

## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“Here, look at these two group photos,” Tobias said, flipping through the album. “I was there too.”

Caitlin and Sebastian followed the direction of his finger and immediately spotted him seated in the front center of the group, clearly in a position of authority as the head of the center.

Tobias shifted his hand, pointing to the second row toward the back, about six people in from the left. “That’s Ellie. Take a look—do you recognize her?”

Caitlin leaned in. The photo was wide-angled and filled with people, making it difficult to make out individual faces.

Tobias handed her a magnifying glass. Caitlin carefully zoomed in on the woman he’d indicated. When the image finally came into sharp focus, her heart clenched as if scorched by fire—sharp, sudden, and burning.

It was her mother.

No doubt about it.

Ellie was her mother.

“Yes, it’s her! That’s my mother!”

Caitlin lifted her head, her voice trembling with emotion. She could hardly contain her joy. After so long, she had finally confirmed her mother’s whereabouts and found the place where she had last

been.

Sebastian felt a renewed sense of hope rise in his chest. If she was alive, there was still a chance.

Caitlin took a picture of the group photo with her phone and turned back to Tobias. “Tobias, when my mother was discharged, how was her mental state?”

“With our treatment plan, she showed considerable improvement. The depression didn’t vanish completely, but it was much better than when she first arrived,” Tobias recalled.

“During her stay, did anyone besides Parker ever visit her? Did she ever act strangely?”

“She was very withdrawn, rarely spoke. There were a few instances where she attempted suicide, but we were able to intervene each time. After each episode, Parker would come and take her away for a few days, then bring her back. We never knew where he took her or what they did.”

Caitlin's brow furrowed deeply as she listened. This only added to her unease.

Who was Parker? And what was he doing with her mother during those absences?

She had all the answers she could get for now. Caitlin stood and extended her hand. "Thank you,

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Tobias. You've given me so much valuable information—I truly appreciate your help."

"It was my pleasure, Miss Esme. I hope you find your mother soon."

"Thank you."

After shaking hands, Caitlin added, "Before we go, could we visit Ida for a moment?"

"Of course. I'll have someone take you."

Tobias called in his assistant, who escorted them to Ida's room.

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The facility didn't feel like a typical hospital. Each room was designed to resemble a warm, welcoming home, filled with personal touches to make patients feel at ease.

Ida's room was painted in a soft, minty green. Cute decorations and plush toys adorned the space, adding a sense of comfort.

They found Ida seated at a table, focused on a rehabilitation exercise. She was trying to drop small wooden beads into a hole at the top of a wooden container.

For someone healthy, it would've been effortless. But Ida's condition, caused by damage to her cerebellum, made even this simple task nearly impossible. Her hand trembled, and each bead missed its mark.

Caitlin walked over, picked up a bead from the floor, and handed it to her.

When Ida looked up and recognized her, she jumped in surprise. "Is it true? Can you really make my wish come true?"

She still believed Caitlin was from the "Wish Fulfillment Bureau," and her eyes held a fragile hope.

“Of course I can.”

Caitlin knew it had started as a lie to save her, but now she genuinely wanted to help this girl,

She gently took Ida’s hand and helped her place a bead through the hole, then smiled. “But I need you to tell me your brother’s name. The more details you can give me, the better my chances of finding him.”

“My name is Ida. My brother’s name is Neil

“Those are beautiful names. Let me write that down.”

Caitlin pulled out her notebook and began jotting down everything Ida told her—names, ages,

hometown.

Through their conversation, Caitlin learned how close the siblings had been. Neil, twelve years older, had raised Ida after their parents died. He had spent years seeking the best neurologists in

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the world to treat her.

He wasn't just her brother. He was her entire world.

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"Your brother clearly loves you very much. Do you have a photo of him? That would help a lot."

"I don't have any recent pictures, but I have one from when we were little."

Ida handed her a precious old photo. She was three years old in it, her arms still intact, while Neil was a lanky fifteen-year-old with soft, youthful features.

"I'll take a photo of it," Caitlin said, snapping a picture before carefully returning the original.

"Ida, I've written everything down. I also have the number for the center here. As soon as I find your brother, I'll call and let you know."

"Okay! Thank you. Thank you so much!"

A shy but genuine smile appeared on Ida's face—like a bloom after a long winter. She looked like someone who, for the first time in a long time, had something to look forward to.

“I'm going to find your brother. You just keep working hard, okay?”

“I will!”

They hugged. Before Caitlin turned to leave, she paused. “Is there something small you can give me? Something I can show your brother so he'll believe I'm telling the truth?”

Ida thought for a moment, then removed a small bear-shaped hair clip from her hair. “My brother gave me this. He'll know it's mine.”

“Perfect. I'll bring this to him. Take care, Ida.”

“Goodbye!”

Ida walked them to the door. As Caitlin and Sebastian stepped out of the building, she watched from the second-floor window, waving goodbye,

Once back in the car, James could barely contain his anticipation. “Well? Did you find anything?”

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“We found it. We finally have something solid.”

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Caitlin relayed everything they’d uncovered, showing James the photograph of their mother.

“This... this is really her... it’s Mom...”

James couldn’t hold back the tears that welled up in his eyes. His throat tightened painfully as he stared at the picture. Years of separation, of wondering and not knowing—it all came crashing down now that he was so close, and yet still unable to see her face-to-face.

Caitlin gave his shoulder a reassuring pat. “Don’t be sad. Based on what we’ve learned so far, it’s clear that Mom wasn’t abused after she was taken. She received treatment, and her depression was under control when she was discharged.”

“Even though we still don’t know who orchestrated all of this or why, we know for certain that she’s still alive. And that means we can keep searching.”

James nodded, then asked, “Who is this Parker

guy?”

“We don’t know yet,” Caitlin replied, “but I’m certain Black Hawk knows. He was the one who brought my mom to Athea. He must know who Parker is.”

“That bastard’s mouth is sealed shut,” Sebastian muttered with frustration. “We still can’t dig up anything on his past. It’s like someone wiped it all clean.”

Everyone fell silent, until Caitlin broke the tension. “Actually... I just thought of something.”

“What is it?”

“Do you remember what Timothy said with his last breath?”

Sebastian’s eyes lit up as he caught on. “If he was trying to say ‘Ellie,’ then your mother’s disappearance might be connected to Forrest. Which means... she could be linked to Carlos’s

faction.”

“Exactly,” Caitlin nodded. “If that’s true, then Carlos and Black Hawk might be working together or part of the same network.”

James’s voice rose with anger. “There has to be something bigger going on. Why take Mom? And if this is about the Codex, why hasn’t anyone come after you for it?”

“Maybe it’s not even about the Codex,” Caitlin reasoned. “Carlos sold off Jonathan family assets. He’s clearly aiming to carve up the empire.”

Sebastian voiced a chilling possibility. “What if Carlos... is Parker?”

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Everyone was stunned into silence.

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Caitlin thought back to Forrest. “Forrest is just Carlos’s cover identity, which means he could have many others. It wouldn’t be surprising if Parker was one of them.”

“If they’re the same person,” she continued, “then Timothy’s last words—‘Forrest’ and ‘Ellie’—would make perfect sense. He was trying to tell me where my mother was. He just didn’t have enough time.”

“And if Forrest brought her to Athea, maybe he’s from here. Maybe the mastermind has been hiding in Athea this whole time. We need to dig into Parker. Don’t lose track of Carlos either.”

“Let’s get going.”

They all headed back to Sanctis.

As their vehicle drove off, a man in a white coat and glasses stood at a third-floor window of the sanitarium, watching them. He pulled out his phone.

“The woman’s name is Esme. She’s here digging into Ellie. They just left.”

“Esme?” The voice on the other end was low and dangerous, with a tinge of surprise. “What did she find out?”

“She met with the director. I don’t know exactly what was said, but the whole group left together.”

“Your director really is a stubborn old man.”

The line went dead. But that voice... it left the doctor chilled to the bone.

Back at the hotel, Sebastian had Tyler post everything they'd discovered onto The Obsidian Order's intelligence system, tasking their operatives to investigate the leads.

Later, Caitlin and Sebastian visited Federico at the hospital. His condition had stabilized, and he was expected to be discharged within a day or two.

They decided to wait for him before leaving Athea. In the meantime, they'd keep digging—maybe someone local knew something useful.

After lunch, they returned to the hotel.

But as they approached the entrance, they saw an unusually large number of royal guards posted

outside.

Unease stirred in Caitlin's chest.

They walked in. The moment the guards spotted Caitlin, one of them stepped forward and radioed

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his superior.

“Commander! We’ve located Esme!”

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The squad leader quickly emerged from the lobby, his eyes scanning the group. He locked onto Caitlin. “Miss Esme, please come with us.”

“What’s going on?” Caitlin asked, her tone calm but firm. Sebastian and James immediately grew

tense.

“His Highness the Prince was injured during an attack last night. You were present at the scene. His Majesty and Her Majesty would like to speak with you personally at the palace.”

So it was about the shooting.

The others exchanged looks. Was the royal family trying to blame Caitlin for the attack? Or were they simply searching for answers?

Caitlin answered carefully, “We already spoke to the Sanctis police. We gave statements. Why is the palace involved now?”

“We’re just following orders. Please, come with us.”

Sebastian stepped forward, shielding Caitlin with his body. “Commander, even if you’re summoning someone to the palace, do you have the proper paperwork? A royal summons?”

The guard’s gaze hardened. He hesitated.

“No... but we’re acting under a direct verbal order. You’ll have to take it up with Their Majesties. Take her.”

The commander waved, and two guards stepped toward Caitlin. Sebastian moved again to block them, but Caitlin reached out and stopped him.

“It’s okay, Jason. If the King and Queen just want to ask questions, I’ll explain everything clearly. I’ll be fine. Wait for me here.”

She turned to Tyler, “You and James were also there. Can you come with me?”

“No. The King only summoned Esme,” the commander said sharply. “Just her.”

The guards cleared a path and waited.

Caitlin turned back one last time to her group. They were clearly worried. She gave them a reassuring smile, “Don’t worry. I’ll be back soon.”

Left with no other option, they watched helplessly as Caitlin was led away, escorted into a black car

and driven off.

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Why had the palace called her in alone?

Sebastian’s gut twisted.

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Back at the hotel, the group gathered in Caitlin's room to discuss what had just happened.

Sebastian couldn't suppress his frustration as he paced. "You don't think the King has some twisted interest in Caitlin, do you?"

James frowned. "Come on. The guy's in a wheelchair. What could he even do to my sister? It has to be about the attack on the Prince."

