

c 617

## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Hearing his **words**, Wendy's fragile mask crumbled. She broke into **sobs**, but she didn't lean on Benjamin's shoulder. Deep down, she knew there could be no future between them. Her family background had already decided the road ahead, **and** it was one that could never truly meet his.

"Alright, that's enough tears."

When she finally quieted, Benjamin pulled out a **handkerchief** and gently wiped her cheeks. His voice was **serious**, soft in a way he rarely showed. "Your mom is safe. Your brother is safe. Molly will be alright. As for that bastard Landon, his death was his own doing. **He's** gone, and that means freedom for your family. No more threats hanging **over** your mother."

His fingers brushed her face tenderly. "You don't need to carry any guilt, none of you. So why are you still crying? If you keep it up, I'm going to kiss you."

He leaned toward her playfully, trying to lighten her mood, but Wendy turned her head away. She didn't even know why she felt so hollow. Maybe it was because the future looked like a fog she couldn't see through—only sadness **and** confusion waiting **ahead**.

Maybe she never should have let Benjamin into her life. If she hadn't fallen in love with him, she wouldn't now be mourning a future they could never **have**.

At that moment, the light above the operating room went out. The surgery was over.

Everyone stood up, eyes fixed on the door until the surgeon stepped out.

“Doctor, how **is** she?” Raymond rushed forward.

“We’ve stabilized her. She’s not in immediate danger, but she’ll need a lengthy recovery in the hospital.”

“Thank you, thank you...”

Relief rippled through the group. As long as she was alive, everything else could be endured,

Soon after, nurses wheeled Molly out. Her face was pale, her body fragile against the stark white sheets.

“Molly!” Eliza broke into tears, clutching her hands to her mouth.

As they escorted her into a ward, Caitlin tried to comfort her. “She’ll get better, Eliza. Just give her time.”

Eliza nodded through her tears **and** urged the others, “You all have work to do. Leave the bedside to me. I’ll stay here with her.

Vincent **and** Jasper headed back to the company, Sebastian left for KM International Group, and Caitlin remained to support Eliza.

Two hours later, Simon returned from giving his statement at the police station. The first thing he did was hurry to the ward. “How is she? What did the doctors say?”

“The surgery went **well**. No danger to her life. She just needs proper rest now,” Caitlin explained.

Simon exhaled hard, the weight on his chest easing slightly.

“You should change, **Caitlin** suggested gently. His clothes were still stiff with blood.

He nodded, went to his office nearby to clean up, then returned in fresh clothes. Taking Molly’s hand, he **stared** at her pale face, guilt clawing at his chest. He swore silently that from this day forward, he would cherish her even more.

Later, Caitlin accompanied **him** to visit Rebecca, who was resting in another room on the same floor.

Benjamin **was** there when they arrived. He stood politely to greet them. Wendy, sitting by her mother’s side. had stopped crying but looked drained and fragile.

“You stay here with Mom. I’ll walk Benjamin out,” she said suddenly.

She pulled him along before he could **object**, leading **him** all the way to the elevators. Only then did Benjamin speak. “I never said I was leaving. I wanted to stay with you.”

“No.” Wendy let go of his wrist, turned toward **him**, and her red-rimmed eyes met his. “Benjamin, let’s break

1. up.

“What?”

“I said, let’s break up. Don’t you understand?”

His brows furrowed, his **voice** rising with disbelief. “What are you talking about? You’re upset right now, that’s all. Let’s wait until you calm down—then we’ll talk.”

He couldn’t accept it. They had only just begun, had only just called it love. There were so many things he had planned, so many **moments** he wanted to give her.

“I am calm,” she said, her voice tight, her heart twisting. “I’ve thought about this seriously. We’re not right for each other.”

“Not right? We’re perfect for each other.”

To back to

“That’s what you think,” Wendy whispered. “But I don’t. We should stop **now**. No more dating. Just go b the way it was before. You live your life, I’ll live mine. We’ll just be friends.”

The words hit him like a punch. Benjamin gripped her shoulders. “Why? We agreed to do this together. We said we’d start slow, get to know each other. Why throw it away now?”

Wendy bit her lip **hard**. “Because being with you makes me feel like I’m drowning. I can’t eat, I can’t sleep. I feel like I’m about to break.”

Benjamin stared at her, stunned. He hadn’t expected that. He thought back to her smiles, her laughter when they were together. Wasn’t she happy then?

He decided not to argue. Maybe the chaos of the day had pushed her too far. “Alright, alright. I get it. You’re

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under too much pressure. I'll give you space. Your home's off-limits right now, so come stay at my place. Rest, sleep it off. When you wake up, maybe you'll feel better."

Wendy shook her head. "I'm staying here with my mom. Go, Benjamin. Don't come find me again. I don't want to see you."

She turned and walked away, leaving him frozen by the elevator.

He watched her retreating back, frustration and helplessness tearing at him. Had she just... thrown him away again?

He couldn't think of anything he'd done to make her angry.

But Wendy's heart was breaking as badly as his. After saying the words, she locked herself in a bathroom **stall**, muffling her sobs.

She knew the truth. Love was between two people. But marriage—it was between two families. And her family and Benjamin's were worlds apart. Even if he married her against all odds, would she ever know **true** happiness inside his world?

Mrs. Jones would never accept her. Not with her **background**.

She repeated it to herself over and over. This was the right choice. Better to cut it off now than to suffer later. Long pain was worse **than** short. Don't waste each other's time.

But Benjamin didn't **leave** the hospital. His chest was burning with anger and hurt. With nowhere else to put it, he called Caitlin.

When she came out to meet him, she frowned. "You're still here? What happened? What do you need from me?"

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## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

"She wants to break up with me. What **am** I supposed to do?"

Benjamin dragged a hand down his face, the picture of frustration.

“Break **up?**” Caitlin studied him. “Did she give you **a** reason?”

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“She said being with me is too much pressure. She can’t eat, can’t sleep, feels like she’s going to collapse.” Benjamin’s voice was heavy, defeated. “Come on, help me think of something. I don’t want to lose her.”

“I understand. Don’t panic. After everything **that** happened today, she’s been shaken badly. Give her time to calm down. Why don’t you head home for now?”

Fine.”

With Caitlin stepping in, Benjamin convinced himself it would all work out soon. Reluctantly, he left the hospital.

Caitlin stayed until Wendy returned. One look at her swollen eyes told Caitlin she’d been crying hard. She pulled her aside to a quiet corner.

“What’s going **on**, Wendy? Why did you suddenly break up with Benjamin?”

Wendy's voice trembled, but she forced a casual tone. "I just don't want to date him anymore. We're not right for each other."

"In what way?"

"In so many ways. My family... his world isn't mine. Even if we force it, it **won't** bring

happiness. Caitlin, if you really care about me, then don't **push** me into this. Being pressured to date him—it hurts."

Caitlin looked into her face, saw how close she was to shattering completely. Instead of pressing, Caitlin simply embraced her, patting her back gently.

"Alright. If it hurts, stop. Rest. I won't pressure you, I won't force anything. Once things at home settle, **then** we'll talk again. For now, don't think about anything else."

"...Okay." Wendy nodded through her tears.

Caitlin didn't know the full truth behind Wendy's decision, but she could feel it: Benjamin's love, intense as it was, had become a weight. With the scars of her broken family and now the fresh chaos surrounding them, Wendy had lost all confidence in a future together.

Later, as they returned to Rebecca's room, a cry echoed from inside.

“Mom, **Mom!** It’s me! You’re safe **now**, it’s **alright**, don’t be afraid!” Simon’s voice carried desperation.

Caitlin and Wendy rushed in. Rebecca had woken, but her eyes were wild, her body fighting to flee. Simon tried to calm her, but she thrashed in panic, confusing him for Landon.

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“No! Don’t hit me! Please don’t.”

“Mom!”

05 VOULES

Wendy threw her arms around her mother. “It’s me, Mom, it’s Wendy! That’s Simmon, not him. No one’s going to hurt you. Please, don’t be scared.”

Tears spilled down Wendy’s cheeks at the sight of her mother’s helpless terror. “Simon, step out. Let me stay with her.”

Simon hesitated, then obeyed. Caitlin moved closer, trying to help. “Rebecca, listen. Landon is gone. He’s dead. He’ll never hurt you again.”

At that, Rebecca froze, eyes wide. “Dead... he’s **dead**?”

“Yes. He’s gone. Forever.” Caitlin’s voice was soft, steady. She reached for Rebecca’s hand **and** pulled a small pendulum from her pocket. “Look here. Do you see this?”

She began to sway it gently, guiding Rebecca into hypnosis. Soon, Rebecca’s body slackened. Caitlin spoke carefully, “Rebecca, Landon is gone from this world. You don’t need to fear him

anymore.”

But instead of easing, Rebecca’s terror only deepened. Her voice cracked through the haze of sleep, whispering. “Stop stop, Daddy, please don’t hit me.” Tears seeped from closed eyes. Then, suddenly, she wrapped her own hands around her throat, choking herself with terrifying strength.

“Mom! **Mom!**” Wendy cried in panic.

“Rebecca!”

Caitlin snapped her from the trance, prying her hands free. Rebecca jolted awake, gasping, eyes full of horror, trying to bolt from the bed..

“Wendy! Call a doctor!”

Wendy hit the call button frantically. Doctors rushed in, administering a sedative until Rebecca finally lay still again, drifting into sleep.

Afterward, Caitlin turned to Wendy, her expression grave. “Was your mother’s childhood... very difficult?”

Wendy nodded, voice breaking. “My grandfather was a violent drunk, a gambler. He beat my grandmother and my mom constantly. My grandmother couldn’t take it anymore—she jumped to her death. Mom

grew scarred, and when she married Landon, she never thought he’d be the same kind of monster. But he was.

“Her childhood and her marriage... both destroyed her. That’s why she developed her illness. My brother chose medicine because of her. He eventually found one of the best specialists for her, and she actually got better. For years she never had an episode. But now—because of Landon—she’s relapsed.”

