would be admitted

at 6 p.m.

It was already past three—just under three hours to prepare.

But less than thirty minutes before departure, an unexpected accident struck the orchestra. The violinist, Richard, slipped in the bathroom after his shower and hit his head on the toilet, bleeding heavily.

His roommate called emergency services. The conductor rushed to the scene with several members, and Caitlin and Federico followed.

They watched as paramedics carried Richard away, blood still staining his clothes.

“What do we do now?” one of the musicians asked, panic setting in. “We’re supposed to be in the palace in twenty minutes!”

“Yeah, without a violinist, how are we supposed to perform? We don’t have time to find a replacement.”

The conductor was visibly stressed. He told an assistant to accompany Richard to the hospital but still had to figure out a solution for the performance.

“Everyone, stay calm,” the conductor said. “I’m going to contact the St. Sanctum Symphony Orchestra. Maybe we can borrow a violinist for tonight. It’s not ideal, but it’s our best option right now.”

Just as he was about to make the call, Federico stopped him.

“Wait, Maestro—I have an idea.”

“What is it, Federico?”

“Why not let my assistant Esme try? She can take Richard’s place.”

The conductor turned to Caitlin. “Esme plays the violin?”

Everyone turned to look at Caitlin. Most of them didn't know she was Trinity; they believed she was just Federico's assistant.

"She does," Federico said with a smile. "She's multitalented—plays both violin and piano quite well."

He winked at Caitlin. "Why don't you give it a **shot**, Esme?"

Caitlin had indeed studied multiple instruments since childhood, with her mother teaching her violin. Her mother had always played beautifully.

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Though she was fully capable of performing, she had come to A Nation for another reason—to search for her mother. The less attention she drew to herself, the better.

But under these circumstances, there wasn't much choice. She couldn't just stand by and watch the orchestra's show fall apart.

After a moment of thought, she nodded. "Alright. I'll give it a try—but I have one condition."

“Name it. I’ll double your performance fee if you want,” the conductor offered quickly.

“No, no fee,” Caitlin said. “I just don’t want to reveal my identity.”

The conductor paused to think, then nodded. “Would wearing a mask work?”

“That’s fine.”

“Great. Come with me, Esme. Let’s try the violin.”

Caitlin and Federico exchanged a glance, and Federico gave her a reassuring nod.

She followed the conductor to rehearse. Time was tight, but after just a few minutes of playing, the conductor looked relieved.

“Incredible, Esme! It’s a shame you’re not a full-time violinist.”

He was so impressed that he ran through the entire concert program with her on the spot.

As departure time approached, Caitlin told King to stay behind at the hotel to wait for James and Tyler, while she and Federico headed for the palace.

Around 6 p.m., their car pulled up at the gates of the royal palace in St. Sanctum. Everyone was required to undergo a security check before entering.

Each person passed without issue—until they reached Caitlin.

The guard checking her ID frowned.

“This young lady doesn’t quite match the ID photo. Please remove your makeup.”

It was standard protocol. The palace took no chances with impersonators.

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Caitlin had used Federico’s assistant’s ID and replicated her appearance with makeup. But no disguise was perfect—removing her makeup would expose everything.

The conductor, aware of the truth, stepped in to intervene. “Is there any chance you could make an exception? We’re short on time. If she removes her makeup and has to redo it, we’ll be late for the performance.”

“Apologies,” the guard said firmly. “This is the royal **palace**. We’re just doing our job.”

“Miss, please remove your makeup immediately.”

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“This demand is completely unreasonable. You’re wasting our time.”

Federico’s patience was wearing thin as he stared at the unyielding guard. For a brief moment, he considered walking away from the performance altogether and taking Caitlin with him.

But just as he was about to make that decision, a royal motorcade slowly pulled into the palace gates.

The guards immediately straightened and lined up in formation as the prince’s convoy approached.

Inside the stretched Bentley, Prince Magnus noticed the commotion at the gates and ordered the car to stop.

He stepped out and approached the group, asking what was going on.

One of the guards stepped forward and reported, “Your Highness, we’re verifying the identities of the European Royal Philharmonic. We noticed a discrepancy in one violinist’s photo, so we asked her to remove her makeup.”

Hearing this, Magnus walked over to Caitlin and took her ID. His eyes scanned her features, then flicked back to the photo.

“Esme? The makeup’s just a bit heavier than in the photo. Nothing major,” he said casually.

Caitlin quietly exhaled in relief.

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The conductor quickly chimed in, “That’s right, Your Highness. She’s performing tonight, so the makeup is part of the stage look.”

Magnus nodded and handed the ID back to Caitlin. Then he turned to the conductor and said, “I apologize, sir. The guards were simply following protocol, not trying to offend. I hope you’ll understand.”

Magnus had personally invited the orchestra, and he now offered his own apology for the misunderstanding.

“It’s quite alright, Your Highness,” the conductor replied with a respectful handshake.

Magnus also greeted Federico warmly. “Mr. Colli, welcome. Please, all of you, come in.”

With the prince’s approval (the guards *no* longer insisted on the makeup removal, and the group was allowed to enter the palace

without further issue.

As Magnus re-entered his vehicle and was driven away, the young women of the orchestra could hardly contain their excitement.

“He’s so handsome!”

“He’s even more charming than the pictures online—so warm and polite!”

“Our own prince isn’t bad either. I think Federico could give him a run for his money!”

Everyone chuckled at the comparison, knowing full well Federico’s true identity. He took it all in stride.

In a low voice, he leaned toward Caitlin. Good thing that prince showed up. Otherwise, we'd be in real trouble."

"Yeah... If they had figured out who I was, it wouldn't have just been about false identity. I could've been arrested for illegal entry."

"Let's be even more careful from here on out," Caitlin said, her voice quiet but serious.

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They were escorted through the palace to the grand banquet hall—the largest ceremonial chamber in the palace—where the orchestra would be performing.

Next to it was a large reception room where the musicians left their belongings and made final preparations.

The stage was set in the center of the hall, ready for their performance.

As the hour approached, everyone rushed to change, touch up makeup, and tune their instruments.

At 7 p.m. sharp, the royal banquet officially began. Nobles, ministers, and dignitaries filled the seats in the grand hall.

At the head of the room, seated on the throne, was King Leif VI. Beside him sat Queen Heather.

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King Olav rarely attended public celebrations, mostly due to his limited mobility and reliance on a wheelchair. But tonight was Queen Heather's birthday—a rare occasion.

She sat beside him with a gentle smile, leaning over to ask what he wanted to eat.

Don't worry about me. Eat whatever you like," Olav said in a flat tone.

Heather smiled, though there was a trace of disappointment in her eyes.

To outsiders, they appeared a dignified and courteous couple. In truth, that's all they were—companions who had long lived as

friends.

As the banquet progressed, guests began offering their birthday wishes to the queen in increasingly elaborate ways.

Finally, it was Magnus's turn. He stepped forward to the throne and said, "Father, Mother, today is Mother's birthday. I've prepared a special performance in your honor."

Queen Heather smiled. "Oh? What kind of performance?"

"You'll see very soon."

Magnus gestured to the musicians. The background music stopped, the lights dimmed, and the stage curtain began to rise.

All eyes turned toward the center of the hall. A single spotlight beamed down on a small circular stage.

There, under the light, stood a young woman in a floor-length black gown. Her softly curled hair cascaded down her back. She wore a half-face mask.

Her pale skin shimmered under the spotlight, and her entire presence exuded mystery.

Caitlin stood calmly at center stage. Through the **mask**, she scanned the grand hall.

Gilded walls glowed under the chandeliers. Nobles and dignitaries sat on either side. In the distance, on the elevated platform, sat the king and queen.

Even though they were far away, Caitlin could sense their imposing aura.

The conductor gave her a subtle signal. Caitlin raised her violin to her chin and lifted the bow.

With the first gentle stroke, a hauntingly beautiful melody filled the hall.

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The sound of the violin, combined with her enigmatic presence, immediately captivated the audience.

Even King Leif VI, who had shown little interest in the event, raised his eyes toward the stage.

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The solo violin piece was mesmerizing, as if it carried a spell. It swept through the grand chamber, stealing every breath and holding every heartbeat still.

As the melody flowed, something stirred in Leif VI—a ripple across a lake that had long been still.

Deep within his mind, a memory began to resurface.

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There had once been a woman who played the violin too. A beautiful woman with eyes full of unspoken sorrow and a smile that lingered like a fading dream.

She had been unforgettable.

When the solo ended, the spotlight shifted to a white grand piano. Federico sat poised at the keys.

Some of the guests immediately recognized him.

“Oh my, that’s the Piano Prince—Federico!”

“I had no idea we’d be seeing the European Royal Philharmonic tonight! What an incredible surprise!”