"I don't buy it," Sebastian said coldly. "That's just a cover."

He didn't like any of this. Even though Caitlin was going by Esme, even though her face had been altered, she still had that figure, that presence—she was hard not to notice. And to someone like the King, who spent all day cooped up in a wheelchair, who knew what kind of dark fantasies brewed behind polite smiles?

Sebastian had been in that same position once—immobile, helpless, angry. He knew how twisted a man could become when robbed of control. That kind of internal damage didn't just go away.

“If that’s really what’s going on, what do we do?” Tyler asked grimly. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this. It smells like a trap.”

“Athea’s still a country with laws,” James insisted. “They’re not going to do something to her in broad daylight. Why don’t we head to the palace and wait outside? If she doesn’t come out after a while, we’ll take action.”

“Fine,” Sebastian agreed reluctantly. “We’ll do that for now.”

He was deeply worried about Caitlin’s safety, but James made a good point. At least they’d be close by.

But the convoy transporting Caitlin didn’t head toward the royal palace.

Instead, the vehicle turned down a different road and finally pulled up to the National

Administrative Building.

Caitlin’s eyes narrowed. She looked around through the tinted windows. This wasn’t the palace. She leaned forward and asked, “Excuse me, where are we? I thought we were going to the palace to meet with the King and Queen?”

The guards didn’t respond. Their expressions remained stone-cold.

The car came to a halt. They opened the door and motioned for her to step out.

She had no choice but to follow, entering the government building under silent escort.

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From the opposite side of the square, a man exited the building and caught sight of Caitlin walking with the guards. He froze, narrowing his eyes. That woman looked exactly like the violinist who had performed for the King the other night—Esme.

Why was she being escorted into a government building by royal guards?

Inside, Caitlin was led to a reception room. The guards instructed her to wait and left her alone.

She looked around, reading the text displayed on the wall, and quickly realized where she was. This was the headquarters of Athea's civil administration—where the nation's most powerful ministers met and worked.

Athea was a constitutional monarchy. The King held supreme power, but directly beneath him was the Prime Minister, who managed state affairs. Below the PM were the Cabinet ministers: heads of the departments of Interior, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Justice.

Could it be that the King was meeting with the ministers here today? Was she to be summoned after the meeting?

Having no choice, Caitlin sat and waited patiently.

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Meanwhile, outside the palace gates, Sebastian and James remained parked in their car at a safe

distance.

Both men watched the main entrance like hawks. A car passed through the gate, but no one emerged.

That car came to a stop at the palace steps, and out stepped Utah, the royal secretary. He entered the building and made his way to the King's study.

Inside, King Leif VI was reviewing documents.

"Your Majesty," Utah said with a bow.

The King glanced up. "Back already? How's Magnus?"

"I went to visit the Prince earlier. He's out of danger. Her Majesty is staying with him at the hospital."

The King nodded. "Good."

"On my way back from the hospital, I had to deliver a document to the Administrative Building. And while I was there... I saw the guards escorting Miss Esme."

Leif VI paused. "They took her to the Administrative Building? Why?"

"I followed at a distance," Utah said carefully. "She's currently in a reception room at the Ministry of

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Justice. It appears she was taken there by orders from Minister Maxwell."

"Maxwell wants to see her?" The King's expression darkened with confusion. "What for?"

Could it be because of his own private meeting with Esme? Had word of that reached the Queen, who then told her brother, Maxwell, the current Minister of Justice?

“Does Maxwell think I’ve been inappropriate with the girl? Is that why he summoned her?”

Leif frowned deeply. If that was the case, then he had inadvertently dragged her into trouble.

“Your Majesty, I don’t think that’s the only reason. From what I’ve gathered, Miss Esme was present during the attack on the Prince. She even helped save him. The Queen and the rest of the royal family know about this. The police have it on record.”

Utah hesitated before continuing. “So it’s possible that Minister Maxwell summoned her to ask about the incident. Perhaps he’s suspicious of her motives.”

The King’s gaze turned cold. “Esme saved my son. If anyone should be questioning or rewarding her, it should be the Queen and me. Maxwell has no right to act on his own.”

“Your Majesty, forgive me for saying this, but... what if Her Majesty herself is suspicious of Esme?”

Leif raised an eyebrow. “Suspicious?”

“From the Queen’s point of view, the entire thing seems too convenient. Why was Esme at the scene of the attack? Why was she the only one to help Magnus? The attackers were all killed—no evidence left behind. No one knows who was behind it. To the Queen, it might look like Esme staged the whole thing to gain favor with the royal family—perhaps to get close to the Prince.”

Leif didn’t respond. He wheeled himself slowly away from the desk and headed for the door.

Back at the Administrative Building, Caitlin had been waiting for nearly thirty minutes when the doors finally opened.

The guards stood aside with disciplined precision. A tall man in his early forties entered the room. He was broad-shouldered, dressed in a dark uniform, with sharp features and an imposing presence. Authority seemed to radiate from him.

“Minister, this is Miss Esme,” one of the guards announced.

The man turned and looked at her.

“You’re all dismissed.”

The guards exited silently, closing the door behind them.

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Caitlin rose to her feet and studied the man across the room. Based on the insignia on his uniform—and the titles she'd seen on the wall earlier this man had to be the Minister of Justice.

But why was \*he\* the one meeting her?

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She had been told she was going to the palace to speak with the King and Queen about the Prince's attack.

Why had she been brought here instead?

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“So, you’re Esme—the violinist from the royal gala?”

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Maxwell stepped forward, his sharp gaze fixed intently on her, every step laced with pressure.

“Yes, Minister.”

Caitlin bowed politely, her voice calm despite the faint warning bell in her head.

She still didn’t know exactly who this man was, but the way everyone addressed him made it clear he held real power.

“You played beautifully that night. Who taught you to play?”

He was starting with small talk, seemingly casual. But Caitlin could feel the trap being laid.

Was he also a violin enthusiast? Would he suddenly ask her to perform again?

“My mother taught me,” she replied.

“Oh? Then your mother must’ve been a violinist herself?”

Maxwell continued to study her face. Caitlin kept her head lowered slightly—enough to hide behind her bangs and long lashes, only the tip of her nose visible.

“She wasn’t a professional. It was just a hobby.”

“Interesting. But that’s not what we found when we looked into your background.”

Maxwell’s voice dropped ever so slightly, the tension tightening like a noose.

“You were born in S Country, into a musical family. Your mother was a violinist. You inherited her musical talent and studied the violin from an early age. But when you were twelve, you injured your wrist in a riding accident and could never play again. That’s why you became Federico’s assistant. So tell me, was it really you playing that night at the palace?”

Caitlin’s stomach dropped.

They had investigated Esme’s background. In detail.

A background she herself barely knew, because when she agreed to take on this identity, she had only gotten the surface-level details.

Now, her earlier answers had completely contradicted what Maxwell just laid out.

He was testing her.

And she had just failed.

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Forcing herself to stay composed, Caitlin tried to recover. “Minister, it’s true I injured my hand at twelve, but I was able to recover over time. The night of the gala, our violinist had an accident, and I stepped in last minute. I was the one performing. If you don’t believe me, you’re welcome to test me on the spot.”

Maxwell chuckled.

The sound was wrong—offbeat and cold. Caitlin’s heart skipped.

That laugh was not amusement. It was the sound of a hunter cornering prey.

“I don’t doubt your skill,” he said. “Even His Majesty asked you to perform for him alone, didn’t he? No, I laughed because... you’re lying.”

The amusement vanished. His gaze turned dark, calculated. He wasn’t just suspicious—he was certain.

Caitlin’s stomach twisted tighter.

‘I am not lying, Minister.’”

‘Oh, really? So I’m the liar now?’”

Maxwell took a step closer. “Let me tell you something—I made up part of that story just now. Esme was never injured riding horses. Her mother wasn’t a violinist—she was an ordinary woman. Esme studied orchestral instruments, yes, but never specialized in violin. She graduated from a prestigious conservatory and was assigned to Federico as his assistant during her internship. That’s the real Esme.”

Caitlin went ice cold from head to toe.

Everything he'd said before—all of it—had been a trap. He had deliberately fabricated parts of Esme's backstory to bait her.

And she had walked right into it.

It was a critical oversight—one she hadn't anticipated when agreeing to take on Esme's identity. If she had known things would escalate like this, she would've memorized every last detail of Esme's life,

Now, she was cornered.

“Nothing to say?”

Maxwell's tone was laced with mockery. He was savoring this. Waiting for her to crack.

Caitlin forced a calm breath.

“I apologize, Minister. Is my background really worth your attention? You're the Minister of Justice.

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You must have far more important matters to attend to than investigating my personal history. I assume you brought me here because of the Prince's attack, yes?"

She lowered her posture, deflecting, trying to steer the conversation away from her identity.

But Maxwell didn't answer.

Instead, he walked toward her slowly, deliberately.

Caitlin instinctively stepped back until her spine hit the wall.

He reached up and took a lock of her hair, bringing it to his nose.

The subtle, almost languid motion made her stomach churn.

Her hands clenched tightly into fists at her sides.

f this man dared do anything out of line, she wouldn't hesitate to knock him flat.

But he didn't touch her further.

Instead, he yanked the strand of hair free from her scalp.

Minister, what are you doing?"

The pain on her scalp wasn't much—but her alarm spiked.

'We'll find out soon enough if you're really Esme.'

His voice was low and dangerous.

It was clear now: he knew she wasn't Esme. And he planned to prove it.

I've heard about this new technology—advanced disguise techniques. Some say it's possible to alter a person's appearance completely. You ever heard of that?"

Maxwell leaned in, his gaze drilling into her. He reached again toward her face, this time clearly intending to check for a disguise.

Caitlin's heart thundered. She could feel the danger pressing in from every angle.

Then, without warning, the door slammed open.

"Minister!"

Utah entered with several royal guards.

Maxwell froze mid-motion, his hand shifting to the wall beside Caitlin's head, pretending as if he hadn't been about to inspect her face.

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He turned sharply, eyes narrowing.

"Secretary Ro, what is the meaning of this?"

"His Majesty has sent us. We're here to escort Miss Esme."

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Utah's voice was firm and authoritative. He'd clearly seen Maxwell pinning Esme to the wall. But instead of accusing him, he let the implication hang in the air.

Caitlin felt the breath return, to her lungs.

The King had sent people for her. She was getting out of here.

"Esme? I don't know who you're talking about. Get out," Maxwell snapped, unwilling to yield.

But Utah didn't move. He stepped to the side.

And then, the sound of wheels rolling over tile filled the room.