Caitlin sat in heavy silence. The truth pressed down like lead.

Domestic violence... it happens once, or it happens forever. And for women, its wounds cut to the soul. No excuse, no justification. The moment you tolerate it, it only grows worse.

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Rebecca's scars ran far too deep for a few words or hypnosis to erase.

"Don't despair, Wendy," Caitlin said gently. "If she recovered once, she can recover again. When your brother's friend comes back, we'll find a way to get her treated."

Wendy nodded faintly, though her sigh carried years of weight.

Later, Caitlin found Simon in the hall and told him what had happened.

"I figured she must've relapsed," Simon **said**, his face drawn. "But my friend isn't in the country anymore. He emigrated, joined a research project abroad. If I **want** his help again, I'll have to send Mom overseas."

"Maybe that's not a bad idea," Caitlin said softly. "A new place, a fresh start, far away from these memories. Rebecca needs that as much as she needs treatment. If it's too difficult to arrange alone, let Sebastian and me help. We'll make it happen."

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## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Given Simon's financial situation, he might not be able to shoulder the cost of such expensive treatment. Caitlin and Sebastian were both ready to help however they could.

Simon's gratitude **was** genuine. "Thank you, Caitlin. But I'll need to **talk** it over with my sister first."

"Of course."

The day after the incident, Molly finally woke. When her eyes fluttered open, she saw her mother at her side. Her voice was hoarse, barely a whisper. "**Am** I... still alive?"

"Molly, you're awake! Yes, you're alive. You're safe now."

Eliza clutched her daughter's hand, tears streaming down her face.

"Mom"

Molly slowly turned her head, calling the names of those around her. "Sebastian... Caitlin..."

"I'm here."

“Molly.”

Sebastian and Caitlin each held her hand. Seeing her awake let everyone finally breathe again.

But the moment Molly remembered what had happened, she panicked when she didn't see Simon. She tried to sit up, only to collapse back with a groan of pain as her abdomen screamed in protest.

“Where's Simon\_?”

“He's outside. I'll call him in.”

Caitlin stepped out and brought Simon inside. The moment he heard she was awake, Simon rushed in. “Molly! You're finally awake..”

His eyes **were** wet as he gripped her **hand**. Molly's tears spilled over too. After coming so close to death, the sight of each other brought both of them to their knees emotionally. For Simon, a woman who would throw her life in front of a knife for him was someone he knew he could never let go of

The others quietly left the room, giving them space.

Outside, Caitlin's phone rang. She assumed Felix was calling with updates on the Smith case, but instead, he passed along a message: New York Prison had reached out. Black Hawk wanted to see her.

The moment she **hung** up, Caitlin turned to Sebastian, eyes alight. "Black Hawk wants to see me! **Finally**."

"Then let's go. Now."

Together they hurried to the prison. **Under** the guards' arrangements, Caitlin entered a monitored visitation

7:00

room. This time there was no glass between them, **only** a metal **table**. Black Hawk was shackled to his chair. wrists and ankles bound.

As Caitlin sat, she noticed he was different. Not the cold statue from before, but a man whose eyes carried storm after storm as they studied her.

"I came as **soon** as I got the call. Does that mean you've decided? Did you sign the papers?"

Black Hawk nodded toward the table. A file sat there.

Caitlin picked it up and flipped to the last page. There, the signature “Neil” was scrawled.

“Good. I’ll have her transferred for treatment immediately. If you’d like to leave her a message, I can record it for her. Let her see her brother with her own eyes.”

Thank you.”

It was a single word, but when he said it, his voice cracked, and his eyes grew wet. That thank-you carried a weight of surrender, gratitude, **and** something like reverence.

For the recording, they removed his prison garb so that Ida wouldn’t see him chained. On camera, Neil smiled, greeting his sister warmly, apologizing for his absence, and urging her to eat well, to fight, to never give up. By the end, tears ran freely down his face.

When it was done, Caitlin nodded. “She’ll see this. It will give her strength. She’ll fight harder.”

She gathered her things to leave, but his voice stopped her.

“Wait, Caitlin.”

She turned.

He wiped his face with a trembling hand. "It's true. Ellie... is your mother. And the Parker you've been searching for... that's me."

Caitlin froze. Her heart hammered in her chest as the truth struck. Black Hawk was Parker.

"Thank you for finally saying it," she whispered. "But tell me, where is my mother now?"

"Last year, I took her from the Flowerstone Tower. I placed her on Ebonreach Isle. If you go there, you'll find

her."

"Ebonreach Isle. in A Country?"

"Yes. There's a white building on **the** island. Find that, and you'll find her."

"White building? A name? A marker?"

"No. But I remember heather planted at the entrance. That's all."

**Caitlin's** chest ached with barely contained emotion. Finally, finally she had her mother's trail. She steadied

herself and pressed further.

"Then tell me this you didn't take her just to give her a comfortable life. Who ordered you to take her?"

His answer was quiet, heavy. "Doña Dolores."

"Doña Dolores?" Caitlin frowned. The title was unmistakably feminine. "Who is she?"

"I'm sorry. **That's** all I **can say.**"

He would go no further. Whatever answers lay beyond would have to be dug out by Caitlin herself.

"Fine. I'll uncover the rest myself. One last thing, though. Tell me the truth. Do you know Carlos?"

Neil shook **his** head. "No."

It wasn't a lie. He truly didn't.

Caitlin nodded. "Alright." She left the room.

**HEA**

The moment she stepped outside, her pace **quickened**, and then she broke into a run, unable to contain the flood of relief.

Sebastian caught her **as** she rushed out. "Well? Did he talk?"

"He did! He did..."

Her laughter mixed with tears as they slid down her **face**. After all the suffering, the endless searching, they finally had a lead on her mother.

Sebastian pulled her into **his** arms, pressing a kiss to her cheek, wordlessly steadying her.

When at last they parted, Caitlin murmured, "He said the one who ordered it was Doña Dolores."

Sebastian frowned. "Never heard of her."

“Neither have I. But he confirmed my mother is on Ebonreach Isle.”

“Then that’s where we go. Immediately.”

There was no time to waste. Back at Vanderbilt Manor, they rallied everyone.

**James** was the first to stand. “I’m coming **too!**”

“Then **we** all go,” Caitlin said firmly. “This time, we’re bringing Mom home.”

Brother and sister had waited for **this** moment far too **long**.

Sebastian secured a private jet that night. Caitlin didn’t hide behind a false identity this time. She boarded **as**

herself.

38

65 vouchers

After a long flight, dawn saw them landing at Sanctis Airport in A Country. They checked into a hotel first to

regroup.

As Caitlin stared out the window toward the horizon, her heart surged. The thought that she was finally about to see her mother again made her chest ache with anticipation.

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

After a short rest, Caitlin decided to stop by the sanatorium before leaving. She wanted to take care of Ida's situation first.

With the help of Director Tobias, she met with the girl again. The moment Ida saw her, she lit up and tried to run forward. But her weak body betrayed her, and she stumbled right in front of Caitlin. Caitlin caught her gently and smiled.

"Ida, remember last time I promised to make your wish come true? I found your brother."

"Really?" Ida's eyes widened, full of hope.

“Yes. He’s working out of town right now, so he can’t come see you in person. But he asked me to bring you something.”

Caitlin pulled out a tablet and played the video Black Hawk had recorded. The moment Ida saw his face, her eyes flooded with tears.

“It’s him... It’s really my brother... Her voice trembled as she touched the screen, listening to his words of encouragement, nodding over and over again.

By the time the video ended, she was sobbing openly. Caitlin gently wiped her tears and said, “You heard him. He wants you to get better soon. You have to be strong. Ida.

“I will. I promise.”

“Good. Your brother also arranged the best doctors for you. They’re ready to start your treatment, if you’re willing.”

“I am. I want to go.”

“That’s all I needed to hear. I’ll have my people take care of everything. This tablet is yours—whenever you miss him, just turn it on and he’ll be right there.”

Ida clutched the tablet tightly. “Thank you... thank you so much.”

Caitlin hugged her, then left two of her men to handle the paperwork and arrange the transfer. There was nothing more she could do—Ida’s future would depend on her own courage and perseverance.

With Ida’s wish fulfilled, Caitlin and her **team** set out for Ebonreach Isle.

They had done their homework before coming to Country A. The island was known as a resort and retreat **destination**, praised for its beauty. Black Hawk had said her mother hadn’t been mistreated, but Caitlin still had no idea what condition she might be in now.

From Sanctis Harbor, they boarded a ferry. The ocean stretched endlessly around them, waves rising and falling beneath the keel. White gulls wheeled overhead, their **cries** carried away by the wind. Clouds gathered in soft, cotton-like clusters across the horizon, and the view was breathtaking.

Caitlin, Sebastian, and James stood at the bow, the **wind** whipping through their hair as the silhouette of a

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dark island emerged in the distance.

“There it is. Ehonreach Isle.”

55 vouchers

Even from afar, they could see a towering white structure on the island, shaped almost like a fortress, its top crowned with turning blades of a wind turbine.

“Could **that** be the white building Black Hawk mentioned?” Caitlin studied the map in her **hand**. “It’s marked as a power station here.”

She frowned. “It doesn’t make sense. Why would he keep my mother in a power station?”

“Don’t jump to conclusions, Sebastian told her. “We’ll know once we get there.”

The ferry drew closer. What had looked like a small island from afar revealed itself to be much larger up close. The docks alone stretched wide, crowded with ferries and **fishing** boats. Tourists poured on and off while locals bustled to and fro, shouting offers for rides, hotels, and souvenirs.

Once they disembarked, Tyler arranged three shuttle vans to take the group to their hotel. Only after they’d checked in and left their luggage behind did they set out to explore.

Their first destination was the power station, but inside they found only tourists snapping pictures. The place was more of a sightseeing spot than anything else. No one could possibly live there.

“This isn’t it. There aren’t any heather plants here,” Caitlin said, her disappointment clear.