Federico began to play, and Caitlin’s violin joined his melody. The duet sent chills through the audience.

Then the rest of the orchestra appeared, the conductor raised his baton, and the full ensemble launched into a sweeping, majestic arrangement.

Music filled the hall like a storm, growing more powerful with each note.

On the throne, King Leif VI leaned toward his son.

“Magnus,” he said in a low voice, “you invited *the* Royal Philharmonic. Do you know who that violinist is?”

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Chapter 546

“Her name is Esme. Father, why are you asking about her?”

Magnus glanced at his mother, who was fully absorbed in the music, then back at his father. He figured the old man might have taken a liking to the violinist.

“I’m just curious. After the performance, ask her to come see me.”

“Alright, but I’ll arrange for her to meet you in private. Don’t want to upset Mother.”

“That’s fine.”

When Magnus returned to his seat, Queen Heather leaned in and asked, “What did your father want?”

“Nothing much. He just said the European Royal Philharmonic was brilliant.”

Magnus didn’t mention anything about Esme. Some things were best kept between father and son.

“Indeed. It was spectacular.”

Heather smiled at her son. “I didn’t expect you to invite the European Royal Philharmonic. That was very thoughtful.”

“I know how much you love their performances. You’re one of their biggest fans. I just wanted to make you happy—did it work?”

“It did. Very much so!”

Heather glanced toward the stage, watching the pianist with a soft, almost girlish look in her eyes.

Everyone assumed she adored the orchestra, but the truth was, what she really adored was the elegant and talented piano prince,

Federico.

Federico was immersed in the music, and from his vantage point at the piano, he could see Caitlin perfectly.

They played in harmony, their musical chemistry seamless. This had been a long-awaited dream for Federico—to perform with Caitlin. Now, it was finally coming true.

The performance continued in full splendor. After more than an hour, the concert concluded to thunderous applause.

The audience was captivated, many moved by the music’s emotional depth and sheer artistry.

The performers all stood as the conductor led the orchestra in a formal bow toward the royal throne.

King Leif VI and Queen Heather praised the orchestra with sincere admiration.

Afterward, the performers were escorted out of the ball and back to the reception room to pack up.

With the performance over, the banquet also came to an end. Guests began to leave the palace.

As Leif VI was wheeled away, he glanced at Magnus, who gave him a slight nod in understanding.

Back in the reception room, members of the orchestra gathered their belongings.

A royal guard soon entered the room.

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“Is Miss Esme here?”

Everyone turned to Caitlin. She looked up, locking eyes with the guard. “I’m Esme. What is it?”

“His Royal Highness would like to see you. It won’t take long.”

The other musicians lit up with envy.

“Esme, this is your chance! If the prince likes you, you could end up a princess!” one of the women whispered, half-joking.

Others shared the sentiment, mistaking this for a romantic encounter.

But only Federico and the conductor knew this could be serious—possibly dangerous.

Federico stepped forward protectively. “May I ask why His Highness wants to see her?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know. Please come with me quickly. We don’t want to keep the prince waiting.”

Caitlin glanced at Federico. He looked uneasy.

“I’ll go,” she said firmly. “If anything happens, I’ll take full responsibility.”

She was making it clear: if her identity were exposed, she would protect the orchestra and Federico from all consequences.

“But-”

“Enough. I’ll be fine.”

Caitlin slipped her mask back on and followed the guard out.

Federico and the conductor stayed behind, worried. They agreed to wait for her before leaving the palace.

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The corridors of the royal palace were lined with priceless paintings and artifacts. Caitlin followed the guard silently, taking in the grandeur.

Eventually, the guard led her into an ornate parlor. Magnus wasn't there.

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"You may wait here. His Highness will join you shortly," the guard said before stepping out.

Caitlin sat down on a vintage sofa, glancing around the room.

Her eyes caught a carved wooden table with a delicate antique vase, filled with Heather flowers—the national bloom of Saint City.

She also noticed that the walls were decorated with motifs of the same flower. Clearly, Queen Heather was deeply cherished here.

She was still admiring the decor when the door creaked open again.

But it wasn't Prince Magnus who entered.

It was King Leif VI, seated in a wheelchair,

Caitlin rose immediately and bowed. "Your Majesty"

"No need for formalities."

49%

28

He waved off the guards, who promptly exited the room. He wheeled himself forward, stopping a couple meters from her.

Leif VI studied her with curiosity. Caitlin also quietly observed him.

His expression was stern, composed, but there was a natural aura of authority around him.

Strangely, something about his face felt... familiar.

But that couldn't be. She was certain they had never met before.

Still, she couldn't help but glance at his wheelchair. To see a man of such stature forced into one at his age—there was something tragic about it.

The silence stretched. Caitlin finally broke it. “Your Majesty, they told me it was the prince who wished to see me. Why is it you instead?”

“I asked him to bring you.”

He was blunt, his voice low but clear.

“You wanted to see me? May I ask why?”

Leif VI hadn’t yet decided what he believed. He simply wanted to see her face, to be sure.

“Your violin performance was excellent,” he said. “Forgive me for being direct—but may I see your face?”

Caitlin’s heart skipped a beat.

Was this it? Was she about to be exposed? Was this not about the music at all, but some twisted interest from the king himself?

But then she thought again. He was in a wheelchair. That didn’t make sense.

And she wasn’t even wearing her real face. So even if he saw it, it wouldn’t mean anything.

She nodded and slowly removed the mask.

Leif VI stared at her feature—plain, ordinary, completely unlike the face in his memory.

No, this girl wasn’t her.

The only similarity was that both played the violin.

He had let his imagination get the better of him,

The woman he remembered had been gone for years.

How could she possibly still be alive?

“Thank you,” he said quietly. “Would you play one more piece for me?”

Caitlin hesitated “I didn’t bring my violin with me.”

“I’ve had one prepared.”

He signaled to the door. A guard entered and placed a violin case on the table.

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Caitlin stepped forward, opened it, and found an exquisitely crafted violin nestled inside.

It was clearly a rare collector's piece, handcrafted with meticulous detail.

Etched on the body in elegant French script were the initials L.L.K.

Caitlin frowned. She had never heard of a violin brand or luthier by those initials.

What did L.L.K.** stand for?

Chapter 547

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Caitlin couldn't figure out what L.L.K. stood for, but she didn't have time to dwell on it. King Leif VI sat quietly just a few feet away, waiting patiently.

She adjusted the violin on her shoulder, tuned it lightly, and began to play.

Leif VI leaned back in his wheelchair, resting his chin on his hand, silently listening.

The sound of the violin always pulled him back to that beautiful, distant memory.

He remembered the first time he met her—drawn in by a haunting melody. He had followed the music and found her by a lakeside near the hotel, bathed in morning light, glowing like an ethereal spirit.

Just like now, he hadn't disturbed her. He had simply watched and listened, allowing the moment to stay unbroken.

Back in the reception hall, Federico and the rest of the orchestra waited....

The longer Caitlin was gone, the more anxious he grew.

What exactly did the prince want with her? What if something happened?

Unable to sit still any longer, Federico made up his mind.

“Conductor, you stay here with everyone. I’m going to find Esme.”

The conductor frowned. “This is the royal palace. You can’t just wander around.”

“I’ll be careful.”

Even if the worst happened, Federico had one final card to play—his true identity. The royal family wouldn’t dare act recklessly.

The conductor reluctantly agreed. “Fine. But don’t provoke anyone. Avoid conflict with the palace guards at all costs.”

“I understand.”

-1

Federico left the reception hall and began walking down the long corridors in search of her.

Meanwhile, word of Esme’s private meeting with the king reached Queen Heather.

After the banquet, Heather had returned to her chambers, already scheming ways to arrange a private meeting with the piano prince.

Then the head lady-in-waiting reported, “Your Majesty, the king **has** summoned the violinist from earlier.”

“What?”

Heather sat up from her chaise lounge, startled.

The image of that mysterious violinist immediately surfaced in her mind.

A flash of darkness flickered in her eyes. Could it be... he still couldn't let go?

1/4

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Anger simmered quietly beneath her poised demeanor. Without a word, she rose and headed straight for the reception suite.

As she approached, she heard violin music flowing from inside.

The guards at the door moved to salute, but she waved them off. She didn't enter—she simply stood there, listening.

After a moment, she turned and instructed her lady-in-waiting, “When that woman comes out, bring her to me.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Inside the hall, Caitlin's music carried Leif VI back to the past.

When the final note faded, he remained lost in his memories.

Caitlin carefully set the violin down and turned toward the king, who was still deep in thought.

What was he thinking? Why did his eyes look so heavy with sorrow?

“Your Majesty, I’ve finished. May I return now?”

Her voice brought Leif VI back to the present. He blinked and looked at her.