King Leif VI entered, guided by an attendant. His face was cold as ice.

His eyes flicked immediately to Maxwell. Then to the woman behind him.

"Why did you summon Esme here?"

Maxwell straightened but didn't retreat. "Your Majesty. I followed legal protocol. I had reason to believe she might be connected to the attack on Prince Magnus."

"She is not," Leif VI said flatly. "She saved my son's life. I was on my way to personally reward her."

Maxwell's gaze shifted, landing back on Caitlin.

Now his curiosity was fully piqued.

The King himself had come—for her?

How... interesting.

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King Leif VI called, beckoning her with a calm wave of his hand.

Caitlin seized the moment. Head bowed, she slipped past Maxwell without a word.

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Maxwell's eyes followed her like a shadow, cold and unreadable, until she stood safely at the King's side.

"Your Majesty,"

She curtsied formally.

Leif VI gave her a subtle nod and, with a glance toward Maxwell, said clearly,

"I've learned everything I needed. You acted with bravery and selflessness, risking your life to save my son Magnus. On behalf of the royal family, I thank you."

"It was nothing, Your Majesty. I simply did what anyone would have done."

Caitlin's tone was humble, her demeanor composed.

Leif VI gestured for his attendants to escort him out. As he wheeled away, he added without looking back,

“Maxwell, I’ll be taking her with me. There’s no need for any further questioning.”

“... Yes, Your Majesty,”

Maxwell responded through gritted teeth.

Caitlin followed the King and his escort out of the Ministry of Justice. Once they were gone, Maxwell slammed a fist into the glass frame on the wall, shattering the surface.

He stared at the broken shards for a moment, breath heaving with quiet rage, then slowly looked down at the single strand of hair in his palm.

A strange smile began to tug at the corner of his mouth.

Outside the government building, Leif VI turned toward Caitlin.

“I must apologize, Miss Esme. I didn’t intend for you to be dragged into this mess.”

“You’re too kind, Your Majesty,”

This encounter gave Caitlin a deeper sense of the King’s character. He was sharp, principled, and just—truly a wise monarch.

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“I’ll have Utah escort you back to your hotel. If there’s nothing else, I suggest you all return home as soon as possible.”

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Leif VI’s words weren’t just polite. He was clearly warning her. The longer she stayed, the more dangerous things could become—especially with Maxwell involved.

“I understand. We’ll leave tomorrow,” Caitlin replied, offering a polite smile.

Leif VI nodded in return, a rare warmth crossing his regal expression.

Then he turned to Utah, "Make sure Esme returns safely. Post guards at their hotel until their departure."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Utah motioned to the car.

"This way, Miss Esme."

Caitlin offered one last curtsy to the King before following Utah to the royal transport.

Elsewhere, Sebastian and James were still waiting near the palace gates. Time dragged on with no sign of Caitlin.

"I'm going in to ask," Sebastian muttered.

He stepped out of the car, and James followed closely behind.

But as they approached the entrance, guards blocked their way.

"Step back. This area is restricted."

“We’re looking for someone. My girlfriend was taken by the royal guards. Her name is Esme. Where is she?”

The guard shook his head.

“No such person was brought in today.”

“That’s impossible. I saw the royal escort enter earlier. There has to be a record!”

“I said no one named Esme entered today!”

That answer only made Sebastian angrier.

“You better let her out now! Give her back to me!”

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He moved forward aggressively, prompting the guards to raise their weapons. The tension snapped—an argument broke out.

Just then, a black car returned from the government building and pulled up at the palace gate.

The guards immediately stepped aside and bowed—the King’s car had arrived.

Leif VI, from inside, noticed the commotion.

“What’s going on?” he asked the driver.

The driver relayed the question to the guard, who answered honestly,

“Your Majesty, a civilian tried to force his way in. Says he’s looking for his girlfriend, someone named Esme.”

“Why?”

“He claims she was brought here by the palace guard. But we’ve had no record of anyone by that name entering today.”

Inside the car, Sebastian heard the word “Your Majesty” and immediately guessed who was inside.

He shouted toward the vehicle,

“Give Esme back! Let her out!”

His voice was loud enough to cut through the closed windows.

The King looked up and nodded to his driver.

“Tell them—Miss Esme has already been returned to the hotel. They can go

Hearing that, Sebastian wasn’t sure if it was the truth.

“Let’s just go check,” James urged, tugging at his arm.

“We don’t want to make things worse.”

Sebastian finally relented, letting himself be pulled away.

there.”

From behind the tinted glass, Leif VI watched the two men retreat. The younger one’s face—it struck him. Something about him seemed... familiar.

But the car had already passed the gates and the moment was gone.

Caitlin was safely returned to the national hotel. Upon arrival, she was informed that Sebastian and

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James had gone to the palace looking for her.

She hadn’t even been near the palace.

Quickly, she called Sebastian.

“I’m back. I’m fine.”

Minutes later, the doorbell rang.

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Caitlin opened it to find Sebastian and James. Sebastian didn't say a word—he just pulled her into a tight embrace and held on for a long time.

Only after finally releasing her did he ask,

“Are you okay?”

“Come inside. Let's talk.”

Once seated, James asked worriedly,

“What happened? Why are you back so soon?”

“Yeah, we waited at the palace for hours. I almost-”

Sebastian trailed off.

“Almost what?” Caitlin looked at him.

“He almost fought the royal guards,” James finished for him.

Caitlin sighed, pulling Sebastian down next to her.

“The people who took me—weren’t sent by the King. And they didn’t take me to the palace.”

“Where then?” Sebastian asked.

“To the national government building. The Ministry of Justice.”

Sebastian and James exchanged glances.

“You met with someone from their justice department?”

“Yes. Their Minister of Justice, Maxwell. I almost blew my cover...”

Caitlin relayed what had happened—how Maxwell had baited her with fake background details and nearly exposed her real identity.

“If His Majesty hadn’t shown up when he did, I don’t know what would’ve happened,” she said, still

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rattled.

Sebastian frowned.

55 vouchers

“Maxwell... isn’t he the Queen’s brother? And instead of asking about the prince’s attack, he focused on your identity?”

“Exactly. He dug into Esme’s background and laid a trap. I slipped up. He definitely suspects I’m not the real Esme.”

“That’s... strange,” James said.

“And then he pulled out a strand of my hair,” Caitlin added.

“He said he was going to run a test. Why would the Minister of Justice care about something so small? What does my identity have to do with him?”

The room fell silent.

That question—none of them had an answer for.

## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

E55 vouchers

Sebastian and James were still puzzling over Maxwell's behavior. Sebastian's tone darkened.

“Whatever his reason, if they fail to find the mastermind behind the prince's attack, the fake identity you're using—Esme—makes you the easiest target. They could pin it on you and arrest you at any time.”

“If that's true, we need to get out of A Country immediately. His Majesty already urged me to leave—he doesn't want me getting dragged into this.”

Caitlin nodded seriously.

“Seems like their king actually knows right from wrong.”

Sebastian pressed his lips together, making a decision.

“I’ll book a flight right now. We’re flying out tonight. As for Federico, I’ll leave someone here to look after him until he’s discharged.”

“That works. Let’s just go. As for finding my mother, we can delegate that to someone else.”

Caitlin had no desire to stay in A Country any longer. The longer she remained, the stronger her sense of unease grew—like something bad was just around the corner.

Their plan was quickly set. Caitlin remained at the hotel. James went to the hospital to say goodbye to Federico. Tyler and King stayed behind to continue tracking leads and ensure Federico’s safety.

Sebastian arranged a flight departing around 6 p.m. that very evening. Caitlin, still under the guise of Esme, bid farewell to the music troupe and boarded the plane out of A Country.

When the plane touched down at JFK in New York, the moment Caitlin's feet hit the tarmac, she felt grounded again.

The Vanderbilt family's car was already waiting at the terminal, Sebastian, Caitlin, and James all returned home safely. The family, relieved beyond measure, welcomed them warmly. The children especially ran straight into Caitlin's arms the moment they saw her.

After the joyful reunion, Sebastian contacted Federico's real assistant, the true Esme. She had remained in the US all along.

Concerned upon hearing **that** Federico had been hospitalized, she listened closely as Caitlin told her everything that had happened in A Country. They double-checked their stories, just in case they were ever questioned.

Esme assured her she wouldn't slip up if she was ever approached.

That same day, Zeke arrived at the estate.

2:27 pm

"Caitlin, how did your trip to A Country go?" he asked.

55 vouchers

“Mostly smooth. I did find some leads about my mother, though... we ran into some unexpected trouble.”

Naturally, their conversation turned to S Country.

“Now that you’ve built your own network here in the US, what’s the situation back at Graystone?”

Zeke’s lips curled into a light, mysterious smile.

“Let’s just say... I mailed Zorro a little gift yesterday. He should be receiving it any moment now.”

Caitlin chuckled, then grew serious again.

“And your mother? Is she out of the hospital?”

“She is. She’s living with me now. The Thompson Residence is all set. If you’re free, you should stop by.”

“I’m free today. Let’s go. Maybe I’ll notice something useful.”

Meanwhile, in Graystone.

Since Zeke’s defection, Zorro had been on edge. Furious, he had been trying to retrieve his son Samir and his mentor Pierrick—both still in Zeke’s hands.

But without leverage, he’d had no luck.

“Bring me someone!” he shouted.

“Send a team—round up every member of the Gonzales family!”

Zorro had convinced himself that Alicia had helped Zeke escape, meaning there had to be some secret alliance between the two families. Now that Alicia had gone missing, the Gonzales family had become his only bargaining chip.

But about an hour later, a subordinate rushed in.

“My Lord—The Conzales residence is empty. We searched top to bottom—everyone is gone. No

one saw them leave.”

“What?! What about the men 1 posted outside their estate?”

“They’re missing too, sir.”

Zorro’s face twisted in rage.

2:27 pm

“Damn it!”

: {

55 vouchers

He smashed a goblet to the floor. It was only now becoming clear—the Gonzales family must have been in on the escape all along. How else could they have acted so quickly, so cleanly?

They’d played him—like a well-executed decoy tactic.

They hadn't just taken Alicia and vanished. They'd neutralized his spies in the process.

They were openly declaring war.

Still reeling from that, another servant burst into the hall.

"My Lord! A package arrived—from the United States. It's addressed to you."

All packages went through strict screening to ensure safety. This one passed inspection.

"Who sent it?"

"Zeke, my Lord..."

*The room fell silent.*

Zorro's expression darkened.

“Zeke? He dares send me a package?”