**Sebastian** squeezed her shoulder. “We’ll keep looking. It’s not the only white building on the island.”

Tyler nodded. “Exactly. I asked **around**—there are several. We’ll check them one by one.”

By nightfall, they had only crossed a fraction of the **island**. Everyone **was** exhausted. Sebastian insisted they rest and continue tomorrow.

Later that night, Caitlin received a call from Zeke.

“Any luck?” he asked.

“Not yet. The island is bigger than I expected. We’ll try again tomorrow.”

“You’ll find her. If she’s here, you’ll find her.” His voice carried steady reassurance.

“How are you holding up over there?” she asked.

“Still breathing. That’s enough.” He chuckled, but behind the humor Caitlin could sense the danger he was constantly **under**.

After hanging up, Caitlin still couldn’t sleep. She wanted air. Sebastian walked with her, with Tyler and James **shadowing** them at a distance.

The island was alive with nightlife. Cool breezes swept away the day’s **heat**. Tourists thronged the beaches, while bars and shops along the boardwalk glowed with light and laughter.

43 vouchers

Vendors stopped them with trays of trinkets. Sebastian bought a glowing witch headband and slipped it onto Caitlin’s head. Then he grabbed a ridiculous mask, strapped it over his face, and started speaking in a comically distorted voice.

Caitlin burst into laughter, hitting his arm. “You’re ridiculous.”

“I just wanted to see you **smile**,” he said warmly, catching her hand. “Don’t push **yourself** so hard.”

“I know...” Her voice trailed off, the weight of the day dragging at her. She had been so full of confidence this morning, but after hours of fruitless searching, she couldn’t shake the fear. What if Black Hawk had lied? What if she never found her mother? The thought gnawed at her.

“Forget it for now. Let’s treat this as a vacation. If we find her tomorrow, it’ll be a miracle waiting to happen.”

He wrapped his arm around her shoulders as they walked along the busy street. And for the first time that day, Caitlin allowed herself to breathe.

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Comment

## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 621

BG Pouchers

Up ahead was a large bar, its open doors revealing flashing lights and crowded tables. Tourists of all kinds gathered at the **entrance**, while inside people laughed and drank, men and women clustered together. On stage, beneath spinning beams of light, a sultry woman swayed to the music, her movements bold and provocative.

As they passed, Caitlin suddenly stopped in her tracks, Sebastian, seeing her pause to look toward the bar, **assumed** she wanted to go inside for a drink.

“Want to go in?” he asked.

Instead, Caitlin tilted her head toward the stage.

“Look at that dancer.

“Nothing worth looking at. She’s not half as pretty as you.”

Sebastian’s survival instincts were sharp—he knew exactly what a good husband should say.

“No. I mean...” Caitlin trailed off, then tugged at his arm. “Let’s **go** in for a bit.”

Hand in hand, they stepped inside. A few men turned their heads, their gazes lingering far too long on Caitlin until Sebastian wrapped an arm around her waist, silently warning off every wandering eye.

James and Tyler followed. Since they were the only ones without dates, they instantly became targets.

“Hey there, handsome, want some **fun**?” A woman slid her hand across James’s chest.

Startled, James practically bolted behind Tyler.

Tyler chuckled, “Relax. They won’t eat you.”

Caitlin and Sebastian found a table near the stage, close enough to clearly see the dancer’s face. Caitlin stared hard, even raised her phone to snap a picture, but the dim lighting blurred the features.

Sebastian frowned. “What exactly are you looking at? She’s just another nightclub girl. Women like her dance for strangers every night. There’s nothing special there.”

“That’s not it,” Caitlin said softly. “She looks **familiar**. Even under all that heavy makeup... **even** dressed like that. I could **swear** I know her.”

“**Familiar how**? Who are you thinking of?”

“Alicia.”

“No way.”

At her words, Sebastian looked again but shrugged. He had never really known Alicia, so he couldn't see it.

"The more I look, the **more** it seems like her," Caitlin murmured. "What if it really is?"

When the dancer's set ended, whistles and shouts rose from the crowd. She ignored a few men who invited her for drinks, took her pay from the manager, stuffed the bills into her pocket, and slipped out through a

side exit.

"Come on. Let's follow her, Caitlin urged, already heading after her.

They **trailed** her through the bar and out into a narrow back alley. There, two rough-looking men stepped in

her way.

"Hey sweetheart, come have some fun with us."

The girl blew a bubble **with** her gum and smirked. "I don't think you can afford me."

The **voice**—it was nearly identical. Caitlin’s pulse quickened. She was halfway convinced.

The two men reached for her, but she moved fast—knee, fist, elbow. Within moments both were groaning on **the** ground.

“Told you

you you couldn’t handle me. Serves you right.” She spat at them and kept walking.

Caitlin followed until the dancer spun suddenly, eyes sharp. “What’s with the sneaking around? Come you’ve got guts!”

Caitlin stepped into the glow of a streetlamp. Her voice was gentle but urgent. “Alicia.”

e out if

The woman froze. For a heartbeat, shock flashed in her eyes, but she quickly masked it with a laugh. “You must have me confused with someone else, pretty lady.”

She turned to leave.

Caitlin rushed to block her path. “It’s me, Caitlin! You’re Alicia, aren’t you? You’re alive. How are you here?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m going home to sleep. Leave me alone.” She shoved past Caitlin. but stopped short when Caitlin called after her.

“I know you hate me. But think about Zeke. He thinks you’re dead. He’s been shattered without you.”

The woman hesitated, then came **back** a step, her eyes hard. “Listen carefully. My name is **Ava**. Not Alicia. You’ve got the wrong person. This place isn’t safe at night—go home. Goodbye.”

And with that, she **was gone**, swallowed by the shadows of the street.

“Alicia.” Caitlin whispered, watching helplessly as the figure disappeared.

Sebastian appeared at her side. “That wasn’t Alicia. If it were, she would’ve recognized you. You must’ve been mistaken. Come on, let’s go.”

Though she followed him back to the hotel, Caitlin’s mind wouldn’t rest. Was that **woman** really Alicia?

Later, she couldn’t keep it to herself. She called Zeke.

“What? You **saw** Alcia? Are you suT77-

His voice shot up, disbelief and hope tangled together. The thought that Alicia might be alive and here, on Ebonreach Isle—was almost too much to take in.

“... I can’t be sure. She looked so much like her, but she denied it. She wouldn’t acknowledge me.” Caitlin’s tone carried regret. “If it really was her, she’d never accept me anyway. She hated me too much.”

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“I don’t **care**. I have to see for myself. I’m coming.”

For Zeke, her words struck like lightning in a storm. The ashes of his heart flared alive again.

As soon as he hung up, he had **Lightwing** arrange a private jet. That very night, he was **on his** way to A Country.

By the next morning, before Caitlin and her group could even set out, Zeke called. His voice crackled over the line. “I’m on the ferry to Ebonreach Isle. I’ll be there soon.”

Sebastian frowned. “If that girl isn’t Alicia, he’ll just end up crushed all over again.”

Caitlin shook her head. “Better he sees with his own eyes. If she isn’t, then at least he won’t spend the rest of his life wondering.”

Still, she prayed it was her. That Alicia was alive.

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

Before Caitlin and the others could even sei out, Zeke arrived in a rush with his men to meet them.

“Caulin

“Zeke

When Caitlin saw him, his eyes were bloodshot—he clearly hadn’t slept all night. But his spirit seemed anything but weary.

“Sorry to show up like this and complicate your plans,” he said. “Can you tell me everything?”

“Of course.”

They sat down together, and Caitlin explained what had happened the night before, how she had seen a dancer who looked strikingly like Alicia. She even **sent** Zeke the short video clip she had recorded.

“The footage is too dark. I can’t tell,” Zeke admitted.

“If you’d been there in person, you’d understand why I think it’s her,” Caitlin said firmly.

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Zeke’s pulse thundered in his chest. Barely able to contain himself, he said, “Then I want to go see her now. Can you take me there?”

“Yes. Today we’ll split into **teams**.”

They had already divided Ebonreach Isle into sectors. James and Tyler would handle one zone, Sebastian led another with King, Vaughn, and a few more men, while Caitlin would accompany Zeke in search of the woman she believed was Alicia. Zeke also had his own men join Sebastian’s group, to aid in the parallel search. for Caitlin’s mother.

There was no time to waste. They set out immediately.

Caitlin and Zeke returned to the nightclub from the previous night. In daylight it was a shell of itself—no flashing lights, no crowd, just a single older woman sweeping the floor.

“Excuse me.” Caitlin called gently, offering her a tip. The woman eyed it, pocketed the cash, then nodded.

“Do you know where the dancer named Ava lives? The one who performs here every night?”

The cleaner thought for a moment before shaking her head. “Ask the boss. Ava was hired by **him**.”

“Where can we **find** him? What’s his name?”

“Glenn. He only comes at night. You’ll **have** to return then.”

With no address to follow up on, Caitlin and Zeke had no choice but to leave and wait for evening. Until then, Zeke decided to join Caitlin in searching for her mother.

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**Teams** spread out, combing their assigned zones. The task was harder than expected—Ebonreach Isle had no shortage of whitewashed buildings, and Heather bloomed everywhere. What Black

Hawk had described as a “marker” now felt like a frustrating trick, for nearly every property had patches of the pink flowers,

“Tyler, we should head back. There’s nothing in this sector, James said after hours of checking

Just then. Tyler froze. “Wait. Over there.”

Through the thick green **canopy**, a **glint** of **white** tile peeked out.

“James, look! White roofing,”

James raised his binoculars. Sure enough, a rooftop shimmered faintly behind the trees. “Come on. Let’s check it out.”

They drove down a winding stone road, weaving through the woods until the path opened onto an expansive private estate. It loomed high, with towering walls and a heavy gate crowned by white marble angel statues, the kind that gave the place an austere, almost sacred air.

And at the base of the walls, Heather sprawled everywhere. The pink blossoms were fading—the season nearly done—petals scattered across the ground.