“You play beautifully. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Caitlin was relieved. So the king had summoned her merely to listen to her play—nothing more.

“I’ll have someone escort you back.”

He called a guard and gave brief instructions. Caitlin bowed, replaced her mask, and left the hall.

The king remained in his wheelchair, unmoving, his thoughts spinning in silence.

As Caitlin stepped outside, the head lady-in-waiting intercepted her.

“Miss Esme, Her Majesty the Queen would like to see you as well. She enjoyed your performance.”

Caitlin blinked. The queen too? Did she also want to hear her play?

If so, why hadn't the king and queen just listened together?

Strange.

“Of course Please, lead the way.”

Caitlin followed her to the queen's opulent quarters.

There, she finally saw Queen Heather up close. The queen was surprisingly youthful, her appearance well preserved and elegant.

“Your Majesty, Esme is here,” the lady in waiting announced.

Heather turned toward the masked girl, her expression soft and graceful.

“You’re Esme? You played beautifully. I really enjoyed it.”

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“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Caitlin bowed respectfully.

“You look very mysterious in that mask. May I see your face?”

Caitlin instantly understood.

It wasn’t about the music—it was the mask. The curiosity it stirred in people.

Had she performed with a bare face, no one would have bothered to summon her afterward.

Curiosity truly was powerful.

Caitlin gave a small nod and removed the mask.

Heather studied her features.

It was a very ordinary face. Without the mask, the mystique vanished entirely.

She found nothing familiar or noteworthy.

Heather gestured, indicating that she could put the mask back on.

She asked a few inconsequential questions, complimented her again, and then signaled for a reward.

A jeweled box was brought over, filled with fine accessories.

Caitlin politely declined. "Your Majesty, it's an honor to perform for you and the king. I don't require any reward."

“Nonsense. It’s yours.”

Heather insisted, and the lady-in-waiting gently pressed the box into her hands.

Caitlin could only accept and thank her again.

No further questions followed. Heather simply had her escorted back to the reception hall.

The conductor spotted her immediately.

“Esme! You’re back! Did you see Federico? He went to look for you.”

“I didn’t see him. He went looking for me?”

Caitlin frowned, her concern growing. She handed her belongings to the conductor. “I’ll go find him.”

48%

“Wait,” the conductor stopped her. “If you go out now and he comes back, then he’ll go out again, and you’ll end up chasing each other in circles. Stay here. He’ll return once he hears you’re back.”

That made sense. Caitlin nodded and stayed.

At that moment, Federico was wandering the palace halls, completely unfamiliar with the layout, relying only on instinct.

Without realizing it, he stepped into the restricted section of the royal residence—the queen’s private wing.

Guards spotted him immediately.

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“Who are you? This area is off-limits!”

“I’m Federico, the pianist who performed earlier.”

48%

“The performance ended over thirty minutes ago. The orchestra is preparing to leave. And yet here you are, sneaking around. What’s your real purpose?”

The guards hadn’t seen the performers up close, and Federico’s nervous glances made them suspicious.

“I’m just looking for a colleague. I have identification—look for yourself.”

“We don’t care who you are. Entering the queen’s quarters without permission is a serious offense. You’ll be detained immediately.”

They moved to apprehend him.

28

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“I’m not a criminal! I’m a law-abiding citizen... I’m from the royal family of Britain!”

Federico struggled as the guards restrained him, trying to explain himself.

He revealed his identity, but it didn't help. They still took him into custody.

News of an intruder in the royal quarters quickly reached Queen Heather. When she heard that the intruder claimed to be the pianist Federico, her eyes lit up.

“Oh Mr. Colli entered the royal residence? Bring him to me at once!”

At her command, the guards soon escorted Federico into her palace chambers.

He was still protesting as he was pushed through the doors. “I'm not a bad guy... let me go...”

The moment Heather saw the young man, her surprise quickly turned into delight. She immediately ordered the guards, “He's Federico. All of you, leave us.”

The guards obeyed, releasing him and exiting the room.

“Your Majesty,” Federico bowed quickly when he realized who she was.

Heather had never had the chance to get this close to him before. She approached him slowly, circling around him with a smile on her lips.

“So, Mr. Colli, what brings you to this side of the palace?”

“Your Majesty, I was looking for my friend. She was escorted away by the guards, and I was worried about her. I meant no offense or intrusion. Please forgive me.”

“Oh, I see. You were looking for your companion, Esme.”

“Yes, exactly.”

Heather kept her eyes fixed on him, visibly pleased. She stepped closer, placing a hand lightly on his shoulder.

“I didn’t expect you to be so loyal. It’s... admirable.”

Federico noticed the way her fingers lingered on his shoulder, how her gaze lingered too long. An uneasy feeling crept over him.

He understood the subtext but pretended not to.

Heather’s hand slid slowly down his arm as though she were touching something precious, something beautiful.

She had watched every performance of his posted online. His face, his style—he was her ideal type.

If not for her position, she would have approached him long ago.

Federico felt like something cold and slithering had brushed against his skin. It made him deeply uncomfortable.

What exactly was the queen trying to do?

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He gathered his composure and asked, “Your Majesty, do you know where my companion is?”

“I do. And if you agree to a small request of mine, I’ll tell you.”

Heather knew he hadn’t seen Esme yet, which meant their paths hadn’t crossed. That gave her an excellent opening.

“What request?”

Federico’s tone grew cautious. His brow furrowed, his entire demeanor guarded.

48%

28

“It’s nothing too difficult. I just really enjoy watching you play the piano. If you could perform for me privately, I’d be very grateful.”

So that was it. The queen was a fan. That would explain why the royal family had invited the orchestra in the first place.

“It would be my honor to perform for Your Majesty. However... there’s no piano here.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll have one prepared. Tomorrow evening, someone will come to your hotel to escort you.”

As she said this, a chill ran down Federico’s spine. He couldn’t refuse, but everything about this felt wrong.

“I also enjoyed your companion’s performance,” Heather added with a smile. “I gave her a gift and had someone escort her back. You’ll see her once you return.”

“Thank you for telling me. May I go now?”

“Of course. Just don’t forget our little agreement—and don’t mention it to anyone.”

“understand...”

With that, Heather ordered a guard to escort him back to the reception hall.

The moment Federico stepped through the door, Caitlin spotted him and rushed over.

“Federico!”

“Esme, are you alright?”

“I’m fine.”

He quickly looked her over. Seeing she was safe, he finally let out a breath of relief.

“Now that we’re both back, let’s get out of this palace.”

Federico's expression was dark and tense. He urged everyone to move quickly.

They exited the palace and boarded the shuttle back to their hotel.

Inside the vehicle, Caitlin noticed how Federico's brow remained furrowed. He hadn't said a word since they left.

"Federico, are you okay? You went to look for me... did something happen?"

Her keen observation didn't miss a thing.

He glanced at her but couldn't bring himself to say it. Eventually, he shook his head.

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"It's nothing."

He tried to convince himself the queen was just a passionate admirer of his music. That was all.

Caitlin didn't press further, though her instincts told her something had definitely happened.

Back at the hotel, James and Tyler were already waiting.

As soon as Caitlin stepped inside, she asked, "What did you find out?"

James looked serious. "We investigated the area, but something strange came up."

"What was it?"

48%

(28)

Tyler added, "We posed as reporters making inquiries. But whenever we mentioned the Outercity development project or the Huashi Tower ruins, nobody could give us a straight answer."

"Nobody? That doesn't make sense. ScandBuild bought the land and demolished the structure just earlier this year. It's only September. How can no one remember anything?"

"Exactly. It was like they were all following a script. Everyone said the same vague things."

Caitlin frowned. “Did you dig into ScandBuild itself? Who owns it?”

“We did. So far, we haven’t found anything questionable on the surface. The owner is Mikkel, a well-known real estate mogul here. He’s got developments all over the country.”

James added, “The Outercity project officially started early this year.”

Caitlin processed the details. “If he’s that successful, it means he’s smart and has powerful backing.”

She went on, “They initiated the project and demolished the old building right away, yet none of the residents were relocated? And construction has been frozen *ever* since?”

“Maybe it’s because of holdouts—families who refused to leave,” James suggested. “That happens a lot. Some just won’t budge, even with compensation.”

“It’s possible,” Caitlin said. “But think about it. We’re not talking about one or two families. We canvassed the entire neighborhood, and no one’s moved. Not a single one,

“How could a project go on for over eight months without even the beginning of relocation? And ScandBuild doesn’t have money problems.

“I looked at their past projects. Every one of them showed visible progress within three months of launch. But this Outercity site

Why?

has

Comment

AD

Send gift

No Ads

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Chapter 549

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“Yeah, it’s definitely strange.”

James and Tyler fell into deep thought. Neither could make sense of it.