That name—Zeke—had become a curse in Graystone. Zorro had already disowned him and stripped him of all titles and rank.

Still, hands trembling with unease, he motioned to the box.

“Open it. Now!”

The subordinate carefully unwrapped it.

Inside was a black box embossed with subtle gold detailing. The moment the lid opened, a sharp gasp rang out.

“It’s... a hand-carved sculpture... of hands.”

Zorro’s blood turned to ice. He fell back into his chair, his face contorting with horror.

“Let me see it... now!”

The servant passed him the box. Inside, the sculpture was masterfully crafted, lifelike and haunting.

Zorro picked it up with shaking hands. On the bottom of the base, an inscription read:

2:27 pm

“The Hands of Samir – With Sincere Regards to the Earl”

“Ahhhhh-!!”

55 vouchers

Zorro dropped the sculpture with a cry of agony. The pain and fury on his face twisted into something monstrous. He seized a ceremonial sword from its stand and began smashing everything in sight.

The hall descended into chaos.

Servants backed away, terrified.

When he finally stopped, the sword's tip was embedded in the floor, and Zorro was leaning on it, heaving for breath. His eyes were bloodshot.

His only son—\*\*dead\*\*. At the hands of Zeke, the traitor he'd once trusted.

His fury boiled over.

“GUARDS!!”

Several men rushed into the room, trembling.

“My Lord!”

Zorro's voice was venomous.

“Send word to the Shadow Moon Pavilion. I want Zeke dead. I don't care what it costs—KILL HIM!”

The room went silent. Then, nodding rapidly, the men scattered to carry out the order.

Zorro gripped his sword harder.

“Whoever brings me Zeke’s head—I will grant them title and fortune!”

“Yes, my Lord!”

The hall cleared quickly.

Moments later, alone and seething, Zorro suddenly coughed violently—and spat a mouthful of blc

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## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

“My lord!”

14:

55 vouchers

Zorro's men rushed to catch him as he collapsed and spat blood, calling urgently for the doctor.

After an examination, the doctor confirmed that Zorro's sudden bleeding was caused by a surge of rage affecting his heart. He needed to rest.

But the moment Zorro regained consciousness, his first question was whether the assassins had been dispatched.

His men informed him that the order had been delivered—killers from the Shadow Moon Pavilion

were already on the move.

The vehicle slowly pulled into the Thompson Residence.

After parking, Caitlin stepped out of the car with Zeke. Standing inside the estate grounds, she looked around, taking in the familiar sights.

The Thompson Residence had been well preserved; the main building still stood tall and majestic. The garden bloomed with vibrant irises, lush and thriving. Besides irises, there were many unfamiliar flowers scattered throughout—some in full bloom, painting the garden with brilliant colors.

The scenery triggered a flood of childhood memories for Caitlin.

This had once been her paradise. Before she turned five, she and her brother used to play here—chasing butterflies, kicking balls.

She could almost hear the cheerful voices of her grandparents, sitting at the stone table in the garden, chatting happily. Those joyful memories played vividly in her mind.

But then, like a film cutting to a darker reel, she saw blood. The day the Jonathan family was wiped out. Her grandparents and many others, lying in pools of crimson.

Brutal. Devastating.

“You used to live here as a kid?” Zeke’s voice pulled her out of her reverie.

She blinked away the sting in her eyes and forced a smile. “Of course. This place was my heaven.”

She pointed at some of the well-maintained garden features. “See over there? Those bushes shaped like animals—my grandpa trimmed them. My brother and I used to play hide and seek right in front of them. And that sandbox over there, we used to build castles in it... Those playground structures are new, though.”

1:27 pm

**55 vouchers**

She continued to walk with him through the garden, talking about childhood like she was leafing through an old photo album.

But when Zeke glanced over, he saw tears streaking down her cheeks despite her smile.

He could guess that being back in this place—so full of joy and trauma—was emotionally overwhelming for her. Especially after what had happened here.

‘I’m sorry...’

He handed her a handkerchief. Caitlin took it with a soft “thank you” and wiped her face.

‘Let’s go inside.’

Yeah.”

They headed toward the main building, and a middle-aged woman stepped out to greet them. Caitlin recognized her—it was Imani, the housekeeper.

Zeke, Caitlin, you're here."

Ximena had already informed Imani, who had stayed behind just to receive them.

Hi, Imani."

After exchanging greetings, they stepped into the villa.

Inside, the decor had changed significantly. Though the structure remained the same, most of the furniture and details had been redone, clearly to suit a female taste.

These renovations had all been arranged after Ximena and her daughter moved in.

"It's changed a lot... everything's different," Caitlin said softly.

"There wasn't much choice," Zeke said, trying to comfort her. "Once my mother moved in, of course the house needed to be redone."

I understand.”

After looking around the living room, Caitlin headed toward the staircase. While the decor was new, some old details remained. The staircase still bore carvings from long ago—scratched symbols she remembered making as a child, though their meanings had long faded,

As they toured the second floor, someone arrived downstairs.

Zora rolled a suitcase through the front door of the villa. Seeing no sign of her mother or Imani, she dragged her luggage upstairs alone.

At that moment, Zeke was on the balcony taking a call, and Caitlin had entered what used to be her

2:27 pm

mother’s room. She paused at the threshold.

55 vouchers

Now the room bore all the signs of belonging to Zora. There were personal photos on the shelves

and walls.

As she turned to leave, her bag accidentally bumped a figurine off the table. It rolled under the bed.

She bent down to retrieve it and found a fabric doll tucked beneath the frame. Curious, she pulled it out. When she saw the name stitched onto it, her face changed.

“Caitlin?! What are you doing?!”

A harsh voice snapped from behind. Caitlin turned to see Zora standing at the doorway, seething.

“You’ve got some nerve!” Zora stormed in. “You broke into the Thompson Residence and snuck into my room! What, were you trying to steal something?!”

“I was just looking around,” Caitlin answered calmly.

‘Looking around? What a joke! I’m calling the police—breaking and entering, attempted theft!’

Zora pulled out her phone, acting as if she’d just caught a major criminal.

“Go ahead and call,” Caitlin said, unbothered. “But before you do, maybe you’d like to explain this first?”

She held up the doll she’d found under the bed.

Zora’s face went pale. She lunged forward, trying to grab it. “Give that back!”

Caitlin stepped away and hid the doll behind her. “How low can you get? Resorting to this kind of pathetic black magic?”

“I don’t care! Give it back to me!” Zora shouted, not expecting Caitlin to dig through her room while she’d been away in the mountains.

She’d planned to hide that thing later. But now Caitlin had found it,

“I’m not giving it to you.”

“Fine! Don’t give it back—I’ll really call the police then!”

Zora dialed the emergency number furiously, but just before the call connected, someone snatched her phone from behind.

She turned around. “Zeke?!”

“What are you calling the police for?” Zeke asked, frowning.

2:28 pm

B55 vouchers

Zora was livid. “She broke into my room! She was digging through my things! This is theft! She should be arrested!”

“Theft? What did she steal?”

“She took something from me! Who knows what else she’s taken? My design sketches—my room’s a mess. She probably photographed everything!”

Zora darted around the room, scanning for anything out of place.

“I didn’t steal anything,” Caitlin said. “I just found a doll under her bed. And to my surprise, it had my name on it.”

She showed the doll again.

Zeke took it from her hand and examined it—instantly overcome with anger.

“You made a voodoo doll of Caitlin?!”

He stared in disbelief at the ragged doll bearing Caitlin’s name, pierced with dozens of pins and smeared with a red substance resembling dried blood.

Zora had gone full witchcraft. Medieval levels of spite.

\*Speak! What the hell is this about? Why would you do something like this?!”

Zeke’s voice thundered through the room.

## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

Faced with Zeke’s furious questioning, Zora dared not admit the truth.

“That’s not mine... I didn’t make that!” she stammered. “It had to be Caitlin! She’s manipulative- she must’ve snuck in here while I was away and planted that thing under my bed to set me up!

“If I hadn’t come home just in time, she would’ve framed me without anyone knowing!”

Watching Zora deny everything and pin the blame on Caitlin, Zeke’s anger boiled over. Without thinking, he raised his hand and slapped her-hard.

Smack!

Zora’s head spun from the impact, her body slamming into the doorframe. Her cheek burned as she clutched her face, eyes welling up with tears.

“Zeke!”

She stared at him, stunned and furious, unable to believe he’d just hit her-his own sister-because of Caitlin.

“How did I end up with such a vicious sister?” Zeke snarled. “How many times are you going to pick fights with Caitlin?”

“Let me be very clear–this house is no longer yours. It was originally Caitlin’s grandfather’s home. This room belonged to her mother when she was young.

“Mom has already transferred ownership of the Thompson Residence back to Caitlin. She’s the rightful owner now. And you? Pack your things and get out!”

Zeke jabbed a finger toward the door, his glare seething. Zora, shaken by the intensity of his rage, broke down further.

“Why? Why would Mom give this place back to her? Why?!”

Tears streamed down her face as she turned her hatred toward Caitlin. “I knew it–you’ve been plotting this all along! First you stole Patricia, and now the Thompson Residence! You’re scheming, manipulative–every step of this was your doing!”

She refused to believe her mother gave Caitlin the house willingly. No, Caitlin must’ve blackmailed her somehow. That’s how she worked–always full of devious tricks.

“This has nothing to do with Caitlin,” Zeke snapped. “It was Mom’s decision.”

Seeing Zeke continue to defend Caitlin, Zora let out a bitter, mocking laugh. “Right. Of course. Go ahead, defend her. Like I don’t know what’s really going on between you two?”

2:28 pm

55 vouchers

“She’s got Sebastian, and yet she’s still leading all of you around by the nose! You’re all obsessed with her, pathetic lapdogs throwing yourselves at her feet, ready to be her playthings in bed...

“She must be amazing in bed, huh? Got you wrapped around her finger, enough to turn on your own sister. Let me tell you something—she’s got men lined up around the block!

“Yates, Nolan, Felix, Thomas, Federico... any man with talent has ended up under Caitlin’s spell. She’s nothing but a filthy slut, used by thousands, slept with by tens of thousands. Keep simping for her—enjoy being the eternal backup!”

In Zora’s twisted view, Caitlin had slept with every man she knew. Her hatred had driven her completely off the rails.

Zeke’s eyes turned bloodshot. The things she was saying—so degrading, so vile—pushed him past

his limit.

Without warning, he lunged forward and wrapped his hand around her throat, slamming her back into the doorframe.

He was furious enough to kill.