James’s heart leapt. “This has to be it. Look at the Heather. This matches Black Hawk’s description exactly.”

Tyler was less certain. They had been fooled before. “Maybe. But we won’t know until we get inside.”

They hid their car in the brush, then moved in on foot.

The gates were shut tight, no guards visible outside, but surveillance cameras gleamed near the angel **statues**.

“Split up.” Tyler whispered. “You go around the side, look for a way in. I’ll try the front,”

James nodded and slipped into the **woods**.

Tyler approached openly, playing the part of a lost tourist. He knocked for several minutes before the gate creaked open, revealing a man in white clothing.

“Can I help you?” the man asked warily.

stolen. I’ve been walking for hours, I’m starving and thirsty. Coulation, but my wallet and bag were

“Please,” Tyler began, putting on a desperate tone. “I came here on

you spare me some food or water?”

The man eyed him, suspicious, but after a pause disappeared back inside. When he returned, he handed over a bottle of water and a bag of bread.

“**Thank** you, thank you,” Tyler said earnestly. The gate slammed shut again.

Ten minutes later, Tyler returned and knocked once more.

The **man** opened it, frowning **this** time. “You again?”

“Sir, I’m grateful for the food. But could I stay just one night? Tomorrow I’ll be gone.”

“No.”

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As the man tried to close the door, Tyler wedged **himself** in the gap. “At least let me use a phone. I just need to call my family.”

“You’re becoming a nuisance,” the guard snapped.

Tyler clasped his hands together, smiling sheepishly. “Please, just this once.”

While he kept the man occupied, James had already scaled the wall at the side. Hidden among the trees inside, he studied the estate.

It wasn’t a villa at all, but a miniature fortress. Armed men in black patrolled the grounds.

James’s stomach knotted. No ordinary residence required guards with rifles.

Then his eyes caught on movement above. On a high balcony, a woman stood.

He raised his binoculars, breath caught in his throat. A middle-aged woman, her profile turned away—**just** enough to set his heart hammering.

She lingered only a moment before retreating inside.

James lowered the binoculars, his pulse wild. He couldn’t see her face clearly. But every instinct screamed the

truth.

It had to be her.

Their mother was here.

AD

## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“Who’s there?”

James hadn’t even had the chance to signal Tyler before a guard spotted him. A sharp shout rang out, and James bolted.

Bang!

A gunshot cracked behind him. With no way back the way he came, James ducked into cover, weapon raised, ready to return fire.

Outside, Tyler was still stalling the gatekeeper when the muffled shot echoed from within the estate. Both men froze. Tyler instantly realized James was in danger. Before the guard **could** shut **the** gate, Tyler struck, taking him down..

Inside, the two brothers quickly discovered there were only about eight to ten guards in total. Fighting side by side, they dispatched them swiftly.

“You okay?” Tyler asked as he reached James.

James, weapon steady **and** eyes sharp, shook his head. “I’m fine. We have to get inside. I’m certain our mother is here.”

“Shouldn’t we call Sebastian and the others?”

“Not yet. Let’s confirm first. If it’s not her...” **James** didn’t **finish**. He couldn’t bear the thought of raising everyone’s hopes only to crush them.

“Alright. Let’s move.”

They kicked open the castle’s heavy doors and stormed inside.

The entry hall was cavernous and dim, two long corridors branching off into opposite wings.

“You take **that** side, I’ll take this **one!**” James ordered.

They split up.

The interior gleamed with wealth—ornate chandeliers, tapestries, polished floors—but the air was heavy, damp, as though shut away for too long.

Tyler took a **staircase** upward. James did the same on the other side, his boots thudding quietly against marble steps. At the **landing**, he **came** face-to-face with an elderly maid in a white apron carrying a tray.

She gasped at the sight of his weapon, dropped the tray, and turned to flee.

“Stop!” James barked, seizing her arm and pressing the barrel of his gun to her temple. “Tell me who lives

here.”

The woman trembled violently, her lips moving but only guttural sounds escaping

“**You** can’t talk? You’re mute?”

**She** nodded frantically.

Cursing under his **breath**, James released her and pressed on.

At the end of the hall he found a lavish room. A vase of fresh

roses sat on the table, their fragrance mingling with a faint, almost cloying perfume that seemed to seep from the oil paintings lining the walls.

James froze before one canvas. The face was familiar—too familiar. It was her. His mother.

Painting after painting showed the same woman. The same gentle eyes. The same face he had memorized from old photographs.

His chest tightened, eyes blurring with tears. She was here. She had to be.

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Driven by a surge of hope, he pushed on until he reached the highest floor. There, a gilded door loomed—the same balcony he had glimpsed earlier from below.

She must be inside.

James steadied his breath, forced himself to move slowly, and eased the handle down.

The door swung open. Light spilled into a grand chamber. White drapes billowed in the sea breeze, jewels glittered on every surface, and rare artifacts crowded the shelves.

And then—he **saw** her.

Behind a **veil** of white gauze sat a woman **at** an **easel**, painting quietly. Her long hair fell like silk down her back, her figure draped in pale robes. Her skin **was** unnaturally pale, the complexion of someone who rarely **saw** sunlight.

James stood frozen, lungs tight, afraid even his breath might shatter the moment. He was about to step forward when a blur sliced past him.

**Pain** exploded across **his** shoulder. He spun, but the attacker was gone. His shirt was ripped, blood seeping from the fresh cut.

The strike had been impossibly fast—his nerves screamed with tension.

In turning, he jostled the chandelier overhead, crystals clinking together.

The sound made the woman at the easel pause. She slowly turned her head.

Their eyes met.

James felt time **itself** grind to a **halt**.

Her **face**—it was her face. The face from the portraits. From the memories burned into his heart.

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“Harrison,” the woman whispered, voice trembling. “Is it really you, my son?”

Tears burst from James’s eyes. “Mom... I found you.”

“My **son**. My son.”

Her brush clattered to the floor as she rose unsteadily, tears sparkling in her eyes. James surged forward, desperate to embrace her-

But the shadow struck again, kicking him hard and sending him crashing across the room.

“Don’t hurt my son!” Kelly cried out, her voice sharp with terror.

James staggered back to his feet, ignoring the throbbing in his shoulder. He charged the black-clad figure, the two of them clashing fiercely.

They spilled out of the room and onto the landing, James managed to kick the attacker off the railing, but the man clung to the sheer wall like a bat, his movements unnaturally agile. With an astonishing leap, he bounded back up and struck **again**.

James fought with everything he had, but the man’s speed and strength were overwhelming. A flurry of blows sent James crashing to the floor, blood spraying from his lips.

The assailant drew a short blade and drove it down toward James’s chest

James rolled aside, the knife biting deep into the **floor**. Trapped against the wall, he caught the next strike with his bare hands, the blade cutting deep **into** his palms. Blood streamed between his fingers, but with a roar he kicked the man back.

The shadow lunged again—only for gunfire to crack through the air.

Tyler.

Bullets whistled past. The assassin dodged with inhuman speed, bounding along the banister like it was solid ground. But speed wasn’t enough. One round tore into his arm, sending him tumbling.

Tyler vaulted over the railing, sliding down to meet him. They clashed violently, steel against steel, fist **against** flesh.

But wounded, the shadow couldn't keep up. Tyler's blade drove deep into his gut, and with a final brutal kick, he sent the man plummeting to the marble floor below.

The body hit with a sickening thud. It didn't move again.

Breathing hard, Tyler raced back up to James.

James was on his feet, but blood covered his shoulder and hands.

"James!" Tyler shouted.

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

Tyler rushed over, tearing a strip of cloth from his shirt to bind James's bleeding palms before hauling him upright.

“Your **back’s** bleeding too...”

He caught sight of the darkening bruise around the wound, and when his eyes flicked to James’s lips, they were tinged with purple.

A heavy dread sank into Tyler’s gut. “James.. are you poisoned?”

“I’m fine... need to find my mother.” James forced the words out, teeth clenched against the pain. He staggered back toward the room.

Tyler followed close behind—and then she appeared before them.

“My son... Harrison...”

He

Kelly caught her boy as he stumbled, her tears falling freely. Tyler’s chest tightened at the sight. After years of searching, she was real. She was here.

“Madam, it’s really you. Tyler said, his voice breaking with relief. “We finally found you. Please, come with us

**now!”**

Kelly nodded through tears. Together they supported James down the stairs and out of the suffocating castle.

But the moment they crossed the threshold, James’s strength failed him. He collapsed unconscious.

“James! James!”

“Harrison!”

“I’ll carry him,” Tyler barked, slinging James onto his back. He hurried across the grounds, Kelly at his side, until they reached their hidden **car**.

He laid James carefully across the back seat. Kelly climbed in, clutching her son’s hand, unwilling to let go.

Before starting the engine, Tyler dialed Sebastian. His voice was urgent, but triumphant: they had found Kelly.

On the other end, Sebastian and his team were scouring another part of the island. The moment he heard, his entire group lit up.

“You found her? Bring her **back** at once!”

Sebastian immediately relayed the news to Caitlin.

“Are you serious? They found her?”

Caitlin sat rigid in the car beside Zeke, her heart leaping into her throat.

“Yes,” Sebastian said.

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Her eyes flooded. She clutched the phone, sobbing as **she** told Zeke, “Zeke, they found my mother! They really found her!”

Zeke’s jaw clenched, his eyes wet. “That’s incredible. The best news I’ve heard in years.” He ordered his men to turn back at once.

Before long, everyone converged at the hotel where they’d agreed to regroup. Caitlin and Sebastian waited. anxiously at the entrance.

At last, headlights cut through the dusk. Tyler's car pulled up, brakes squealing.

He leapt from the driver's seat.

"Tyler!" Caitlin cried, running down the steps. "Is it true? Did you really find my mother?"

"We did. She's here."

He opened the door. Slowly, Kelly stepped out.

Caitlin froze.

The woman before her wore plain clothes, her long hair spilling freely, her face changed by the years but still unmistakably hers. Time had altered the features, but not the bond of blood.