48%

Caitlin finally offered a solution. “If we want to find out the real reason behind the demolition of the Huashi Tower and the suspension of the Outercity project, we need to find Mikkel and ask him directly. Harrison, tomorrow, investigate Mikkel’s movements in detail. See where he usually stays, where he likes to spend his time or money. As soon as you know something, call

me.”

“Got it.”

After making arrangements, James and Tyler returned to rest.

Caitlin removed her makeup and made a video call to Sebastian. Soon, his handsome face appeared on screen. From the background, she could tell he was in his study.

“I heard from Harrison you didn’t find any leads on your mother?”

Sebastian had already spoken to James earlier in the day.

“No, nothing yet. The building was demolished. But I still want to keep searching. I might need to stay here a few more days.”

There was a trace of disappointment in her tone. Sebastian quickly reassured her, “Don’t lose hope. We’ll find something. We can’t give up.”

“You’re right. I won’t give up. I have this feeling that I’m really close to finding her. Maybe I just need one more clue.”

Caitlin thought about Black Hawk. “By the way, we need to keep pressing on Black Hawk too. Try to find a breakthrough there.”

“I know. That guy’s tough as hell. I even tried poisoning him, had him on the brink—but he still won’t talk.”

“That guy’s iron-willed.”

They had pulled out all the stops and still couldn’t get a word out of him. Who was Black Hawk protecting that made him willing to die rather than talk?

Their conversation shifted from her mother to the orchestra performance.

Sebastian asked, “The performance is over? Everything went okay?”

“Yeah, it went well. I even got **summoned** by their king.”

“He summoned you? Why?”

Sebastian’s voice tightened, clearly uneasy. Another man taking an interest in his wife, especially a king, was not something he could ignore.

“He wanted a private violin performance.”

Sebastian went quiet, clearly thinking, “Really? Out of the entire country, no one else plays violin?”

Caitlin could tell what he was thinking. “Relax, I went as Federico’s assistant, Esme. They didn’t see my real face. And their king was

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very polite. He just wanted to hear one song. Nothing happened. Their queen also gave me a gift—a box of jewelry.”

“I heard he’s in a wheelchair. Is that true?”

“Yeah. He really is. Kinda sad to see, actually. How did he end up like that?”

Caitlin felt sympathy, mentioning it casually.

Sebastian flipped his phone camera to show her some articles he had pulled up on Leif VI.

“Apparently, he had an accident while studying abroad in France more than twenty years ago. He’s been paralyzed since.”

48%

The article included photos of Leif VI in his younger years. Caitlin stared at them, a bit taken aback. “He’s got a bit of that camera-ready look... kinda reminds me of my brother.”

“I thought so too,” Sebastian admitted.

Then came the photos of him in the wheelchair. Caitlin sighed. “What a shame. He was really handsome back then. Still has a dignified air, though.”

Sebastian’s face darkened. He flipped the camera back to himself. “More handsome than me? More dignified than me?”

Caitlin laughed at his sulky expression. “I’m just being objective. Of course, in my heart, you’re always the most handsome, the most charismatic.”

“That’s better.”

Still not totally reassured, Sebastian reminded her, “Keep that face of yours hidden. Don’t let anyone see what you really look like. I’m getting serious security alerts over here.”

“Alright, alright. I got it.”

They chatted for a bit longer before hanging up and heading to bed.

After the royal performance, the entire European Royal Philharmonic Orchestra stayed at the hotel. The Aurelian royal family had arranged a luxurious tour for them the next morning, with a private car for transport.

Caitlin joined the others for the day trip, with King by her side as security. Meanwhile, James and Tyler went off to track Mikkel. Everyone moved separately.

They spent the day sightseeing in Sanctis. The group enjoyed themselves—everyone except Federico, who seemed distracted and tense the whole time.

Back at the hotel around 4 p.m., Caitlin knocked on his door. When he opened it and saw her, he stepped aside to let her in.

“Is something wrong, Trinity?”

“I just wanted to check on you. You seemed off all day. Did something happen?”

Federico hadn’t planned to tell anyone. But Caitlin, being sharp as ever, had clearly seen through him. There was no point hiding it.

“Have a seat. Yeah... something’s bothering me.”

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They sat down. Caitlin leaned in attentively. “What is it? Talk to me. Maybe I can help.”

48%

+28)

Federico rubbed his hands together, hesitating for a second before speaking. “You know, with this face of mine, it’s not uncommon for women to fall for me. During my tours, I’ve had wealthy women, socialites—plenty of them throwing themselves at me, Some go as far as offering themselves outright. But you know I’m not that kind of guy. I’ve always been selective.”

“I know. If you wanted to, you could be with a different woman every night. But you’re not that kind of man. So what happened? Did someone proposition you? Make some kind of offer?”

Caitlin guessed right away that the issue had to do with an admirer. If it were anything else, Federico would’ve handled it himself.

“Yeah. Someone made it very clear they were interested... and invited me to perform privately tonight. And maybe even more...”

He paused, clearly uncomfortable.

“I get it. So, who is she? Just another obsessed fan?”

“She is... but not just a fan. The thing is... I can’t refuse, but I have to. What am I supposed to do?”

Caitlin grinned. “You’re really not gonna tell me who she is? You’re the great piano prince. Who on earth could you not say no to?”

“If it were you, I’d never say no,” Federico joked, trying to lighten the mood.

Then he grew serious and lowered his voice.

“It’s the queen. So tell me... what the hell am I supposed to do?”

The queen?”

Caitlin gasped.

1

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Federico quickly clapped a hand over Caitlin’s mouth. “Keep your voice down! If anyone hears this, I’m as good as dead!”

Caitlin suppressed her shock, then whispered urgently, “What exactly happened? When did she contact you? Did she send someone? Call you directly?”

“Neither,” Federico replied, exhaling deeply. “Remember last night at the royal performance?”

He recounted everything—how he went to find Caitlin, got caught wandering, and ended up face-to-face with the Queen. “And that’s how I ended up in this mess. I’ve been stressed out ever since.”

Caitlin finally pieced everything together. The Queen of Auralia wasn’t just a fan—she admired Federico and had clearly made advances. Caitlin couldn’t help but think of the king in his wheelchair and wondered... was the Queen’s behavior driven by frustration with her husband’s condition? Was it a lonely woman’s secret rebellion?

But regardless of the reason, this wasn’t some petty scandal. This was the Queen of a sovereign nation. If Federico got involved with her and it came out... it could mean death. There wasn’t a man alive who’d tolerate being publicly humiliated—especially not a king confined to a wheelchair.

Federico looked grim. He glanced at his watch. The hour of the “invitation” was drawing closer, and the closer it got, the more agitated he became.

Caitlin teased him gently, “Most men would kill for an opportunity like this—spending the night with a queen? Sounds like something straight out of a fantasy. But here you are, stressing about it for a whole day.”

“Very funny,” Federico grumbled. “I’m an artist, not a... plaything. Come on, help me out. You’re smart. Think of something.”

Caitlin thought for a moment. “We can’t have you flat-out refusing her. That’d be a slap in the face. You’d make a powerful enemy. We need an excuse. Something that’ll make you unavailable, but also sympathetic.”

“Exactly! What’ve you got?”

She leaned in and whispered her plan into his ear.

Federico’s eyes widened. That... that could work. Might require a bit of acting, but I like it. Let’s do it.”

Around 6 p.m., Caitlin got a call from James.

“We’ve tracked Mikkel. He’s still in Sanctis. Just left ScandBuild headquarters and is on the move. We’re tailing his car now.”

“Good. Don’t spook him. I’ll come over *once* you confirm his destination.”

After hanging up, Caitlin and Federico got ready to put their plan in motion.

Night fell, casting neon reflections across the glowing city of Sanctis.

A luxury sedan—unmarked but obviously high-end—pulled up to the Sanctis Grand Hotel. It had been sent by the Queen’s personal

assistant to retrieve Federico.

As the assistant arrived, he noticed an ambulance parked at the hotel’s entrance. Frowning, but not thinking too much of it, he continued inside.

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[48%

But when he reached Federico’s floor, chaos was unfolding. Paramedics, hotel staff, and members of the European Royal Philharmonic Orchestra were crowding the hallway.

“Please move! Step aside!”

The crowd made way as medics rushed through, wheeling a stretcher toward the elevators. As the assistant caught a glimpse of the man on the stretcher, his heart sank.

Wasn’t that... Federico?

Once the medics passed, the assistant approached the nearest person—one of the orchestra members.

“What happened? Was that Mr. Colli?”

The conductor turned to him, clearly distressed. “Yes. He collapsed suddenly. I’m heading to the hospital now. You can ask his assistant, Esme, for details.”

The conductor hurried off with several others. The assistant quickly found Esme—Caitlin—and called out to her.