Zora, still spewing venom seconds ago, suddenly went silent. Her breath caught in her throat. Her hands clawed at Zeke's, but his grip was too tight, his strength overwhelming in his fury.

She couldn't breathe. Fear surged through her as her face flushed deep red, the world blurring

around her.

Caitlin saw it all. When she realized Zora was on the brink of death, she rushed forward and pulled

Zeke off.

"Zeke, stop! Calm down!"

No matter how horrible Zora had been, Zeke didn't have the right to take her life—especially when they were siblings.

If Ximena ever found out her son killed her daughter, it would break her. And Zeke... Zeke would

be a murderer.

Caitlin couldn't bear the thought of something happening to him. Not for her.

Once Zeke was pulled back, Zora collapsed onto the floor, gasping violently.

Cough! Cough! Cough!

Her throat was raw, her breathing labored.

"Let's go! Leave her," Caitlin urged, pushing Zeke out of the room, terrified he might snap again.

Zeke, face dark and cold, was forced out. As Caitlin passed Zora, she paused just for a moment.

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55 vouchers

"Miss Harris," she said flatly, "keep walking down this path and you'll destroy yourself. I suggest you think carefully."

They left.

Zora sat frozen on the floor, the pain in her cheek and neck a burning reminder of what had just happened.

Zeke couldn't be her brother. No way. No real brother would do this to her.

And her mother—clearly brainwashed by Caitlin—was no better.

She hated them. Hated them all.

Then her eyes flashed with a wicked light.

Right. She still had the evidence of Caitlin's "scandals."

Tomorrow's charity award ceremony... that would be Caitlin's fall from grace.

She would make sure everyone saw Caitlin for what she truly was.

The car ride back from the Thompson Residence was heavy with silence. Zeke finally broke it, voice low with guilt.

“I’m sorry, Caitlin. You didn’t deserve any of that.”

He felt ashamed—ashamed of his sister, ashamed that Caitlin had to suffer because of his family.

“I’m fine,” Caitlin said. “I’ve been hated by so many. One more doesn’t make a difference. It’s just... Zora’s not the same person anymore. She’s been completely consumed by hate.”

She sighed. “I thought a few hard hits might snap her out of it. But now I see—there’s no changing her. She’s nothing like your mom or Jillian. Zora and I... we were never meant to coexist.”

Zeke exhaled deeply. “Then I’ll stop thinking of her as my sister. She’s on her own now. Let her destroy herself if that’s what she wants.”

He meant it. From now on, whatever happened to Zora—he wouldn’t lift a finger to help.

He dropped Caitlin off at the Vanderbilt estate and said goodbye at the gate.

Before heading inside, Caitlin warned him, “Be careful, Zeke. Zorro must be absolutely livid. He’ll stop at nothing to take your life”

“I know. I’ll watch my back.”

2:28 pm

55 vouchers

When Caitlin returned to the estate, she didn't see Sebastian right away—but she did find Yates

there.

“Caitlin!” Yates greeted her warmly.

“You're back already? Didn't your movie wrap yet?” Caitlin asked, surprised.

“I came back early to be the opening act for tomorrow's charity awards gala,” Yates replied with a grin.

“Look at you—heading toward multi-talented stardom.”

“Haha, I just sing for fun. Mainly, I wanted to be there to cheer you and Sebastian on!”

The awards are tomorrow?” Caitlin asked. She knew she and Sebastian were nominated for Philanthropist of the Year but hadn’t heard the confirmed time.

“Yep, tomorrow night. But that’s not the only reason I’m here.”

He lowered his voice, suddenly serious.

There’s something important I need to tell you both.”

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## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

### **Chapter 565**

“Abel’s been sentenced! Ten years in prison for attempted murder!”

Yates had come over specifically to share the final outcome.

“He got what he deserved,” Caitlin said coldly. “People like him belong behind bars, not roaming free to hurt others.”

“That’s not all,” Yates added. “During interrogation, Abel confessed something you’d never guess.”

What did he say?” Sebastian asked.

“He admitted the real reason he came back to the States—it was because of Zora.”

\*Zora?”

Caitlin and Sebastian exchanged surprised glances, clearly not expecting that connection.

“Yeah. That woman brought Abel back. The plan was to use him as bait to seduce you, Caitlin. But you didn’t fall for it.”

61%

As Yates explained, everything started to make sense—how Abel had ‘coincidentally’ run into Caitlin at the restaurant, how he spilled juice on himself and asked her to help wash his clothes... it was all part of his plan.

“So that’s what it was. I was the original target,” Caitlin said, finally piecing it together. “And you were the second—his revenge.”

She shook her head, horrified. “Zora went that far just to get back at me? That’s insane.”

“It’s terrifying when you think about it. If the police hadn’t uncovered it, no one would’ve known there was anything between her

and Abel.”

Sebastian frowned. “If the cops know about their connection, why hasn’t Zora been arrested?”

“Because technically, what she did wasn’t a crime. She just encouraged Abel to seduce you. Abel’s murder attempt against me— that was his own idea. No legal grounds to hold her for that,” Yates explained.

“But their relationship wasn’t just strategic. They were sleeping together too. And from what I heard, Abel gave her a bunch of video footage—stuff he recorded secretly. Zora plans to use it at tomorrow’s charity awards to ruin you publicly.”

“Let her try.”

Sebastian’s voice was low and lethal. “She’ll pay for it.”

Caitlin took a deep breath, her tone ice cold. “Then bring it on. This time, I’ll make sure she never rises again.”

She had tolerated Zora for too long because of Ximena’s kindness in raising Patricia, Caitlin had held back. But now? She was done. Zora had crossed the line **one** too many times.

She didn’t even mention the voodoo doll to Sebastian or Yates. That was a different level of darkness and Caitlin had every intention of delivering her own punishment.

After Yates left the Vanderbilt estate, Xavi and Zinnia returned.

“Mrs. Vanderbilt!”

“Caitlin!”

They greeted her warmly.

Xavi, who had been hospitalized after taking a knife to the back to protect Zinnia, looked completely rejuvenated. It was clear Zinnia’s care had done wonders.

“Congrats on getting discharged,” Caitlin smiled, teasing them. “Hospital life must’ve suited you, Xavi. You look great–didn’t get bored, huh?”

Xavi scratched the back of his head with a shy grin. “Zinnia took care of me every day. That’s why I recovered fast.”

“Oh? Sounds like it’s almost time for a wedding.”

Pressed by Caitlin’s blunt remark, Xavi straightened up. “You’re right. I want to marry her.”

“Who said I agreed to that?”

Zinnia gave him a playful punch. Xavi panicked. “You promised me yesterday at the hospital!”

-15

Zinnia smiled quietly. Caitlin laughed. “Xavi, saying you want to get married isn’t enough. Have you made the proper preparations? Where are you two going to live? Have you thought it all through?”

“I have,” Xavi said with resolve. “I’ve got an apartment in New York. Planning to renovate it, and once it’s ready, we’ll get married. I’ll even bring Zinnia’s parents and little brother to live with us. I’ll take care of them.”

His words were full of genuine intention. Zinnia, clearly touched, couldn’t hide her smile.

Xavi wasn’t flashy or powerful—but his warmth and dependability gave her something she had never known before: a sense of home. Something she thought she’d never have after a life in Shadow Moon Pavilion.

Her dark past might finally end—because of this man.

“I’m really happy for you two,” Caitlin said warmly. “So here’s my wedding gift: I’ll take care of the entire renovation, including the furniture and appliances. Sebastian can arrange your wedding, and all you have to do is be happy.”

“Mrs. Vanderbilt...”

“Caitlin...”

Both Xavi and Zinnia were deeply moved. No matter how busy Caitlin was, she always made time for the people she cared about.

“I just want to see you happy, Zinnia,”

Caitlin's words brought tears to her eyes. The two women hugged tightly.

When they let go, Zinnia asked, "I heard you and Mr. Vanderbilt are attending the charity awards tomorrow night. Can I come with *you*?"

Zinnia wanted to stay close, to continue protecting Caitlin.

"Of course. Come with me in the morning."

15:17 Tue, 2 Sept WO

The next day.

New York State Penitentiary.

03 61%2

+15

Caitlin submitted a visitation request. With Captain Felix's assistance, she got approval quickly and soon found herself face-to-face

with Black Hawk.

He'd been in prison for a while, undergoing labor reform, but the ferocity in his eyes hadn't dulled a bit. It was that same dangerous aura that kept other inmates from even trying to mess with him.

Anyone who had tried to "teach him a lesson" early on ended up learning their own. Now, Black Hawk ruled the prison's

underworld.

Inside the visitation room, separated by glass and bars, Black Hawk laid eyes on Caitlin and immediately understood why she was

there.

"I already told you-I don't know anything."

Before Caitlin could even speak, he made it clear: he wasn't going to cooperate.

But Caitlin's expression didn't change. She calmly picked up the phone receiver and said,

"I didn't come here to ask questions. I came to tell you what I've already found out."

Black Hawk arched an eyebrow slightly. Suspicion flickered in his eyes. This woman—this cunning, dangerous woman—what trick did she have up her sleeve now?

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## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

### **Chapter 566**

"You know what? Not long ago, I was at an art exhibition and accidentally saw a painting. The woman in it looked strikingly like my mother. So, I made the effort to track down the artist.

"After speaking with him, he recalled that he saw the woman in the painting three years ago in Country A. So, I followed that lead and went to Country A. Guess what I found?"

Black Hawk listened with a deepening frown, unable to deny that Caitlin was the most cunning, meticulous, and determined woman he had ever encountered.

Her persistence, patience, and sheer tenacity exceeded anything he'd imagined. For a single person, a single answer, she would go to any lengths. That kind of obsession was terrifying.

Now, he was genuinely on edge, wondering—what exactly had she uncovered?

“I found the place from the painting. It’s called Flowerstone Tower.”

Caitlin continued speaking while carefully observing his expression. But Black Hawk remained motionless, like a dark, brooding

statue.

“Unfortunately, Flowerstone Tower was demolished earlier this year. It’s nothing but rubble now.

“I found out the property was acquired by ScandBuild Group in Sanctis as part of an urban development project.

“So I reached out to Mikkel to get the building’s records, but he died in an accident before he could help.”

Black Hawk's expression remained calm, as if he had never heard of Mikkel, or as though none of this had anything to do with him.

"That didn't stop us. We traced the building's original owner and learned that Flowerstone Tower used to be a convalescent home. The institution has since relocated.

"Following that lead, we tracked down the new facility and its director—Tobias. Do you know him?"

"I don't," Black Hawk answered flatly,

"I figured as much. Tobias seemed like a decent man. When we arrived, something unexpected happened."