-

Four years of searching. Endless heartbreak. **And** now she was here.

Caitlin's chest ached. Words failed her. Tears poured down her cheeks,

"Caitlin\_"

Kelly's **voice**, hoarse and lower than she remembered, carried her daughter's name.

That voice—aged, wounded, but still her mother's.

Caitlin shook, lips trembling, "Mom"

She broke into a run. Kelly's arms opened wide.

Mother and daughter crashed together in an embrace, clinging desperately as sobs wracked their bodies.

Sebastian, Zeke, and the others stood back, their throats tightening at the sight. Even hardened men felt their eyes sting, Caitlin had her mother again.

When at **last** Caitlin drew back, she cupped Kelly's face, still weeping. "Mom, I finally found you. I finally found you...."

Kelly's tears mirrored hers. "Caitlin."

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Then Caitlin thought of her brother. “Mom did you see Harrison? I found him too. He’s grown up now!

“I know. But Harrison.” Kelly’s voice faltered.

“What about Harrison?”

Before she could answer, Tyler hurried forward, alarmed. “Mr. Vanderbilt! Madarn! James is injured, you need

to come!”

“Injured?”

Caitlin bolted toward the car. Sebastian and Zeke followed.

“Get him out, quickly!” **Sebastian** ordered.

Tyler and Vaughn lifted James from the back seat. His body was limp, blood smeared across his hands **and** shoulders.

Caitlin’s heart wrenched at the sight. She bent closer—and froze. The wound on his back was ringed with strange discoloration, veins spidering outward in an eerie, purple web.

“This isn’t just a wound. He’s been poisoned.”

Tyler’s face darkened. “Yes. During the fight in the castle, James was cut by that black-clad man. The blade must’ve been laced with venom.

“Hospital. Now.” Sebastian didn’t waste a second.

They sped through Ebonreach Isle to the only hospital on the island. Doctors rushed James into emergency

care.

Hours later, a physician emerged. “We’ve cleaned **and** stitched the wounds. We identified traces of hemolytic venom from *Loxosceles laeta*. The amount was small, not fatal, and we administered treatment for it. But...” His voice faltered. “There are other compounds in his blood. Unknown toxins. We don’t recognize them, and we have no antidote. I’m sorry.”

The words struck like a hammer.

Caitlin’s pulse roared in her ears. They had **found** her mother, only to risk losing her brother.

She forced herself to steady her voice. “At least it isn’t **lethal**—yet. **But** if we don’t identify the rest...”

She clenched her fists. If only she’d studied longer under Aurelius, if only Alicia hadn’t cut her off. She might have had the knowledge to save him herself.

James was transferred to a ward, pale **and** still. Kelly sat by his side, wracked with guilt.

“This **is** my fault,” she whispered brokenly. “Harrison’s like this because of me...”

“Don’t blame yourself, Mom,” Caitlin gripped her **hand**, her own eyes burning. “I’ll find a way. I swear I will.”

She examined James’s wounds again. The purplish veins spread outward, twisting like snakes beneath his skin. like a net of poison weaving tighter with every hour.

Her chest clenched in helpless rage. Then—she thought of something

“I know two people who might be able to save **him.**”

Sebastian leaned in sharply. “Who?”

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## Billionsaire's Regret: Finding Her

“One is my master, Aurelius. The other is Alicia.

“Aurelius? You mean the Wandering Hakim people **talk** about?” Sebastian asked,

“Yes. He was one of my masters too. But it’s too late to find him now. If we can track down Alicia, maybe my brother still **has** a chance. I only know a little about this field, but Alicia trained deeply under him. She’ll know what to do.”

Zeke’s brow furrowed, the tension in his face hard as stone. “Then we find Alicia. I’ll lead the search myself.”

“Let’s wait until nightfall and check that bar again,” Caitlin said. “If she’s still performing, we’ll see her?”

It was the only hope they had. Silence fell across the hospital **room**. The joy of reuniting with their mother was already eclipsed by James’s condition. If he were healthy, they would all be back at the hotel **sharing** a meal together. Now, everything hinged on finding Alicia.

As the sun sank and night swept across Ebonreach Isle, Caitlin asked Sebastian and her mother to stay at the hospital with James **while** she went with Zeke to search.

The commercial district **was** alive with lights and music. Neon bled **across** the streets, tourists packed into bars and restaurants. Caitlin and Zeke returned to the same bar from the night before, slipping inside and waiting at a corner table.

By ten o’clock, the music shifted. Lights dimmed. A sultry silhouette appeared on stage, hips swaying in rhythm to pounding beats.

The **crowd** erupted. Whistles pierced the air. Men cheered and threw tips toward the stage, swept up in the intoxicating heat of her dance.

At their table, Zeke's eyes locked on the dancer. His body **sat** motionless, but inside his chest, his heart hammered with brutal force.

It was her.

It was Alicia.

The lighting wasn't perfect, but he didn't need it. On her left breast, just above the heart, was a tattoo. A single

letter: Z.

He remembered that night, his birthday. She'd revealed the tattoo with a mischievous smile, telling him she'd branded him into her skin forever. **And** he... he had shouted at her, crushed her joy, and she had run into the rain crying. The memory clawed at his throat.

"Zeke," Caitlin whispered beside him. "Is it her? Is it Alicia?"

His lips trembled, but he didn't answer. He simply stood, climbed onto the stage, and seized the girl's wrist.

before she could react.

"Hey! Let go! What are you doing?" she snapped, trying to yank free.

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The bar erupted in protest at the disruption. The owner stormed out with several bouncers.

Before they could interfere, Caitlin stepped forward, flashing a thick wad of cash. "She won't be dancing here again. Consider our cooperation finished."

The man faltered, greed overcoming suspicion. He snatched the money. When his bouncers moved, Tyler and **Vaughn** blocked them with cold, lethal stares. The owner swallowed his anger. Whatever these people were, he wanted no part of it.

Zeke dragged the girl out, his grip crushing, ignoring her complaints as he hauled her down the dark streets. Finally, when they reached the quieter stretch of beach, he stopped.

"Why are you still holding me?" the girl demanded, twisting her arm.

Zeke turned to face her, voice hoarse. “Alicia”

Her brows knitted. She jerked free and snapped, “Who the hell is Alicia? You’ve got the wrong person!”

She tried to bolt, but Zeke caught her again, gripping both wrists. His gaze bore into her, raw and pleading. “It’s you. I know it’s you. I’m Zeke. We grew up together. No matter what makeup you wear, I’d know you anywhere. Stop running, Alicia. Please.”

Her face hardened. “I told you, I’m Ava. Not Alicia.”

“Don’t lie to me. I don’t believe it.” His voice cracked, his chest rising with sharp, painful breaths. “You vanished after saving me from Graystone Castle. They said you died in the explosion near the Yosef River, but I knew... I **knew** you were alive.”

He pulled a silver pocket watch from his coat. “**And** this. Do you remember? You had these words engraved: Never Forget Me. You told me to keep you close, always. How could you forget me?”

His hand trembled as he pointed to her tattoo. “And that Z over your heart... my birthday gift. You said you’d carry me with you forever. Don’t tell me that meant nothing.”

His tears spilled freely. The pain of losing her, the years of torment, the miracle of seeing her again—it all

collided **inside** him.

Caitlin and the others stood back, watching silently from a distance.

For a long moment, Alicia just stared at him, her eyes shimmering. And then her defenses shattered. Tears slipped down her cheeks.

Zeke's lips curved in a broken smile. "I knew it. I knew it was you. You didn't lose your memory... did you,

Alicia?"

Her voice cracked as she confessed, "You're right. I'm Alicia. I never lost my memory. I've been hiding here **on** Ebonreach Isle... trying to forget you. Because you broke my heart!"

"I'm sorry," Zeke whispered, shaking his head violently. "God, I'm so sorry, **Alicia**. It was my fault. I was a fool. Blame me, hit me if you want. I deserve it. I hurt **you**."

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"Do you think I want your sorry?" Alicia's sobs turned into a shout. She pounded her fists against his chest. "Bastard! You ruined me! Why did you have to find me? I don't need your apologies!"

He didn't flinch. He let her strike him, each blow digging deeper into his guilt. And then he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against him, holding her as if he would never let go again.

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## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

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“If an apology isn't enough, **then** take me **too**. I'll **give** myself to you. From now on, whenever you want to hit me, you can. I'll be your punching bag for the rest of my life.”

At that, Alicia broke into laughter through her tears. She laughed until it hurt, and then she wept again.

She had gambled her life on one wild bet—whether she could ever win Zeke's love. And after all these years, after decades of waiting, she had finally won.

From childhood she had carried feelings for him, growing from innocent affection into relentless devotion. Loving him, waiting for him, had become as natural as breathing. And now that he had finally come to her, her heart swelled with both bitter ache and overwhelming relief. Tears streamed down her face, unstoppable.

“Enough crying, Alicia,” Zeke murmured.

He brushed her tears away with **his** thumb, then leaned in and pressed his lips to hers. It was a gentle kiss, trembling with emotion, but it was real. His confession, his vow. Their first true kiss as lovers.

“Come back with me.” Zeke whispered, holding her hands tightly. “From now on, wherever I go, you’ll be with me. We’ll never be separated **again**. Please?”

Alicia nodded through her tears, joy flashing in her eyes.

“Let’s go. I **want** you to meet Caitlin

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders **and** led her **back**. Caitlin watched them **approach**, her lips curving **into** a smile, “Congratulations. Two souls who belong together, finally

“**Thank** you.” Zeke said quietly, glancing down at the woman in **his** arms.

Alicia stepped **forward**, clasping Caitlin’s hand. “Thank you”

The bitterness of their past had long since faded. Alicia no longer **saw** Caitlin as a rival, but as someone who had unknowingly helped her find her way **back** to **Zeke**. If not for Caitlin discovering

her and calling Zeke, who knew how long she would have stayed hidden, lost in her own pride and pain.