“Miss Esme, what happened to Mr. Colli?”

Caitlin looked stricken, her expression full of worry. “I honestly don’t know. He called me for help, and when I got to his room, he was already unconscious on the floor. I called for an ambulance right away.”

The assistant’s brows furrowed. “That’s terrible.”

“It is. I need to get to the hospital.”

She left with Ashfall in tow. With no one to bring back, and no clear explanation, the assistant had no choice but to return and report to the Queen.

Meanwhile, in a secluded royal villa lit by candlelight, a grand piano sat waiting. Wine was poured, music queued, and the Queen herself was dressed to perfection.

She checked the time again, impatient. When the assistant returned empty-handed, her expression darkened.

“What do you mean you didn’t bring him?”

“He was being taken away in an ambulance when I arrived. He collapsed at the hotel.”

“What?”

Heather stood up, her face stiffening.

“Why? What happened?”

“I don’t know, Your Majesty. They weren’t sure either.”

The Queen's mood soured instantly. She picked up a wine glass and hurled it across the room. It shattered against the floor.

"No one dares refuse me. No one! And he thinks he can get away with this?"

As Queen of Auralia, she had given him the rare honor of a private audience—and he dared play sick to get out **of it?**

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"Find out if he's faking. If he is, I'll make sure he never plays the piano again."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

48%2

11

At Sanctis General Hospital, Federico was rushed into emergency care. Caitlin and Ashfall arrived shortly after, joining the rest of the orchestra already gathered outside the ER.

Federico's condition remained unknown. The conductor paced anxiously.

"What if something's really wrong? If we lose Federico, we lose the soul of our orchestra."

It was no exaggeration. The European Royal Philharmonic's global success largely came from Federico's reputation. He was their star. Without him, their future was in jeopardy.

"God, I hope he's alright."

"Please, let him be okay."

The group began quietly praying, each person gripped with concern. Caitlin tried to keep everyone calm.

"Let's not panic until we know more. I believe Federico's going to be fine."

"Yes, yes. He'll be okay. He has to be."

The Queen's assistant arrived as well, standing at a distance, silently watching the ER door.

Time dragged on. Then, finally, the emergency room doors swung open.

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 551

Caitlin and the conductor rushed forward to meet the doctor.

25%

“The patient’s bloodwork shows cyanide poisoning. Luckily, he was brought in time. We’ve performed gastric lavage and emergency treatment. His life is no longer in danger.”

“Thank you... thank you, doctor.”

After the doctor left, the group remained in place, waiting anxiously.

The Queen’s assistant discreetly sought out the doctor who had just given the update. From him, he confirmed that Federico had indeed suffered from cyanide poisoning. The medical records backed it up—this wasn’t a ruse.

He returned to the palace and reported everything to Heather.

When the Queen saw the hospital report, her fury finally subsided a little. “So I was wrong. He really was poisoned. But why? Who would poison him?”

She sat in thought for several long moments, but no answer came to her.

“Prepare a royal delegation to visit the hospital tomorrow morning. Also, notify the Sanctis police—within three days, I want a full investigation into how cyanide ended up in Mr. Colli’s hotel room. If this

gets out, it’ll cause a media storm. Until we know more, no one is to speak of this to the press.”

“Understood.”

At the hospital, Federico was moved to a private room after his stomach had been pumped. He was

still unconscious.

Just then, Caitlin received a call from James. She turned to the conductor.

“I have something to take care of. If Federico wakes up, please let me know.”

“Of course. Don’t worry. We’ll keep an eye on him.”

Ashfall chimed in, “I’ll stay too. You go do what you need to do.”

With King by her side, Caitlin left the hospital. Behind them, the rest of the orchestra began to speculate.

“This isn’t a small matter. We need to get to the bottom of it.”

“Exactly. Could someone have tried to hurt Federico? Poisoning sounds like attempted murder!”

1/4

18:32 Tue, 26 Aug

“Word is the police are already investigating at the hotel.”

“Let’s hope they find the truth fast.”

25%

From James's earlier call, Caitlin learned that Mikkel had gone to a high-end restaurant for dinner and was now inside a popular nightclub—Aurora Club.

About thirty minutes later, Caitlin and King arrived at the club and met up with James and Tyler.

“He's in VIP Room 8—'Spade.' He's playing cards with a few friends.”

“Good. In ten minutes, we go in.”

Ten minutes later, Caitlin reappeared at the club's entrance—still in her Esme identity, but with a dramatic shift in style. Gone was the gentle violinist; now, she radiated confidence and allure.

She wore a sleek black outfit that hugged her curves perfectly, paired with a golden wig and a delicate black veil hat. With James, Tyler, and King flanking her, they walked through the glitzy, hedonistic interior of the Aurora Club.

No one paid them much attention—they looked like they belonged.

They reached VIP Room 8. Two hosts stood by the door and blocked their path.

“Who are you here for?”

“I’m a friend of Mikkel’s,” Caitlin replied, slipping a thick wad of cash into one of their chest pockets.

The host’s demeanor changed instantly. With a respectful smile, he opened the door for them.

Inside, a long card table was lit under soft lighting. Chips were stacked high, cards being played. Laughter and cigar smoke filled the room. At the center sat a balding, overweight man—Mikkel, the

CEO of ScandBuild.

The men were too focused on their game to notice the new arrivals—until one of their bodyguards moved to intercept them.

“Who are you? This is a private room.”

“I’m here to see Mikkel. Business,” Caitlin said calmly.

Her voice turned heads immediately. Mikkel and his companions paused their game and looked toward the doorway.

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She was stunning–striking figure, elegant attire, veiled allure.

“Business?” one man laughed. “With her? Damn, Mikkel, you’ve got some luck tonight.”

“Who is she?” another chimed in. “Introduce us!”

“What kind of business are you in, sweetheart? I’d love to invest.”

“I only want to speak with Mikkel,” Caitlin replied coolly, ignoring their lascivious stares.

Mikkel leaned back, intrigued, smirking lazily. “You want to do business with me? What kind of

business?”

“One that’s better discussed privately,” she replied.

His friends, smirking and elbowing him, began clearing the room. “Say no more. We’ll leave you two

alone.”

“Yeah, looks like you’re in for a special negotiation, Mikkel.”

They clapped him on the shoulder and left with their bodyguards.

Mikkel got up from the table and moved to the plush sofa, gesturing for Caitlin to join him.

“So, what’s your name, sweetheart? And what exactly do you want from me?”

Caitlin sat down across from him, her expression cooling. “I want some answers.”

“Wait, I thought we were here for business.”

“This is business,” she said, voice turning sharp.

Mikkel frowned, sensing something off. Up close, her beauty was less surreal, but the air of mystery still clung to her.

“What answers?”

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“I want to know why the land ScandBuild acquired earlier this year was blown up and why the project has since stalled.”

The question made Mikkel visibly tense. A warning bell rang in his mind.

Someone had reported earlier that a few people were asking around about the ‘Outer City’ project. He’d assumed it was nothing. Now, here was someone confronting him directly.

Regardless of who she was, his answer had to be the same.

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“That project is part of our internal business strategy. It’s confidential and not open for public

discussion. I’m sorry, but I have other matters to attend to-‘

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He began to rise, but James and Tyler stepped forward, placing firm hands on his shoulders, forcing

him back into his seat.

His bodyguards rushed forward—only to find themselves facing drawn weapons.

James and Tyler had guns pointed straight at them. The guards froze.

Mikkel paled, swallowing hard, beads of sweat forming along his hairline.

Caitlin leaned in slightly, her tone deadly calm.

“I’m only asking once. What happened to the Flowerstone Tower that got demolished? What exactly is ScandBuild hiding?”

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"I... I don't know anything!" Mikkel stammered, sweat rolling down his forehead. "Any project decision is made collectively by upper management. I just give the final go-ahead. As for how it's executed, that's all handled by the project department."

He had already realized one thing: the woman in front of him was not someone to mess with. They had weapons—and weren't afraid to use them.

"The Flowerstone Tower was a historic landmark. Don't tell me you've never heard of it?" Caitlin pressed.

"I know about the Flowerstone Tower, but... it was old, a structural hazard. That's why we demolished it immediately after acquisition. There's nothing illegal about that. Why are you even asking me these questions? Who are you people?"

Afraid of the guns aimed at him, Mikkel could only spill what he knew.

“Fine, let me ask you this—was the building empty when you ordered it to be demolished?”

Mikkel’s face twisted, his brow deeply furrowed, as though he were holding something in.

James tilted the gun barrel up to his temple.

Mikkel flinched and quickly blurted out, “It was empty! The demolition team checked beforehand — no residents, no squatters. That’s standard protocol. We would never blow up a building without making sure no one was inside. You can check if you don’t believe me!”