Black Hawk's face shifted slightly with irritation,

"Are you done yet? Your whole tragic mommy-hunt story doesn't interest me. If you've got no real questions, I'm done here."

"Fine, fine, I'll keep it short. When we arrived, a girl named Ida attempted to jump off the roof. That part's not important. Anyway, we spoke to Tobias—"

“What did you say? Who jumped?”

For the first time, Black Hawk interrupted, his voice laced with tension.

The once-disinterested man suddenly leaned forward, visibly shaken.

“A girl named Ida. She was a patient at the center. Why? Do you know her?”

Caitlin noticed the shift immediately. He hadn’t reacted to anything—until she mentioned Ida. Only then did he seem truly rattled.

His guard returned just as quickly. “No. Never heard of her. Go on.”

“She’s a poor girl. Lost her parents, lost an arm, and suffers from a rare disease. Her brother—her only family—never came to see her. She was heartbroken, which is why she tried to take her life.”

“Did she... die?”

His voice was even, but the fists clenched in his lap gave him away.

“No. She’s alive. We happened to be there and I pulled her back in time.”

Black Hawk looked away, silent for several seconds before finally turning back to Caitlin.

“And then?”

Caitlin, sensing his interest, continued.

+15

“She’s safe now. After learning her story, I promised to help her find her brother. She gave me a photo of them from when they were kids.”

Caitlin took out the photo and held it up.

“See? I’m not lying.”

Black Hawk stared at the photo in silence, his face unreadable, as still as a statue.

Caitlin put the phone away and pressed on.

“Later, we got more info from Tobias. We found someone named Ellie. Her timeline and symptoms matched my mother’s exactly. But before Flowerstone Tower was sold, she was taken away by a man named Parker. Do you know him?”

“I don’t. I’ve never heard any of this. I’ve never even been to Country A.”

He denied everything.

Caitlin nodded. “Alright then. If you say so.”

She ended the call and stood up to leave.

Black Hawk remained seated, eyes fixed on her retreating figure. No one could tell what he was really thinking.

Outside the visitation room, Zinnia waited for Caitlin to come out. She immediately stepped forward.

“How did it go? Did he say anything?”

“Of course not. That guy’s tougher than concrete in a sewer.”

The two of them walked out together. Zinnia sounded frustrated.

“You were so close to finding your mother. Just a little more... If only Black Hawk would talk, it’d be so much easier.”

“He’s not the kind of person *you* can bribe or threaten. His willpower is terrifying. But getting through to him isn’t impossible—l

think I’ve found a crack.”

15:17 Tue, 2 Sept

“A crack?” Zinnia looked at her, intrigued.

Caitlin smiled confidently. “Give it time. Once I find the right leverage, he’ll talk.”

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Zinnia didn't know what leverage Caitlin had in mind, but she believed her. If anyone could crack Black Hawk, it was Caitlin.

On the way back from the prison, Caitlin received a call from Wendy. They agreed to meet at a local coffee shop.

61%

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At Orange Grove Café, Wendy had been working there for a while. After being constantly harassed by Benjamin, she'd changed jobs several times.

Now that Benjamin was supposedly on a business trip abroad, she could finally breathe.

Hopefully that jerk had a terrible trip and stayed overseas for a long while.

Today, she was looking forward to seeing Caitlin. She'd been working hard to lose weight and couldn't wait to show off her

progress.

When the front bell jingled, Wendy looked up with a smile, thinking Caitlin had arrived.

But the smile froze on her face as soon as she saw who it really was.

No.

Of all the people she didn't want to see today...

She had half a mind to turn around and leave. But then she paused.

Why should she run?

She had nothing to be afraid of.

Let's see what they're up to now.

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# Billionsaire's Regret: Finding Her

## Chapter 567

“Welcome!”

Wendy and her coworker Vicky greeted the two women walking through the café doors.

The one in the YSL dress was Tonya, and her friend trailing behind was Sydney.

They approached the counter and acted like they didn't recognize Wendy at all.

Sydney, what do you want? It's on me,” Tonya offered.

“I'll take the signature coffee.”

Wendy was about to ask Vicky to take their order, but Tonya pointed at her and said, “No, I want you to do it.”

Without saying a word, Wendy entered the order.

+15

Tonya raised her hand to scan and pay, but Sydney grabbed her wrist dramatically. “Oh my god, Tonya, your diamond bracelet is gorgeous! When did you get this?”

Tonya lifted her wrist and flaunted it right in front of Wendy. “It was a gift from my dad.”

“Is it expensive?” Sydney asked.

“Not really,” Tonya replied with a smirk. “Only a few tens of thousands.”

Sydney gasped even louder, “Wow! Your dad really spoils you. You’re totally the princess of your family. I’m so jealous!”

Wendy glanced at the bracelet. It really was stunning–dazzling diamonds, the kind that caught the light just right.

And pierced right through her heart.

She knew Tonya was doing this on purpose. Showing off to make her feel like trash. Classic.

Ever since her parents' divorce, Wendy and her brother had lived with their mom, who never remarried. Meanwhile, her father married again within a year and brought a new wife and Tonya—a girl two years younger than Wendy—into his life.

They formed a shiny new family.

Wendy thought they could coexist peacefully, but Tonya **and** her mom were nightmares. Always finding ways to humiliate her and her mother—emotional jabs, public put-downs, materialistic jabs...

It had become routine.

Wendy liked to believe she was strong. But sometimes, just remembering that her father belonged to someone else's family now—never thinking of her again—still hurt.

“Make sure you bring the drinks to our table,” Tonya instructed as she walked off.

Once the drinks were ready, Wendy brought the tray over to their table.

Tonya turned on the fake concern. “Wendy, why are you working in a place like this? Does Dad even know? He'd be so embarrassed. Want me to find you a more... respectable job?”

“No thanks. I earn my living with my own hands, and there’s nothing embarrassing about that.”

Wendy shut her down without hesitation.

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15

Sydney, clearly offended by her tone, chimed in. “Wendy! Who do you think you are? Tonya was being nice, and that’s how you respond?”

“What, and you’re so free you’ve got time to stick your nose in my business?”

That jab hit home.

Sydney shot to her feet. “Wendy! Who do you think you’re talking to? You’re just a barista! Ever heard the phrase ‘customer is king’? You talk to us like that, I swear I’ll report you!”

“Go ahead! It’s not like you haven’t reported me before. I’ve lost jobs because of your complaints already. One more won’t kill me. Better than getting chased around by rabid dogs.”

Wendy had had enough. She wasn't going to take it anymore. The more she backed down, the more they'd torment her.

"Did you just call me a dog? Wendy, you bitch!"

Sydney jabbed a finger toward her face, but Wendy slapped her hand away.

Furious, Sydney grabbed her coffee and flung it at Wendy.

Wendy raised her arm to protect her face, but the drink splashed on her clothes, her arm, and even her hair.

Tonya watched with glee, but tried to act sympathetic. "Oh no, are you okay?"

"Hmph! That's what you get for mouthing off," Sydney sneered triumphantly.

Sure, Wendy was an employee and technically shouldn't fight back, but she had officially reached her limit.

Without hesitation, she grabbed the second coffee and threw it back.

“Ahhh!”

Sydney screamed as the coffee soaked her head, face, and outfit. Her carefully curated appearance was completely destroyed.

“Wendy, how dare you!” she shrieked.

Tonya gasped dramatically, “You can’t do that! You should apologize!”

“I’m not apologizing. You should be grateful it wasn’t hot coffee.”

Wendy turned and walked off. Sydney screamed behind her, “You fat bitch! I’m reporting you! You’ll regret this!”

She stormed out of the café, Tonya following after her.

Vicky, shaken, ran over. “Wendy, what do we do? They’re definitely going to complain. If the manager finds out, this could be bad. Should I go apologize on your behalf?”

Wendy held her back. “Don’t. I’ll handle my own mess.”

15:17 Tue, 2 Sept W

Outside, Caitlin and Zinnia were just approaching the café when they saw a woman storm out, covered in coffee.

The woman was shouting curses as she walked. “That fat cow! That damn bitch! This isn’t over! She’s gonna pay!”

Another woman followed behind her—well-dressed and very familiar.

Caitlin recognized her immediately. That was Tonya, Wendy’s half-sister.

Watching the two women walk off, Caitlin frowned and quickly stepped inside.

She found one girl mopping up a mess near the tables, coffee stains still visible on the floor and tabletop.

Behind the counter, Wendy was wiping coffee off her arms and clothes.

“Wendy!”

Wendy looked up. “Caitlin, you’re here!”

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“I saw Tonya outside. Did they come here to mess with you again?”

Wendy didn’t want to talk about it, but under Caitlin’s persistent questions, she finally told her everything.

After hearing the story, Caitlin’s anger burned beneath her calm expression.

“Your break should be starting *now*, right? Come eat lunch with me.”

3<sup>rd</sup> Q 61%

Wendy followed Caitlin to a nearby restaurant. They had lunch, chatted, and before long, Wendy had to head back for her shift.

Once she left, Caitlin knew there were many ways to help Wendy out.

But for this specific situation, there was someone even better suited than her to handle it.

She dialed Benjamin's number,

His voice came through the line. "Didn't expect a call from you. What's up?"

"Where are you right now? Wendy just got harassed—do you know that?"

+15

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## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

**Chapter 568**

“What?”

Benjamin had just returned from an overseas business trip and was on his way to Club No.8 when he got Caitlin’s call.

Hearing that Wendy had been bullied, his handsome face darkened and his brows furrowed. “Got it. I’ll take care of it.”

Right after the call, Benjamin contacted his assistant. “Ten minutes. I want a full report on what happened between Wendy and the customers at Orange Grove Café.”

Back at the café, Wendy returned to work. Vicky hadn’t reported what had happened earlier, so the store manager and regional supervisor were still unaware.

As long as Sydney didn’t file an official complaint, Wendy would be fine.

About an hour later, the door chime rang.

“Welcome!” Vicky greeted instinctively.

Wendy glanced up, caught sight of a very familiar tall figure, and immediately ducked down behind the counter.

Crap!

When did he get back?

Why the hell was he suddenly showing up now?

Vicky noticed a ridiculously handsome man walk in and was about to call Wendy's attention to him—only to see Wendy crouching down.

Benjamin stepped into the café, exuding a chilling, intimidating aura. His sharp eyes swept across the customers, then locked onto the counter.

“Sir, what would you like to drink?” Vicky asked cheerfully, unaware of his connection to Wendy.

“I want her to take my order,” he said flatly, pointing his gaze toward the woman hiding behind the counter.