“**How** did you even find me on Ebonreach Isle?” Alicia asked, curiosity mingling with wonder.

“I **came** here looking for my mother.” Caitlin explained. “I never expected to run **into you**. And now... my brother has been poisoned. Since you’re here, will **you** come take a look **at** him?”

**Alicia’s** expression sobered instantly. She nodded. “Take me to him”

They hurried back to the hospital. Sebastian, seeing Alicia **walk** in, quickly pieced together that she **had** never lost her memory at all.

Introductions were made—Alicia meeting Kelly, Sebastian, and the others—before she turned her focus to the bedside.

James lay unconscious, his body marked by bruised veins and faint discoloration around the wound. Alia knelt to examine him closely. From her pocket, she drew out a small kit: a sampler, reagents, a prirtalide toxin analyzer

She worked quickly, and when the tool displayed its results, her delicate brows knit tightly.

Caitlin’s stomach dropped. The heaviness in Alicia’s face was worse than words. The entire room seemed to still, everyone holding their breath.

“Alicia?” Caitlin **finally asked**. “How bad is it?”

Alicia put her tools away, then produced a single pill and slipped it gently into James’s mouth. Only then did

she answer.

“It’s a compound poisoning. Part of it was inhaled through the nose—he must **have** breathed in a toxic fragrance before he **was** wounded. The blade on his back carried the rest, pushing the **poison** into his system.

“Once mixed together inside the body, the toxins create a slow-acting effect. They paralyze the nervous system, forcing the victim into a deep, prolonged coma.

“I’ve just given him a detox pill. It will slow the spread, but the only real solution is to neutralize it completely. And you need to be prepared. Even if we succeed in purging it, there may be permanent aftereffects.”

Her words struck Caitlin like a blow. Her knees buckled, and Sebastian caught her before she fell

Tears stung her eyes. She stared at her brother’s pale, motionless **face**, her voice breaking. “What do we do? What do we do **now**?”

If even Alicia couldn't identify the exact mixture, who could possibly save James?

Zeke spoke up. "What about Aurelius? Would he know how?"

Alicia nodded reluctantly. "It may come down to him. Either that, or finding the person who made this poison. If the one who prepared it is still alive, the antidote may exist."

Tyler frowned. "The one who cut James was a man in black. But I put him down myself—he fell and died."

Caitlin's eyes widened. "No. There's someone else. Doña Dolores. If we can find her, we might find the cure."

"Doña Dolores?" Zeke asked sharply.

"She's the one behind my mother's abduction," Caitlin explained. She turned to Kelly. "Mom. You must know something about her, right? You were held for years. You must have seen her."

Kelly shook her head sadly. "I never met her. The only one I saw was Mr. Black. But even he didn't come often. It's been a long time **since** I last saw him.

"As for the poisoning- I think it came from those portraits."

“Portraits?”

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“The room they **kept** me in **was** full of paintings of me. Anyone who stared too long at them would get dizzy ill. I heard the paints were laced with a fragrant toxin, something meant to repel insects but dangerous to humans it inhaled. I never thought Harrison would be exposed...” Her voice cracked. “I never thought he’d be poisoned”

Caitlin’s heart sank. “Mr. Black is Black Hawk. Sebastian—contact Felix. Tell him to press Black Hawk for

answers.

“On it.” Sebastian **hurried** out to make the call..

“I’ll head back to **that estate**. Tyler volunteered. “I’ll take King, Vaughn, the others. Maybe there’s still evidence we can use.”

“Go.” Caitlin urged.

The room fell heavy again. Zeke placed a hand on Caitlin’s shoulder. “We’ll find **a** way. Don’t lose hope.”

Alicia added softly. “What I told you is only the worst-case scenario. Right now, the toxins are only numbing his nervous system. He’s stable. He won’t die. We still have time.”

Caitlin forced herself to breathe. “Then I need to plan for both outcomes. If we can’t find the antidote here, we’ll take James to S country. Aurelius will be our last hope.”

Sebastian returned, phone still in hand. “I reached Felix. He’ll interrogate Black Hawk as soon as possible **and** get back to us.”

Zeke’s jaw tightened. “Then Caitlin’s right. Searching here is a waste of time—we don’t know who’s pulling the strings. Black Hawk may not know either. We need to decide fast. Do we leave for S country now, and take James to Aurelius?”

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## Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Going to S Country meant facing one enormous obstacle—Zorro’s power. If he got word they were heading there, he would never let them go unharmed.

Sebastian thought for a moment and made his decision. “Here’s what we’ll do. I’ll arrange for people to escort your mother and James back to the US. Then Caitlin and I will go to S Country to find Aurelius.”

“I’ll come too.” **Alicia** said firmly. “Otherwise my master may not even give you the time of day. I don’t have **his** contact information. Finding **him is** already a matter of luck, and he only listens to me.”

She was right. Aurelius was eccentric, nearly impossible to track down, and rarely generous with his help. **Only** with Alicia did he show any real warmth.

“I’m coming as well,” Zeke added without hesitation. He wasn’t about to let them **go** off into danger alone.

Caitlin shook her head. “It’s too risky. Aurelius is in Santa Aurelia, but that’s within Graystone territory. Zeke, Zorro’s assassins are still hunting you. And Alicia, you’re wanted, too. If you both walk into Graystone, it’s suicide.

“It’s fine.” Alicia replied with quiet confidence. “I can disguise us. If I can **stand** in front of **Zorro** himself without him recognizing me, we’ll be fine.”

Sebastian gave a sharp nod. “Then it’s settled. I’ll contact the Obsidian Order and make arrangements right

**away.**

Meanwhile, Tyler and the others returned to the villa they had infiltrated earlier. This time **it** was deserted. The corpses were gone. Even the bloodstains had been scrubbed away.

Clearly someone had swept through after them and erased all evidence.

Inside, the place was stripped bare. The portraits Kelly had described were gone. Every trace of what had been there before was deliberately removed.

“Nothing here,” one of the men muttered.

“Same on my side,” another confirmed.

“It’s like they gutted the whole place on purpose,” Tyler said grimly. “Now it’s just an empty husk.”

The castle loomed dark and silent, its halls barren, its shadows oppressive. It felt more like a set from a horror film than a **place** anyone had lived.

“What now?” Vaughn asked.

“Back to report, Tyler decided.

They left and returned to the hospital, where they relayed everything to Caitlin and Sebastian.

“Then it’s confirmed,” Caitlin said. “They’ve cut off our trail. There’s no antidote here. Our only option is S

Country”

“I’ve already prepared everything. Sebastian replied. “Tomorrow morning, we split into two groups and

move out.

Caitlin exhaled softly. She turned toward her mother, sitting silently at James’s bedside, her gaze lost somewhere far away.

All Caitlin could do was hope their journey to S Country would go smoothly.

That night, Sebastian assigned men to guard James in shifts. The rest returned to the hotel to rest and prepare for morning.

For the first time since their reunion, Caitlin finally had a quiet moment alone with her mother. They sat together by the bed.

“Mom,” Caitlin said softly. “these **years** must have been hell for you.”

Kelly sighed, her voice weary. “It wasn’t **so** bad. I’m just sorry I made you all worry.”

Caitlin took her hand. The skin was surprisingly soft, untouched by weather or age, as though she hadn’t lived through suffering at all.

“Please,” Caitlin pressed, “tell me what happened. How were you taken? What have you been through all these years?”

“Mr. Black sent me to a clinic **in** A Country for treatment. They helped me. I’m better now. But... a lot of the rest, I don’t remember.”

Her eyes dropped. It was obvious she didn’t want to speak of the past.

“Fine,” Caitlin said gently, though her heart was heavy. “But answer me one thing. Who is our real father?”

Surely she couldn’t have forgotten that.

“Your father is Jonathan,” Kelly replied quickly.

“Mom, don’t lie to me. I already proved it. Jonathan isn’t our biological father. Why else **would** he have sold Harrison to traffickers when we were five? Who is our father? Is it the man in your diary—Mr. L? Who was he? Tell me the truth.”

Frustration crept into Caitlin's voice. She couldn't understand why her mother was still hiding it.

"L. I don't know. I've forgotten," Kelly whispered.

"Mom..."

Caitlin stood, trembling with anger she didn't want to feel. Reuniting with her mother should have been a blessing, not a fight. But she couldn't hold back anymore.

"Do you realize what I've been through these past four years? Searching for you, risking my life over and over.

People have died. Innocent **people**. One bloody crime after another, all because we're trapped in someone else's game. The only way to end this is to uncover the truth. You need to tell me who my father is. Stop hiding it from me. Please

"I told you, I don't remember. I don't know who he is. Mr. I. was just something I made up."

No matter how Caitlin pressed, Kelly wouldn't speak. The air between them grew heavy, thick with silence.

“**Fine,**” Caitlin **said** at last, her voice tight. “Then tell me this. Where is the second half of Yun’s Aromatic Codex?”

“Hector took it.”

“Hector? Who is Hector?”

Kelly’s eyes darkened. “Walter’s brother. Your grandfather’s illegitimate **son**. He immigrated to D Country with his mother years ago.”

“Hector... D Country. Caitlin repeated. At least it was something. “And how did he get the Codex? Did **give it to him**, or-”

“He stole it from me.”

you

Caitlin’s chest tightened. But she forced herself to keep asking. “Mom, do you know why everyone wants it? What is hidden inside that book?”

Kelly’s gaze flickered. “They say if both volumes are brought together, they reveal a map to Atlantis. And in Atlantis lies the Shard of Life. They say it has miraculous power—able to restore sight to the blind, heal the sick, even grant longevity to the **old**. That’s why so many have stopped at nothing to obtain it.”

Caitlin froze. It sounded like fantasy. Impossible. Yet the determination in people's eyes told her they believed it was real.

She swallowed hard. "When I asked you about our father, you claimed you'd forgotten. But now, suddenly, you know all of this? Why?"

"I don't know," Kelly murmured. "Maybe it's selective memory. My mind... isn't what it used to be." She tapped her temple with a hollow laugh. "You don't believe me?"