“When exactly was the building abandoned? Three years ago, there were still people living there, right?”

“No... it’s been abandoned for years. No one lived there...”

“But local residents said otherwise,” Caitlin said coldly. “They claimed it was a convalescent home. It wasn’t open to the public, and there were guards posted there. You’re a local—how could you not know?”

“I swear I don’t! How would I know about something so trivial?”

Mikkel was pale, shaking like a leaf. Whatever lies he may have wanted to tell had been beaten out of him by fear. He genuinely didn’t know the deeper truth.

“Alright. Even if you don’t know, your company must have documentation. When ScandBuild acquired that land, the original ownership must have been filed. I want that information.”

“Fine, fine... I’ll need to return to the office to pull the records...”

“Take him,” Caitlin ordered.

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James and Tyler each grabbed an arm and started dragging Mikkell out of the private room. Caitlin followed. King brought up the rear.

Mikkell’s bodyguards still didn’t dare to move, frozen in place as their boss was led away.

They made it out into the main hall unnoticed–Mikkell kept his mouth shut, too scared to resist.

But just as they were passing the lobby, a sudden burst of gunfire rang out. Bullets sprayed into the building from outside, shattering the windows. Glass exploded into deadly shards. A massive

chandelier fell with a crash, sparks bursting from exposed wiring. Half the lights in the room went out, plunging everything into semi-darkness.

Screams erupted. Panic set in.

Gamblers and partiers ran for cover, abandoning chips, cards, and drinks. Life came first now.

Caitlin and her team ducked near the main entrance, using the wall for cover.

Mikkel, seeing the chaos, made a break for it—slipping from James and Tyler’s grip and darting

toward the exit.

‘Mikkel’s running!’ James shouted.

But before they could chase him, a bullet whizzed through the air and hit Mikkel square in the head. He collapsed in a pool of blood.

“He’s been shot!” Tyler shouted and instinctively moved to check him.

Tyler, get back–now!” Caitlin yelled, yanking him out of the line of fire. Bullets sprayed across the corridor, shattering more fixtures and pounding into walls.

It was too dangerous to make any move now. Anyone who stuck their head out could be gunned down.

Tyler turned to Caitlin. “He’s dead. No pulse.”

“Call the police.”

Caitlin looked down at Mikkel’s lifeless body–blood gushing from a gaping hole in his skull, pooling over the white marble tiles. Her expression turned grim.

It wasn’t **just** Mikkel. Multiple civilians had been caught in the crossfire, lying lifeless in the lobby.

A rising sense of helplessness took hold.

Just moments ago, they had been so close to discovering a lead–now, their key witness was dead.

“We don’t know who’s behind this, so stay alert,” Caitlin warned, her tone tense,

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The night outside was flashing with gunfire. Explosions echoed through the streets. It was clear now -this wasn't just random chaos. It was an orchestrated ambush.

Then, in the midst of the chaos, Caitlin spotted armed men in uniforms pushing their way inside.

Not just any soldiers—these were royal guards.

And among them, injured and bleeding, was none other than Prince Magnus.

Caitlin recognized him instantly—he wore a bloodstained white uniform, his face pale as death. He was supported by two guards and barely conscious.

The royal detail had been escorting the prince past the club when they were attacked by an unknown armed force. A brutal firefight had erupted in the streets. Now, the guards were using the club for cover, trying to hold their position until reinforcements arrived.

“That’s Prince Magnus!” Caitlin gasped.

Her eyes widened in alarm. If something happened to the prince, it wouldn't just be a personal tragedy—it would be a national crisis.

“We have to help!” she said. “We can't let the prince die here.”

If it were anyone else, she might have stayed back. But this was different.

“You check on the prince,” James said. “We'll cover the perimeter.”

He motioned *to* Tyler and King. Thankfully, they had come prepared—they were all armed and ready.

“Be careful!” Caitlin called after them, then crouched low and made her way toward the injured prince.

Magnus lay on the floor, barely conscious. His chest was soaked in blood. Caitlin dropped to her knees beside him and tapped his face.

“Your Highness! Prince Magnus!”

He stirred faintly, blinking, barely able to focus. Then, with a soft groan, he passed out again.

Caitlin didn't hesitate. She dragged him to a safer spot behind a wall and began emergency first aid—ripping fabric to bind the wound and applying pressure to stop the bleeding.

The firefight outside showed no signs of slowing down. The other side was heavily armed and well-organized.

Caitlin looked back toward the darkened street, her heart pounding.

James, Tyler, King... please be safe.

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And Magnus—just hang on. Help is coming.

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Sirens echoed in the distance, growing louder. Soon, police units and the royal guard arrived from both directions, finally putting an end to the chaos that had unfolded around the club. Prince Magnus was quickly escorted to the hospital for emergency treatment.

Sanctis police took over the scene, managing the wounded and deceased, while survivors inside the club were temporarily relocated and prepared for questioning.

The attack on the prince was immediately reported to the royal family. King Leif VI and Queen Heather were both stunned and outraged. Orders were given for a full-scale investigation to hunt down the remaining attackers and bring them to justice.

After completing their statements at the scene, Caitlin and her team were allowed to return to the hotel. The night's events felt surreal-like something out of an action movie-but every second had been real.

Mikkel's death was the most regrettable part. Just as they were finally getting close to a solid lead, it had slipped through their fingers, and now, following up would be much harder.

The next morning, Caitlin was finishing up her disguise when she heard a knock on the door. When she opened it, a young man stood outside-someone she didn't recognize at first glance.

He wore a black hoodie, his bangs falling over his eyes in a casual, stylish mess. His overall look was trendy, laid-back, and charming—like one of those soft, puppy-eyed pretty boys straight out of a teen drama.

"You are...?"

The man didn't speak. Instead, he pulled a rose from behind his back and held it out to her.

Caitlin's eyes flicked down to the ring on his finger—and suddenly it clicked.

"You... What are you doing here?"

"Surprised?" he smirked.

The man stepped inside, shut the door behind him, and swept her into his arms.

"Hey! Sebastian—" Caitlin tried to dodge his kiss, gently pushing him away. "I'm not your wife right now,"

"Mm, I know. And I'm not your husband either. Call me Jason."

Sebastian had missed her too much. Ever since Caitlin left, he hadn't been able to relax. In the end, he changed his appearance and identity just to come find her.

Her carefully done makeup was quickly ruined as the "puppy dog" refused to let go. They tangled

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together, teasing and cuddling, until finally they calmed down and cleaned themselves up again.

When they stepped into the hallway, they ran straight into James, who was just coming out of his

room.

James froze.

His sister was with a guy he'd never seen before—a younger man who looked suspiciously close.

Too close.

He walked over with narrowed eyes, glaring at the stranger. “Who’s this?”

He’s-”

Before Caitlin could explain, Sebastian reached out and squeezed her waist mischievously. Then, with a wicked grin, he introduced himself.

Hi. I’m Jason.”

He had altered his voice slightly, and with the makeup and styling, James didn’t recognize him at all. Just as Sebastian leaned in and kissed Caitlin on the cheek, James’s expression froze.

Was his sister... cheating?

With a pretty boy?

Did this mean Sebastian got cheated on?

ames had long since accepted Sebastian as a solid brother-in-law. Now seeing this random guy touch his sister like that, he snapped. He grabbed Sebastian by the collar.

Are you out of your mind? You think you can just hit on her like that? Who the hell do you think you are?"

I don't just think about it," Sebastian said smugly. "I've already slept with her."

James lost it and pulled his fist back, ready to strike—but Caitlin caught his arm just in time.

'Relax! It's Sebastian. He's joking."

"What?"

James took a harder look. The guy didn't look like Sebastian at first, but the eyes... the height...

The more he looked, the more it made sense.

"...Seriously?" he muttered, annoyed. "You think that's funny?"

“Extremely,” Sebastian said, wrapping his arm around Caitlin and laughing.

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James shook his head, speechless. Who the hell plays a prank so hard they “pretend to be their wife’s side piece*?”

“Alright, let’s go. We’ve got a hospital visit to make,” Caitlin reminded them, moving things along.

They headed to the hospital to visit Federico, who had already woken up and was doing well.

Ashfall and the others immediately noticed the new face with Caitlin.

“This is Jason,” Caitlin said casually. “A friend. He’s one of us.”

“Nice to meet you, Jason.” Ashfall shook his hand and added, “Did you hear about the attack last night? The whole city’s talking about it.”

“Yeah, we were there. Saw everything,” Caitlin answered before Sebastian could.

She had already updated Sebastian on what had happened. In his mind, coming here had been the right call. With chaos like that happening out of nowhere, who knew what tomorrow might bring? He needed to be with her—always.

“Do you think the attack was aimed at you guys?” Federico asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” Caitlin replied. “Pretty sure it was targeted at Prince Magnus. He was badly injured last night.”