Vicky blinked, surprised the customer had directly requested Wendy. She quickly nudged her.  
“Wendy, someone wants you to take

their order.”

Damn it, who's calling me out like that?

Wendy had no choice but to stand up, forcing a **plastic** smile as she approached the counter. "Good afternoon, sir. What would you

like?"

"A coffee that makes you fat after one sip."

Wendy rolled her eyes so hard they nearly fell out. Typical Benjamin nonsense,

That wasn't even a real drink, but she got the hint.

She rang up a mocha and went to prepare it—adding extra sugar and milk.

Let's see how you like drinking pure syrup.

"Here's your coffee, sir."

She placed the cup in front of him.

Benjamin didn't take it. Hands in pockets, he turned and tossed out casually, "Bring it to my car."

"Hey-"

But he was already out the door.

Vicky was a bit puzzled, but nudged Wendy. "He asked you to bring it out. You better go."

Wendy sighed and reluctantly followed, carrying the coffee out.

Outside, Benjamin's van was parked at the curb. As she approached, the *door* slid open.

"Here's your coffee," she called in.

"Bring it inside," he said coolly.

Wendy climbed in and found him lounging on the sofa inside.

“Here’s your drink. I’m leaving.”

She placed it on the table and turned to go, but Benjamin grabbed her wrist and pulled her down—straight into his lap.

“Let go of me!”

He held her tightly, taking in the strong coffee scent clinging to her. “Why are you covered in coffee?”

“I work in a café. What do you expect? Now let me go! Someone might see us. I have to get back to work.”

“Sir? Really? You’re calling me sir now?” Benjamin’s tone grew cold.

“If you want to leave,” he said with a smirk, “you’ve got two options. One—kiss me. Two—drink the coffee. Otherwise, you’re not going anywhere.”

Wendy glared at him, seething.

If there were a third option, she would’ve decked him.

But she knew if she didn't play along, he'd cause a bigger scene and jeopardize her job.

Clenching her fists, she asked, "You promise you'll let me go if I kiss you?"

"I swear," he replied smugly.

"Fine."

Wendy leaned in and gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

She immediately tried to bolt—but Benjamin wasn't done.

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Before she could move, he pulled her back and kissed her hard on the lips.

She struggled, her fists pounding against him, but he didn't let go until she was gasping for air.

"You jerk! That's assault!"

Benjamin grinned. "Kissing my own woman isn't assault."

"I'm not your woman, you creep!" she snapped, shoving him off and storming out of the van.

Watching her retreat in fury, Benjamin chuckled, a smug smile tugging at his lips.

Wendy returned to work like nothing had happened. But not long after, the manager arrived with the regional supervisor—and Sydney.

Vicky, startled, greeted them. "Manager, Supervisor—you're here!"

"The company received a formal complaint," the supervisor, Nick, said sternly. "We've reviewed the surveillance footage. Wendy, you engaged in a verbal altercation with a customer and then threw coffee on them. Care to explain?"

The manager stood beside him, nodding and bowing as if afraid to breathe.

Wendy glanced at Sydney, who smirked arrogantly and crossed her arms.

“Nick,” Wendy said calmly, “if you watched the footage, you should’ve seen she threw coffee at me first. I simply reacted.”

Nick scoffed. “She’s the customer. Even if she threw coffee at you, your job is to smile and take it. Do you understand what ‘the customer is always right’ means?”

“I’m sorry,” Wendy said bluntly. “But if your idea of customer service includes letting people throw whatever they want at me and smiling through it, then no—I don’t understand.”

“Wendy!” Nick barked. “Do you have any idea how serious this is? Apologize now, or I’ll escalate this to corporate. You’ll be fired.”

“I’m not apologizing,” Wendy said firmly. “She attacked me first. If anyone’s apologizing, it should be her.”

Sydney sneered, “You all heard that, right? This is the kind of attitude she has. Arrogant, rude, unprofessional, I demand justice!”

Nick, fuming, pointed at Wendy. “That’s it. You leave me no choice. I’m terminating your employment—effective immediately!”

“I’d like to see who dares to fire her.”

A lazy, deep voice echoed from the doorway.

## Billionsaire's Regret: Finding Her

Everyone turned their heads to see Benjamin walking in, hands in his pockets, exuding an air of arrogant dominance.

Vicky's first reaction was, "Wait... isn't that the guy who ordered the 'fat-after-one-sip' coffee earlier?"

Wendy didn't know why Benjamin had shown up out of nowhere. Nick, the store manager, and Sydney didn't recognize him and had no idea who this man was.

Sydney, on the other hand, was immediately smitten. A handsome guy like that walking in? She was practically fantasizing about getting his number.

Benjamin stopped in front of them and looked directly at Nick. "On what grounds are you firing her?"

Nick glanced him up and down, unsure who this man was. He assumed Wendy had brought in someone to speak on her behalf. "Sir, I'm handling a company complaint. This really doesn't concern you—"

“How does it not? You’re firing this chubby girl. Do you even know what the consequences of that are?”

Nick looked more confused than ever. Before he could speak, Benjamin continued, “If *you* fire her, who’s going to make my coffee? You don’t get it—I only drink coffee made by her.”

Nick was completely thrown off. “Sir, the employee in question violated company policy by offending a customer. I’m simply enforcing the rules—”

“Who gave you that right? Who do you think you are? I say the one who should be fired is you!”

Benjamin’s voice was cold and firm, his tone leaving no room for argument. Nick was momentarily stunned, exchanging glances with the store manager and others.

Sydney was taken aback. Was this man seriously defending Wendy? What was going on between them?

Nick tried again. “It’s a customer complaint-”

“What complaint?” Benjamin snapped. “You mean this ugly woman’s complaint?”

Sydney's face turned pale in disbelief. Did he just call her ugly?

Wendy almost burst out laughing. Trust Benjamin to make drama look like theater.

Benjamin gave Sydney a once-over, then scoffed. "With a face like that, you really shouldn't be walking around scaring people. You started this mess-throwing coffee at people-and then expected her to smile at you? Are you delusional? With that face? You should go look in a mirror-if it doesn't crack."

"You-1"

Sydney raised her hand to point at him furiously, but Benjamin swatted it away.

"You what? Nose all crooked and still out here looking for fights? You need a shrink more than a latte. Want me to schedule your psych evaluation?"

Sydney was so mortified she looked like she was about to spit blood. She couldn't win the argument and now had her insecurities publicly aired.

She clutched her nose, stomped her feet, and ran out of the café crying.

Wendy couldn't help but admire Benjamin's sharp tongue. The man was a master at verbal combat.

Benjamin then turned his glare on Nick. “And you—what’s your deal? You trying to pick a fight, or are you just suicidal? If you weren’t so old, I’d kick your ass across the street.”

“Sir, how could you say something like that—” Nick stammered, overwhelmed and completely unable to handle this unexpected

situation.

“What, I can’t say that? I’m the customer. Customers are always right, remember? If I say something, you’re supposed to smile and take it. Got that?”

He’d just thrown Nick’s own words back in his face, word for word. Nick stood there flushed with shame, speechless.

The situation had gotten so awkward, the store manager didn’t know how to step in.

Just then, a group of people entered through the front door.

Nick saw a familiar face and lit up with hope—it was Kaylanyx, the vice president from HQ. “Kaylanyx! Perfect timing—we’re dealing with a difficult customer here.”

He was hoping to use Kaylanyx to pressure Benjamin, but the woman walked straight past him and bowed respectfully to Benjamin.

“Mr. Benjamin, apologies for the delay.”

Everyone’s jaw dropped.

Kaylanyx was being that respectful to him?

Even calling him by his first name?

Benjamin stayed relaxed, his gaze mocking as he looked at Nick. “Have that bald idiot pack his things and leave. I don’t want to see

him for another second.”

“Yes, Mr. Benjamin,”

Kaylanyx turned to Nick. “Nick, as of now, you are terminated. Please return to headquarters to settle your departure.”

Nick felt the world crumble around him.

He was the one getting fired?

“No, no, no, please, Kaylanyx! I can’t lose this job! I have a family to feed!”

“Begging won’t help. This is Benjamin’s decision. Perhaps you weren’t aware—he’s the new CEO of our parent company.”

What?

Nick froze.

He’d just insulted and tried to fire the new CEO’s woman?

Q

3 61%

+20)

It felt like thunder cracked through his skull—he swayed on his feet, then collapsed with a loud thud.

Kaylanyx frowned and waved to the others. “Take him out of here.”

Order restored, Benjamin glanced at Wendy and barked, “Back to work—all of you. Especially you, little chub. Anyone slacks off, I’ll deduct their pay.”

He strolled out of the café like nothing had happened.

Wendy was fuming.

Because she worked here, he’d bought the entire coffee chain?

Who the hell does that?

She called Caitlin, ranting on the phone.

Caitlin couldn’t stop laughing. “Honestly, not a bad outcome. Benjamin’s mouth might be vicious, but the man clearly has your back. Since you can’t get rid of him, why not just accept it?”

After hanging up, Caitlin returned to The Vanderbilt Family residence to spend time with the kids.

From Faith and Quincy, she learned that the kids had recently participated in the regional martial arts tryouts—and Bruce had made it through to the finals.

“Wow, Bruce, that’s amazing! Mommy and Daddy will both be there to cheer you on at the finals!”

She ruffled his hair affectionately.

Howard, on the other hand, looked a little down. “Mommy, I didn’t pass the tryouts…”

Caitlin pulled her eldest into her arms and said gently, “That’s okay, sweetheart. What matters is that you tried. Bruce is great at martial arts, and you’re amazing at playing the piano. Everyone has their own strengths. I’m proud of all of you.”

Howard smiled again. “Okay, Mommy. I’ll practice harder! When is Federico coming back to teach me?”

“Very soon,” she reassured him.

She spent the entire afternoon playing games with the kids, filling the house with laughter until Sebastian returned from outside.

Caitlin glanced at the time and said, "It's almost time. Let's get ready for the awards ceremony."

But Sebastian looked serious. His brows were furrowed as he met her gaze.

"Cai

Carlos,"

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AD

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# Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

## Chapter 570

“Carlos?”

Caitlin’s eyes widened in shock. “What did you find?”

“Remember how we suspected that Forrest might actually be Carlos, using another identity to escape, which made it impossible for Departure City’s police to track him down?”

Caitlin nodded.

Sebastian continued, “Do you remember our earlier investigation into The Silent Order’s underground money laundering operation in Departure City?”

“This is connected to The Silent Order?”