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

Caitlin studied her mother for a long moment. She had doubts, but pressed them down, exhaling softly. "Whatever the truth is, Mom, you've suffered enough. We'll leave Father for now. The Codex-I'll take it back. You just rest. We've got an early start tomorrow."

After making sure Kelly would try to sleep, Caitlin slipped out of the room.

Inside, Kelly sat in silence, the sorrow in her eyes gradually fading. She picked up the bedside phone, dialed another room, and murmured a string of strange words-like a code.

Caitlin returned to her room, where Sebastian was already waiting in a bathrobe. Seeing her weary expression, he wrapped an arm around her waist. “You all right, Caitlin?”

She shook her head and pressed into his chest. “I found out where the second half of Yun’s Aromatic Codex

1. is.

“Where?”

“In D Country. We need to track down a **man** named Hector.”

“Hector? Another Thompson? What’s his relation to Walter Thompson?”

“My mother said he’s Walter’s half-brother. My grandfather’s illegitimate son. He stole the Codex from her.”

Sebastian’s jaw tightened. “At least now we know. Once your brother’s cured, we’ll find Hector.”

“Mm.”

“Enough for tonight. Get some sleep. No more worrying.” He kissed her forehead gently. “I ran your bath already. Go.

“Okay.”

Later, after she washed and they curled up in bed together, peace settled over them.

Across the hall, Zeke and Alicia shared a room.

Alicia emerged from the bathroom, makeup scrubbed away, her face bare, her hair damp. Playful and unguarded again, she was even more beautiful.

Zeke sat on the sofa, pretending to read, but his heart pounded wildly when she walked toward him robe. He held the book upside down, hiding behind it.

Alicia plucked it from his hands and laughed. “What’s this? Can’t even look at me? **Am** I that scary?”

“No, I just...” Zeke flushed and laughed nervously.

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her

She tilted her head, amused, but didn't push. Instead, she glanced at the room's single bed. "Only one bed. How are we sleeping tonight?"

"You take the bed. I'll sleep on the floor," Zeke said immediately. He hadn't booked another room on purpose. -he wanted the time with her.

"That's boring." Alicia shot back.

He coughed. "**What** do you mean?"

"I mean, you've got two options. Either you hold me while we sleep, or I hold you. Which do you want?"

Zeke broke into a grin. "Do I even need to choose?" He pulled her against him, his arm firm around her waist.

Alicia tipped her **head** back, staring into his face. Her voice softened. "I still feel like this is a dream. Are you really here, or am I just imagining you?"

"It's real. But if you're not sure... we could test it." He brushed a tentative kiss against her lips, barely a touch.

“That’s it? I didn’t feel anything. Too gentle.”

She hooked her arms around his neck, plucked off his glasses, and kissed him herself—longer, deeper. When she finally let him go, she asked, “Now do you get it?”

“Not really. You’d better teach me again,” he murmured, his voice husky,

The heat between them flared.

“Say you love me, idiot.”

“I **love** you.

Then love me forever. Only me.” Her demand was fierce, almost childlike.

“I’ll only ever love Alicia. No one else. Not in this life.”

“Good boy. I love **you** too, Zeke.”

Their kiss **turned** hungry, urgent, impossible to break apart.

“Do you want me?” she whispered.

He hesitated.

“What? You’re hesitating? Regretting this already? Fine, I’m leaving.” She pouted and tried to wriggle free.

He grabbed her **back**. “I don’t regret anything. I want you. More than anything.”

Her lips curved into a smile, triumphant and tender. “Then I suppose I’ll allow it.”

That night burned hot, fierce, and full of laughter.

For the first time, Zeke understood what true love felt like. Alicia was fire-wild, **teasing**, irresistible. She melted into him completely, body and soul, and he had never felt so alive.

So this is **what** it feels like to love someone, he thought. And it was beautiful.

The next morning, Sebastian’s arrangements went into effect.

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One group, led by Tyler and backed by the Obsidian Order, would escort Kelly and James back to the US.

The other group—Caitlin, **Sebastian**, Zeke, and Alicia—headed for S Country with their escort.

After a long flight, they landed at one of the Obsidian Order's bases. Xero and his men were waiting in formation.

“Sebastian! Caitlin! You made it,” Xero called out.

“Good to see you **again**,” Caitlin said **with a nod**.

Xero's smile froze when he spotted Alicia. “Alicia? You're alive?”

“That's right. Sebastian said with a grin. “We found her.”

Alicia walked up and punched Xero in the chest. “What's with that look? **Were** you hoping I'd stay dead?”

“Ow! Zeke, control your demoness—she’s terrorizing people again!” Xero groaned dramatically.

Zeke jer

pulled Alicia close, his voice firm. “Call her a demon again, and you’ll regret it.”

Xero threw his hands up. “Unbelievable. You’re already whipped.”

Laughter rippled through the group.

At the base, Alicia provided disguises. Soon the four of them were dressed as bodyguards of the O’Malley Family, Sebastian and Zeke’s men remained behind, while Xero assigned a **squad** to accompany them.

The convoy set out for Santa Aurelia.

But Santa Aurelia was inside Graystone territory. To reach Aurelius, they would have to pass through Zorro’s domain. That was the first test.

On the road, Xero shook his head, almost laughing. “Tell me this isn’t bizarre. Zorro’s son Samir died, and now suddenly there’s a daughter? Word is she’s claiming to be his child.”

**Caitlin**, Sebastian, and Zeke all froze, exchanging startled looks.

Zeke's voice was tight. "Her name?"

"Zora."

Zeke's chest clenched. His sister... She had run away from home straight into Zorro's arms.

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

"The old fox lost a son, and now suddenly gains a daughter. No doubt he'll treasure her like gold."

Caitlin **wasn't** all that surprised. If Zora had learned her true parentage, and after disgracing herself in the US. it made sense she'd run to S Country to seek out her biological father.

"Of course," Xero **said**. "Word is, he's thrown half a dozen banquets in just one month for her. Even brought her to a royal court gala. **And** you won't believe the most outrageous part."

"What was it?"

“At that gala, the entire aristocracy of S Country was present. He tried to parade her in **front** of everyone to find a suitable husband. And the girl chose me. I turned her down on the spot. Our O’Malley Family has always kept out of the Prestons’ **affairs**. I knew Zorro only **wanted** to rope us in. Over my dead body.”

He spoke with disdain, clearly unaffected by Zora’s advances.

“You turned her down in public?” Caitlin frowned. “Then she won’t let that go. I know her temper—she holds grudges until the grave.”

“Her feelings are her problem,” Xero said flatly. “I won’t entangle my family with the Prestons.”

He was pragmatic. With his aunt Nevaeh married into the royal palace as a princess, and his brother Harvey a general, the O’Malleys had to walk a careful line. Their survival depended on neutrality and loyalty to the crown, not reckless alliances.

Caitlin spoke evenly. “There’s something you don’t **know**. The Zora you met—she’s Zeke’s blood sister. Her real name is Zora.”

“What?” Xero blinked. “But I thought you said Zeke and Zorro aren’t related.”

Zeke explained quietly. “We’re not. My father is Dean. She’s the daughter of my mother and Zorro.”

“I see,” Xero muttered, finally piecing it **together**.

No one said more. Before long, their convoy reached the Graystone checkpoint.

Guards blocked the road and ordered them to stop. Xero presented his identification.

“Mr. O’Malley?” The guards were surprised, bowing slightly. “May we ask your destination?”

“I’m on royal business, heading to Santa Aurelia. Clear the way,” Xero said sharply.

“Please wait, sir. We must report to the Count first. Only with his approval can you pass.”

They didn’t move the barricade. Instead, a messenger hurried away.

From the window, Caitlin studied the dense line of guards. “It’s tighter than before.”

“Zorro’s grown paranoid.” Zeke muttered. “He’s afraid of death, so he surrounds himself with walls and soldiers.”

Meanwhile, in the Graystone castle grounds, Zorro sat beside the riding arena, watching his daughter gallop across the **track**.

He had lost his son, yes, but now he had a daughter whose mind and **spirit** mirrored his own. If she was molded properly, **she** could inherit everything.

His smile was soft, indulgent. He had placed all his hopes on her.

Zora reined in her horse after several laps, glowing with triumph. She slid down, crossed to him, and said sweetly. “Father.”

“Well done. Your progress is impressive.”

“Thank you, Father.”

She beamed, sitting close. She would use everything he gave her—training, resources, power. If Caitlin could master it, so could she. And one day, she would surpass her.

A servant arrived, whispering news in Zorro’s ear. His jeweled finger tapped the armrest. “So. They’ve arrived.”

“Who?” Zora asked quickly.

“Xero, With Sebastian and Caitlin.”

Her chest clenched, then her eyes sharpened with venom. “Then let’s capture them immediately. Caitlin should die for daring to step into Graystone!”

Her hatred was naked, teeth bared like a wolf.

Zorro fixed her with a cold look. “What have I told you? Have you forgotten already? If you want to achieve greatness, you must hold your temper. My plans **aren’t** finished. If you act rashly, you’ll ruin everything.”

She dropped her gaze, chastened. “Yes, Father. I was too impatient.”

“Patience,” he said. “The ambitious must learn to control the board, not lash out like children. Shortsightedness will never make you great.”

“I understand, Father. I won’t forget.”

He leaned close and whispered instructions. Zora nodded, eyes gleaming. “Yes, Father. I’ll leave at once.”

At the checkpoint, half an hour passed with no word. Xero grew restless and marched to the guards.

“What’s taking so long? Did you even deliver my message?”

The guard paled at his tone. “We did, Mr. O’Malley. If the castle hasn’t replied, we must wait for their orders. Please, just a little longer—I’ll call again now.”

He hurried to make another report.

Another fifteen minutes dragged by before a military vehicle approached from the direction of Graystone. Out stepped a tall, slim figure in black riding gear, whip in hand.

“Miss Preston!” the guards chorused, bowing deeply.