“What? That wasn’t in the news,” Ashfall said, skeptical.

‘Of course not. If people found out a prince was shot in public, it would cause panic. They’d keep it quiet.

The others nodded in agreement.

Caitlin turned her attention to Federico. “How are you feeling now? Still uncomfortable?”

‘Not really. I’m okay.’”

He was still weak from the stomach pumping and treatment, but knowing it got him out of last night's royal entanglement, he figured it was worth it.

"But I heard the police are investigating your poisoning," Ashfall said. "What if they find something?"

Only a handful of people knew the truth: Caitlin had deliberately used a very small amount of cyanide—just enough to simulate a real emergency without being lethal.

"It's unlikely they'll figure it out," she said calmly. "Besides, with the shooting last night, all available manpower is tied up. By the time they circle back to this case, we'll be long gone."

While they were chatting, royal representatives arrived at the hospital to officially visit Federico.

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Federico, despite feeling a lot better, put on his best 'sick and dying' face for the royal envoys. After the formalities, they left.

With that done, Caitlin, Sebastian, and the team turned their focus back to the mission—finding her mother.

Mikkel was dead, but through other sources, they tracked down the previous owner of the Flowerstone Tower: a man named Tobias, formerly a doctor.

They followed the lead and eventually learned that Tobias now ran a rehabilitation clinic on the outskirts of Sanctis, near the border of another district.

As they arrived at the facility—Sanctis Institute for Rehabilitation and Research—something strange was already happening.

“Why are there so many people over there?”

“Looks like something happened!”

“Let’s go check it out.”

No one knew what was going on yet, but everyone instinctively started rushing toward the front entrance of the clinic.

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Downstairs in front of the rehabilitation center, a crowd had gathered—doctors in white coats and patients in hospital gowns alike—all staring toward the third floor.

Caitlin and her group followed their gaze. The main building of the center was five stories high, and on the third floor, there was a semicircular terrace. Standing on the outer edge of that terrace was a girl with long hair.

She stood with her back to the open air, one hand gripping the railing, her slender frame teetering dangerously.

“Why is that girl trying to jump?” Caitlin asked a nearby doctor.

The doctor didn’t notice they were strangers and replied casually, “Probably lost hope. Looks like a suicide attempt.”

Please don’t jump, Ida!” someone shouted from the crowd below.

It seemed that several people knew the girl. A few patients who were friends with Ida looked deeply worried—this girl, normally cheerful and lively, was now about to throw her life away.

Someone had already called the police, but it was unclear how long they would take to arrive.

After quickly getting the gist of the situation, Caitlin and her team decided to help. Saving the girl came first.

Caitlin and Sebastian ran toward the third floor. James and Tyler mobilized the doctors, instructing them to bring out mattresses to place on the ground below.

Thanks to their leadership, everyone pitched in.

Up on the terrace, a few nurses were already pleading with the girl to come down.

“Ida, please come down! Don’t do anything foolish!”

“Calm down, Ida. Please, come back!”

When a nurse moved a little closer, Ida suddenly shrieked, “Stay away from me! Don’t come any closer!”

No one dared to get too close. They feared she would let go and fall at any second.

Tobias, the director of the facility, had just arrived at the rooftop after hearing what was happening. He was nearing sixty, with a kind face and gentle demeanor—many of the younger patients liked

him.

Seeing one of his patients in danger, Tobias moved quickly to comfort her. “Ida, what’s wrong?”

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Please come down, okay?”

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But Ida just kept crying, her tears flowing uncontrollably. “Don’t try to talk me down, Tobias. I don’t want to live anymore!”

“Why? What happened? Tell me what’s going on, please.”

No matter how Tobias tried to reason with her, Ida wouldn't come down. She wouldn't give a reason either.

Caitlin and Sebastian arrived at the scene. One look was enough—they exchanged a glance, then stepped forward.

The moment Ida saw the unfamiliar pair approaching, she screamed again, “Stay away from me! Don't come any closer!”

Tobias also noticed the newcomers and raised a hand to stop Caitlin. “Who are you?”

Caitlin deliberately spoke loudly, her voice carrying. “We're from the Wish Management Bureau. We heard someone wanted to jump, so we're here to help fulfill the final wish of the person who wants to die.”

Everyone stared at her, puzzled. Wish Management Bureau? No one had heard of such a thing.

But Caitlin turned her attention to Ida. “Ida, we heard you're planning to end your life. I want to ask -do you have a final wish? If you tell me, I can help make it come true.”

It was clear to many that she was making things up, but it worked.

Ida, who had been on the verge of breaking down, was suddenly drawn in. “Really? You can really help me fulfill my wish?”

“Yes. Whatever it is you’ve always wanted to do, your final wish—tell me. We’ll help you. And once your wish is fulfilled, then you can decide whether or not to die. No one will stop you.”

Caitlin took two more steps forward. She studied the girl carefully—she looked no more than thirteen or fourteen, and the right sleeve of her hospital gown hung limp. She was missing an arm.

Was that the reason she wanted to give up on life?

It seemed like such a waste.

Ida was clearly wavering now, no longer as emotionally volatile. Her expression was filled with silent pain, and the tears kept flowing. She looked so pitiful that Caitlin couldn’t help but suspect she might have been a victim of something darker.

To keep up the act, Caitlin pulled out a small notebook and pen, acting as if she were ready to jot things down.

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“You can tell me now. I’ll write it all down. Think carefully—what is the one thing you want more than anything?”

Caitlin’s gentle and patient tone created a sense of safety. Tobias, seeing her method was working, motioned for everyone else to step back.

Now, only Caitlin remained at the front. She was less than three meters from Ida.

The girl was still crying, but now she began to speak. “I want... my mom and dad... and my brother...”

Caitlin looked over her shoulder at Tobias and whispered, “Where are her parents and brother? Are they local?”

Tobias shook his head urgently, whispering back, “She has no parents. Just a brother, but he hasn’t visited in a long time.”

Understanding the situation, Caitlin turned back to Ida. “That’s not an impossible wish. We can let your brother know how much you miss him. Do you have his contact info? We can help you reach

him.”

“I don’t...”

Ida cried harder. That was the heart of her despair. She had no parents—only a brother. But it had been so long since she’d last seen him. She feared something had happened to him.

She didn’t know how to reach him and didn’t even know how to start looking. So she chose this drastic act—hoping that if it made the news, maybe her brother would see it and come back for

her.

“That’s okay. If you have a photo of him, we can still find him.”

Caitlin kept her talking, buying time. “There are all kinds of ways to search for people now. We can use the internet, the media, even the news. It’s easy to find someone no matter where they are.”

“I don’t even know if my brother is still alive...”

That was what crushed Ida the most.

She remembered the last time she’d seen him. He’d told her that even if he never came to visit again, he wanted her to be strong and live on.

It sounded like a final goodbye.

After that day, he'd never come back.

Her tears blurred her vision. She raised her hand to wipe them away—but forgot that she was standing on the edge and only had one arm.

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As soon as she let go, her balance shifted. Her feet slipped off the edge, and her body tilted backward, falling into the air.

“Ida!”

Tobias and the others screamed in horror.

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Caitlin sprang forward with lightning speed, catching Ida's wrist just in time.

Ida let out a terrified scream as her body dropped, "Ahh! Help me!"

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The people below were frozen in horror. Thankfully, Caitlin had managed *to* catch her, leaving Ida dangling from the terrace's edge.

Within a second, Sebastian rushed over and helped pull her back to safety.

Everyone watching from below exhaled in relief. Tobias and the other staff members finally felt their hearts settle as they saw that Ida was safe.

"Ida!" Several people rushed over, surrounding her with concern.

Ida had never truly wanted to die. But having just faced a brush with death, she was trembling with fear. She threw herself into Caitlin's arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

“It’s okay, it’s okay. You’re safe now,” Caitlin comforted her.

Though she was a complete stranger, Caitlin had stepped in out of compassion. It was the right thing to do.

After making sure Ida was safe, Caitlin handed her off to the medical staff. They led the girl away to calm her down.

Tobias, along with several senior staff from the facility, approached them, gratitude written all over their faces. “Sir, ma’am, thank you so much for stepping in just now. On behalf of everyone at the center, I sincerely thank you.”

The director bowed, and the other staff followed suit.

“No need to be so formal, Director He,” Caitlin replied, having spotted his name on his badge—Tobias, the very person they had come to find.

“You’re too kind. Please, allow me to invite you to my office for a chat,” Tobias offered.

That was exactly what Caitlin wanted. She and Sebastian nodded and followed him down from the rooftop.

As they entered Tobias's office, the sound of police sirens echoed from outside. Officers had arrived on scene. However, after some questioning, they learned the jumper had already been rescued and the situation was under control.