“Our intel indicates Carlos is heavily involved in that underground ring. He’s likely the one running the operation. From our interrogation of a few arrested suspects, we learned that Carlos made his fortune as a junket agent.”

“A junket agent?”

“Yeah. Those guys who work in casinos—bringing in new clients, encouraging them to gamble, and offering loan services. Their income comes from commissions and the cut they get from referred bets.”

Sebastian’s explanation gave Caitlin new insight into Carlos’s background.

“If Carlos really is behind the underground operation, that would explain why he’s been hiding out in Departure City all these years. Besides watching Timothy, he’s been using this shady setup to build his empire. If ever discovered, he could vanish again using a new identity or through his money laundering channels.”

“That’s exactly what we’re thinking,” Sebastian nodded. “At the very least, we’ve confirmed that Carlos and The Silent Order have a symbiotic relationship.”

Caitlin narrowed her eyes. “Then is it possible... Forrest, Carlos... could actually be Zero—Dustin—the mastermind of The Silent

Order?”

Sebastian furrowed his brow. “There’s no hard evidence yet to prove they’re the same person. We won’t know for sure until we either catch Dustin or unmask Carlos.”

Ever since their last conflict with The Silent Order, its members had gone underground. Finding Dustin would be no easy task.

Caitlin thought for a moment. “Back when we investigated The Silent Order, we found ties to the money laundering network. Have we traced their financial routes? I’m guessing this thing **crosses** borders and involves multiple countries. That’s where we need to keep digging.”

“You’re right. I’ve already sent a team to follow that lead.”

Their discussion ended, and Caitlin went to change. She slipped into a beige tailored blazer with wide-leg trousers. Her high ponytail gave her a crisp, confident aura.

Sebastian had already changed into a dark navy vintage-style bespoke suit. Caitlin stepped up to help him with his tie, eyeing him with approval. “Looking sharp.”

Sebastian smirked and wrapped an arm around her waist. “Let’s go.”

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EA 61%°

The Annual Philanthropy Awards Ceremony was held at the largest theater in New York.

Only 25 people had been nominated for the prestigious title of Philanthropist of the Year. Alongside them, other notable figures in charitable circles were also invited to attend.

The media had long gathered outside the venue, where a red carpet and signature wall awaited guests—an event with all the glamour of a film festival.

Everyone invited was allowed to walk the red carpet and leave their signature on the wall.

Ximena had also received an invitation. To redeem her daughter's public image, she had been *involved* in a string of charitable efforts—some under the XEG name, others under Zora's. As a result, both mother and daughter were included in the guest list.

Zora wore a white evening gown designed by XEG itself. The fabric shimmered under the lights, catching every eye with its

brilliance.

She attended tonight as the CEO of XEG, determined to outshine everyone.

Unlike showbiz red carpets where celebrities competed for attention, this event was about grace and contribution. But Zora only had one target to outdo: Caitlin.

She walked the red carpet like a seasoned star, changing poses as photographers snapped away.

Many reporters tried to interview her, focusing on past scandals, but Zora brushed them off with polite smiles.

That was, until she ran into Connor.

Given the previous rumors between them, reporters scrambled to capture their awkward encounter.

Connor had been sent to represent The Jackson Family, who had also been active in philanthropy. Upon seeing Zora, he made no attempt to greet her. Instead, he darted to the opposite side of the carpet, pretending not to know her.

They didn't exchange a single word, but the awkwardness radiated from the photos taken.

Just then, a Rolls-Royce pulled up at the far end of the red carpet.

With the crowd erupting into cheers, all eyes turned toward the car.

“Mr. Vanderbilt!”

“Caitlin!”

As soon as Sebastian and Caitlin stepped out hand in hand, the media lost their minds. Flashbulbs exploded. Cameras zoomed in. Every lens was fixed on the couple.

With calm smiles, Sebastian and Caitlin waved to the crowd.

To the outside world, they looked every bit the perfect power couple.

Zora’s smile froze the moment she saw them. Hatred filled her eyes.

15:18 Tue, 2 Sept

Seeing Caitlin bask in the spotlight yet again made Zora boil inside—but there was nothing she could do about it.

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Caitlin and Sebastian walked down the red carpet to the signature wall. Connor spotted Sebastian and immediately handed him a pen with deference.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, please—you first.”

Ximena had waited as well. She approached them with a polite smile. “Caitlin, Mr. Vanderbilt. Nice *to see you* again.”

“Ximena.”

Caitlin nodded, her eyes drifting to Zora beside her.

Zora purposefully avoided her gaze, looking elsewhere.

Caitlin smiled faintly. “Miss Harris, you look absolutely radiant tonight. Seems you put a lot of thought into your look.”

Zora couldn't ignore her. If she did, she'd only come across as petty.

"Yes, tonight is a big occasion. Naturally, I wanted to be prepared."

She glanced over Caitlin's outfit and sneered subtly. "Though Caitlin, you look quite... casual tonight, don't you think?"

"I'm not like some people—always trying to be the proud peacock of the evening, desperate for attention."

Caitlin's smile didn't reach her eyes, but her words landed clean and sharp.

Zora's expression darkened instantly.

Caitlin turned toward Ximena and Zora. "Well then, Ximena, Miss Harris—we'll be heading in. Enjoy your evening."

She signed her name, then took Sebastian's arm and walked into the theater.

Zora stood behind, glaring holes *into* Caitlin's back, her eyes sharp as daggers.

Just wait, Caitlin. Tonight is the night you fall from your pedestal.

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## **Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her**

“We should head in, too,” Ximena said, motioning toward the entrance.

Zora lifted her gown slightly and followed her inside. Connor trailed behind them.

As they neared the main theater entrance, Zora leaned in and said, “Mom, go on ahead. I’m going to stop by the restroom.”

Ximena didn’t think much of it and went in alone, while Zora turned and threw Connor a look.

Lowering her voice, she said, “Connor, come here. I need to talk to you.”

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Without waiting for a reply, Zora walked toward the restrooms, veering off into a nearby service corridor. Connor hesitated—he'd promised Yasmin he was done with Zora—but curiosity got the better of him. With a sigh, he followed her inside and closed the door behind them.

“What do you want?” he asked sharply. “Aren't you worried someone might see us?”

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He assumed she'd dragged him here for the usual reason—and if so, he wasn't interested. One more scandalous photo, and his dad would break his legs.

Zora turned, her expression serious. “It's not what you think. I have something important to tell you.”

Connor narrowed his eyes. “What kind of important?”

“I'm pregnant.”

She dropped the bomb like it was nothing, then waited for his reaction.

Connor's face turned pale. "You... you're pregnant? Whose is it?"

Zora's face darkened instantly. "You heartless bastard. It's yours!"

"Mine?" His expression twisted like he'd just swallowed a cockroach. "No way!"

He was way too young to be a father—not to mention he'd just patched things up with Yasmin. Now Zora was dropping this on him?

"You're seriously not going to take responsibility?" Zora snapped, stepping forward, voice sharp. "What are you going to do if this gets out? Both of us will be ruined!"

Connor flinched under her anger and rubbed his face. "Okay, okay! Calm down, I'll figure something out."

After thinking for a moment, he offered, "How about this—you terminate it. I'll help you get everything arranged."

"What?" Zora shrieked. "You want me to get an abortion?"

"This kid can't happen, Zora! I'm back with Yasmin! What do you expect me to do?"

It was the only solution he could think of—to end it quietly and avoid scandal. But Zora wasn't having it.

“Absolutely not!” she hissed. “This is our child. You have one choice—break up with Yasmin and marry me!”

Connor felt his world crashing down. “You're serious?”

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≈ 61%

+20

“If you don't, I'll go straight to your father and grandfather and ask if they want this child or not!”

It was the perfect threat. Connor's worst nightmare was his father finding out. He was the only heir—if Zora went to them with this, there'd be no way out. He'd be forced into marriage, whether he wanted it *or* not.

“Okay, okay! Just give me a few days to sort this out, alright?”

“You have three days,” Zora said coldly. “I want an answer.”

Connor nodded stiffly. “Fine.”

They went their separate ways—Connor first, then Zora a few minutes later.

She’d locked him in. No matter what happened, she was keeping the baby. She’d make sure she married into the Jackson family.

After dealing with Connor, she made another call. “Is everything in place?”

The voice on the other end confirmed it.

Zora hung up with a smirk. “Perfect. Let the show begin.”

By the time she returned to the venue, nearly everyone had arrived. She located her mother and took her seat—second row, center.

Directly ahead, in the front row, were city officials and the 25 award recipients.

With just a slight turn of her head, Zora could see Caitlin and Sebastian sitting together, whispering to each other, clearly close and affectionate.

Zora clenched her fists.

Soon... Soon they'd all see who Caitlin really was.

Once everyone was seated, the host stepped on stage, announcing the start of the evening. The stage lights shifted, and the opening performance began.

From the mist-filled stage, Yates emerged.

The moment he began singing, the entire venue erupted in applause.

No one could deny it—Yates was a born singer, a talent wasted on acting.

As he sang, the big screen behind him showed moving clips of real-life charity efforts—people uniting during disasters, frontline volunteers risking everything, heartwarming moments of selfless service.

The song and the footage fused into one breathtaking tribute to those who gave their hearts to the world.

When the opening act ended, the applause/was thunderous. Yates bowed and left the stage.

The host returned, inviting a high-ranking official to deliver the opening remarks.

It lasted around forty minutes. Then finally it was time for the awards.

Each award was presented by a host alongside a respected industry figure. The latter opened the envelope, reading the recipient's name, followed by a heartfelt introduction from the host about their contribution to the community.

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Winners were invited on stage to accept their medals, trophies, and certificates.

The ceremony moved along smoothly.

Then came the 20th award-Caitlin and Sebastian.

The host smiled, voice full of admiration. “Now, please welcome to the stage our model philanthropic couple—Mr. Sebastian Vanderbilt and Caitlin!”

Thunderous applause followed as Sebastian took Caitlin’s hand and led her onto the stage.

Standing together, the two were the picture of grace and elegance—an embodiment of the perfect match.

61%

“As we all know, Mr. Vanderbilt and Caitlin have dedicated years of service to charitable causes. Their efforts in disaster relief and support for impoverished areas have touched countless lives.”

The host turned to the audience. “Now, let’s take a look at some of the remarkable work they’ve done over the years.”

Everyone’s eyes turned to the giant screen.

Zora held her breath, eyes locked on the screen.

Come on...

Play it...

The moment it plays, Caitlin's carefully crafted image would shatter.

The truth would be exposed.

The world would finally see her for what she really was.

20

AD