The police went through standard procedures, interviewing the attending physician and filing a report before leaving.

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Inside the director's office, Caitlin and Sebastian noticed several banners of appreciation from patients' families hanging on the walls, along with a cabinet full of awards the center had won. Clearly, this was a well-regarded facility.

Tobias personally brought them two cups of coffee and placed them on the table.

"Thank you again. Your quick thinking prevented a tragedy and spared our center from a serious incident," Tobias said with genuine appreciation.

As the longtime director, he was keenly aware of the risks a criminal case would bring—not just to the center's reputation, but to his own career. He was passionate about his work and hoped the facility would remain incident-free until his retirement.

“You’re welcome,” Caitlin responded calmly.

Tobias took a seat across from them, curiosity in his eyes. “Forgive my boldness, but earlier you said you were from the Wish Management Bureau. I’ve never heard of such a place. Who exactly are you? And why did you happen to be here? You don’t look like locals.”

“My name is Esme. This is my boyfriend, Jason. We’re from abroad, here to investigate something,” Caitlin explained.

“Oh? What kind of investigation?” Tobias asked, intrigued.

“To be honest, we came here hoping to ask you about the Flowerstone Tower. We heard it used to belong to you. Is that right?”

“Yes, it was. Why do you ask about the Flowerstone Tower? That place used to be the original Sanctis Rehabilitation Center. It was my private property until last year, when it was acquired by ScandBuild. They said they wanted to develop the area. As far as I know, the building was demolished earlier this year. A real shame.”

Tobias’s information matched what they already knew. Caitlin and Sebastian exchanged a look.

“What’s such a shame?” Caitlin pressed.

“The Flowerstone Tower was a historical building. Beautiful architecture, rich in character. I assumed they’d develop the surrounding area for tourism and preserve the tower itself. But the first thing they demolished was that very building. I lived and worked there for years—I had a deep attachment to it.” Tobias’s voice softened as he spoke, lost in memory.

Caitlin’s voice pulled him back. “Director He, since you lived and worked there, it’s clear you cared deeply about the patients and the facility. I’d like to ask about one particular patient who might’ve been there. Do you remember her?”

Tobias looked puzzled. “Who are you asking about?”

“A woman,” Caitlin said, pulling out her tablet. She showed him a photo taken by Ashfall. “Do you

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recognize her?”

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Tobias took the tablet. The image showed part of the Flowerstone Tower’s structure and, behind wire mesh, the face of a woman.

His expression froze, then his brows furrowed as he searched his memory.

“Tobias? Tobias?” Caitlin called to bring him back.

He looked up, nodding. “I remember her. I think her name was Ellie.”

“Ellie? Can you write it down for me?” Caitlin asked.

He scribbled the name on a piece of paper: **Ellie**.

No. That wasn't her mother's name.

It was a name she'd never heard before.

But when Caitlin read it aloud, the pronunciation sounded eerily similar to **Kelly**.

Could someone have intentionally recorded it as a homonym?

Or had the name simply been misheard and written down incorrectly?

She instinctively looked at Sebastian. Their eyes met. They were thinking the same thing.

Maybe this “Ellie” was actually Kelly—with a changed name.

Either way, they were getting closer than ever before.

Caitlin steadied her emotions and pressed on. “Why was she admitted to your center? And is she still here?”

“It must’ve been three, maybe four years ago,” Tobias said, thinking back. “Her family brought her in because of her severe depression. Her mental state was poor. But no, she’s not here anymore.”

Three to four years ago. That timeline fit.

And depression—her mother had struggled with it.

A sharp ache welled up in Caitlin’s chest. Her breathing hitched with the weight of it.

Sebastian gently squeezed her hand, giving her silent support.

Caitlin forced herself to stay focused and asked, “Did her condition improve? When did she leave the center? Do you know where she went?”

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Sensing Caitlin’s urgency, Tobias couldn’t help but ask, “You seem deeply concerned about this patient. May I ask what your relationship with her is?”

“To be honest,” Caitlin said, her voice steady but emotional, “she might be my mother. I’m looking for her. Please, Tobias, I’m begging you—if there’s anything you know about her, please tell me. Do you still have her medical records?”

Caitlin laid her intentions bare. Tobias paused for a moment, thoughtful, then gave a small nod. “I’ll have someone check the archives. Please wait here.”

He walked to his desk and dialed the records department. “Look up a patient file. Yes, the name’s Ellie. Once you find it, bring it straight to my office.”

After hanging up, there was nothing to do but wait.

In the meantime, Caitlin asked about the girl who had tried to jump earlier. “By the way, what’s the situation with Ida? She mentioned her brother hadn’t visited in a long time. Has anyone been able

to reach him?”

Tobias gave a sigh and began to explain. “Ida may look young—she’s only sixteen—but she’s actually been with us for over five years now.”

*Over five years? Just because of a missing arm? This is a mental health facility, not a physical rehabilitation center,” Caitlin said, skeptical.

“No, no,” Tobias replied. “She lost her arm in a car accident when she was a child. Her parents died in the crash. She was the only survivor, but she lost an arm. That’s not why she’s here. She suffers from spinocerebellar ataxia. It’s a rare degenerative disorder, and we happen to have a specialist for it here.”

“Spinocerebellar ataxia...”

Caitlin knew the condition—patients often start with coordination issues, unsteady gait, poor precision. It’s a hereditary disease, with key symptoms being movement disorder and speech problems.

Tobias continued, “When she first came, the symptoms were mild. Over the years we’ve provided supportive care, which slows down the progression, but unfortunately, there’s no cure. She has a brother who used to visit from time to time, but this year he hasn’t come at all. Ida might feel abandoned... which may have led to her suicidal thoughts.”

Caitlin's heart ached with sympathy. Sixteen years old, facing a lifetime of pain and illness—that was more than most could bear. No wonder she'd lost hope.

Just then, a knock came at the door. A staff member from records stepped inside, holding a manila

folder.

“Tobias, here are the files you requested.”

Tobias accepted the folder, opened it, and pulled out the contents.

After verifying the name, he handed the papers to Caitlin. “Here—these are her medical records

from our center.”

Caitlin and Sebastian read through the documents carefully. Everything listed under Ellie's personal information was completely inconsistent with her mother's. Nothing matched.

It was either a case of mistaken identity—or someone had deliberately falsified everything.

The records included routine reports: instances of relapse, treatment summaries, even notes from psychological evaluations. But there was one thing all the documents had in common.

“These all look like photocopies,” Caitlin noted. “Are there no originals?”

“You have a good eye,” Tobias said, impressed. “No, we don’t have the originals anymore. As medical professionals, we always aim to preserve full patient records. But last year, when the Flowerstone Tower was sold and we relocated, Ellie’s family came to discharge her. They requested to take the originals, saying they needed them for insurance reimbursements.

“I suspected we might need to reference the files later, so I had my staff quietly make copies. Without those, you’d be holding nothing right now.”

So that was it.

If not for Tobias’s foresight, Caitlin wouldn’t even have this.

“You said she was discharged... Who picked her up?”

“Check the last page. There’s a signature in the ‘family member’ section of the discharge form.”

Caitlin flipped to the final sheet and found the signature. It was scrawled and hard to decipher.

“What’s this say?”

“Looks like ‘Parker’ to me,” Sebastian guessed, “The strokes match.”

“Yes, that’s it,” Tobias confirmed. “He introduced himself as her family. Very polite man.”

Tobias’s memory of Ellie was vivid. When she was admitted, her case had come with specific instructions: she was to be given priority care. They’d even arranged a private room for her.

In the beginning, she’d tried to run away several times, so they installed wire mesh outside the windows to prevent escape.

2:25 pm

55 vouchers

That's what Ashfall had accidentally stumbled across—Ellie behind the wire mesh. It had looked like imprisonment, but inside the facility, her freedom wasn't restricted. She could move around freely like the other patients.

As Tobias explained, Caitlin looked down at the falsified records in her hand. Her gut told her Ellie was her mother.

She'd been admitted three to four years ago. Discharged last year.

That meant she stayed for around two years—and received special care the entire time. Her records and treatment matched the timeline and circumstances of her mother's disappearance.

But who arranged this?

Who had ordered Black Hawk to abduct her mother and send her to a facility in Athelia?

And where had this man named Parker taken her?

There were still too many unanswered questions.

Thank you, Tobias, for telling me all of this. One last thing—do you have any photos of Ellie? There's nothing in the file. I need to see if she's really my mother.”

The original records had one, but the photo went missing sometime after we handed them over. Even the copies were missing it. But... we do have group photos from our patient archives. I'll see if

can find one.”

Tobias stood and walked over to the bookshelf. After a moment of searching, he returned with a large photo album in his hands.

AD

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