Zora’s chin tilted arrogantly as she strode forward, whip trailing behind her. “Where is Xero?”

“Waiting here, Miss.”

“Take me to him.”

At once, the guards escorted her to the barricade.

“She’s here,” Caitlin murmured inside the car, frowning.

Zora was transformed—her aura sharper, colder, wrapped in arrogance.

“I’ll handle it,” Zeke muttered, ready to step out.

But Xero stopped him. “No rash moves. Let me deal with her. I already offended her once. What’s one more? The Prestons won’t risk open war with my family.”

He stepped forward with an easy **smile**. “Miss Preston.”

Zora halted before him, lips curling. “Did you come all the way to Graystone just to see me?”

“You misunderstand,” Xero replied smoothly. “I have urgent business beyond this checkpoint. Please allow us passage.”

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

55 vouchers

“What urgent business? Tell me first. If I find it suitable, then I’ll allow you through.”

Zora's eyes flicked toward the black convoy behind him. She had already noticed the figures sitting inside. Caitlin and Sebastian must be among them, only disguised.

Xero guessed easily what this was—Zora was deliberately making things difficult. It was all because he had rejected her publicly at the royal banquet.

“We’re going to Santa Aurelia to find Aurelius, for my aunt,” Xero explained calmly. “Her health has been failing, and hospitals can’t diagnose her illness.”

It was a flawless excuse. His aunt, Princess Nevaeh, truly had been unwell.

Zora knew about the O’Malley family and had met the princess before. She understood that Nevaeh wasn’t in the best condition.

So Xero hadn’t lied. But she had no intention of letting him off so easily—not after the humiliation he’d given her in public.

“For something so trivial, why do you need to go personally? Surely one of your men could manage it. Tonight there’s a banquet in the castle. You’ll attend. If you come, I’ll happily see your convoy through.”

“This...” Xero hesitated, glancing instinctively back at the vehicles. “That may not be appropriate. If I don’t go myself, it will seem insincere.”

“You needn’t worry. He’ll meet you regardless. Do you think Aurelius would dare refuse the O’Malley family? Even if he would, would he dare slight the crown? Stop making excuses. Come to the banquet, or no one passes this checkpoint.” She turned as if to leave.

“Miss Preston, wait!” Xero blocked her path. He knew Caitlin’s group was racing against time. He couldn’t let them be delayed.

“I never said I wouldn’t come,” he conceded. “If Miss Preston honors me with an invitation, I’ll gladly attend.”

Her smile curled, triumphant. “Good. You’ll join me at the banquet. Your men can go find Aurelius. When they return, they can fetch you back. Isn’t that convenient?”

“Yes,” Xero said evenly.

“Excellent. Then come with me.”

As he climbed into Zora’s car, he glanced once more at Caitlin and the others, signaling them

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silently not to worry and to continue without him.

Once he was seated, Zora waved her hand. "Let them through."

55 vouchers

The gates creaked open at last, and Sebastian's convoy moved forward. Caitlin watched anxiously from the rear window as Xero's vehicle grew smaller and smaller in the distance.

"What now? He's turned himself into a hostage for us."

"We'll worry about him after," Sebastian reassured. "He'll manage. Zorro wants to win over the O'Malleys. He won't harm Xero."

Zeke, who had been silent until now, spoke with fury. "I should have strangled her when I had the chance. She never should have lived to crawl back to Zorro."

"Enough," Caitlin said softly. "She's changed her name. From now on she's nothing to do with you."

"You're right. I should change mine too—take my real father's name." Zeke's tone was firm. He

shadow.

I was done with the Preston name, done with Zoreal father's,

Two hours later, the convoy reached Santa Aurelia.

The mountain town shimmered like a jewel set into the ridges, perched high and bright. Only a narrow suspension bridge led inward. Vehicles couldn't cross. They had to proceed on foot.

The wooden bridge swayed beneath them, but once across, the view opened into rolling hillsides and vibrant homes. Caitlin took in the sight, her hand in Sebastian's.

"Did you know this place before?" she asked.

"No," he admitted. "Why?"

"Because this was my grandmother's homeland. Santa Aurelia. Didn't you know?"

Sebastian blinked, surprised. "I thought she was from the US."

"She told me herself," Caitlin said with a smile. "Her original surname was Gonzales. When they immigrated to the States, the Sanders family adopted them. That's when the name changed."

Sebastian's mouth fell open. He was embarrassed. A Vanderbilt, yet he knew less of his grandmother's history than Caitlin.

Alicia, walking beside them, perked up. “So she was a Gonzales too? That’s our family name!”

“Yes,” Caitlin said. “Her name was Valentina Gonzales. Ever heard of her?”

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55 vouchers

“There are too many Gonzales families around here,” Alicia said, shaking her head. “That one doesn’t ring a bell.”

They continued through the colorful streets until the town gave way to a broader clearing at the base of the mountains. Ahead stood a large lodge-like compound, three stories high.

A wooden sign marked the entrance: The Varga Healing Institute.

It wasn’t easy to see the great healer himself. Aurelius rarely appeared. But his students practiced here daily, treating the sick who came from all over the world.

Diseases that stumped hospitals often found answers here.

“That’s his institute,” Alicia said excitedly, pointing. “Look how busy it is.”

She had spent her childhood years here, studying medicine under Aurelius, the place as familiar as home.

Caitlin, by contrast, had only studied briefly before Alicia had driven her away. She doubted whether Aurelius would welcome her now, let alone agree to help.

“Let’s just knock on his door,” Zeke urged.

“Wait. Don’t go straight to the Vargas’ house,” Alicia cautioned. She hurried off toward the Healing Institute first.

She found a familiar figure, her senior brother Davor, and pulled him aside.

His eyes went wide. “Alicia—you’re alive!”

“Yes.” She smiled faintly. “I’m alive.”

Davor glanced nervously around them and lowered his voice. “After the explosion, when they couldn’t find your body, Graystone started to suspect you survived. They placed men everywhere—surrounded your family home, and even stationed spies here. Do you see those two men in black coats outside the institute? They’re here for you. Coming back now is dangerous beyond words.”

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## Billionsaire's Regret: Finding Her

55 vouchers

“I know. I saw them too. But I came back to find Master for something urgent, a matter of life and death. Davor, please, take me to him!”

Davor hesitated for a moment before nodding. “All right, come with me.”

Using the excuse of moving medicine, he had Alicia help him carry supplies and led her toward the Varga residence.

At the gate of the Healing Institute, Alicia signaled to the others. Together they followed Davor inside.

The two men in black coats stationed at the entrance watched them enter but didn’t find anything suspicious.

Once the doors closed behind them, Davor set the bundle down and said, “Come with me. When Master sees you alive, he’ll be overjoyed.”

They were guided into the inner hall and told to wait. Davor hurried to his master’s quarters.

Inside, Aurelius sat in a wicker chair, sipping tea. His hair was silvered, his features thin and weathered, but his eyes remained sharp and commanding. His face bore the weight of years, lined with sorrow.

“Master, good news!” Davor announced breathlessly.

“What news?” the old man asked.

“Alicia has returned. She’s in the front hall.”

The elder’s expression didn’t shift. It was as though he had expected this moment all along. He waved his hand. “I know. I’ll go shortly. Leave me.”

“Yes, Master.”

Davor ran out, unaware of the storm beneath the calm face he left behind. Aurelius’ brow furrowed deeply.

From behind a folding screen, a man emerged, his body wrapped in black, only his visible-eyes cold with killing intent.

eyes

“Aurelius, you know what you must do,” the man said. “The lives of every member of the Varga family, and everyone in this Healing Institute, are in your hands. Refuse us, and don’t blame us for the slaughter.”

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“I’ll comply,” Aurelius said heavily. “But do not harm the innocent.”

“Do as we say, and they’ll be spared.”

55 vouchers

Aurelius had no choice. He was an old man, ready to face death himself, but he couldn’t risk the lives of so many others.

Moments later, he appeared in the hall, leaning on his cane, dressed in plain robes with looped clasps.

“Master!”

Alicia rose to her feet at once.

He recognized her voice, even if her disguised face was unfamiliar.

“Alicia,” Aurelius said softly.

“Master!” She rushed forward and embraced him, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“My child, it’s enough that you’re alive. I knew you hadn’t perished.”

He patted her back gently, and she held his arm, asking, “How is your health?”

“Good, good.”

“I heard from Davor what’s been happening. I’ve brought trouble to you.”

He shook his head, answering with quiet resolve. “Don’t worry about us. We’re fine. And these people with you?”

Alicia introduced them. “This is Caitlin. We’ve reconciled now.”

Caitlin bowed. “Master Aurelius.”

“Oh, Caitlin... forgive me. I was too harsh with you before. I regret it.” He still remembered driving her away.

“It doesn’t matter,” Caitlin said softly. “You’ll always be my teacher. I’ll never forget your kindness.”

The old man nodded, and Alicia pulled Zeke forward. “This is Zeke. And this is Caitlin’s husband, Sebastian. We’re all in disguise.”

“Well,” Aurelius said, “what brings you so far to find me?”

“Master, Caitlin’s brother has been poisoned. I couldn’t cure him. We need your help.”

After hearing Alicia's account, Aurelius asked, "Do you have photographs?"

"Yes."

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55 vouchers

They handed him pictures of James' injuries. He studied them for a moment. "I can identify several toxins."

"What toxins?" Caitlin asked quickly.

"It looks like a composite poison—a mixture. There's hemolytic venom, gelsemium alkaloids, and certain plant toxins. It requires further analysis."

He lifted his eyes. "Does the patient lie unconscious, with muscle relaxation, heavy breathing, and a faint sweet scent from the wound?"

"That's right," Caitlin confirmed. "Some of it was inhaled, the rest entered through the wound. The toxins combined inside his body. Thankfully, the dosage isn't high. I gave him your antidote pill to suppress the effects. But the poison won't clear from his body. Why?"

Aurelius let out a long sigh. “This may be Scentbane.”

The name was unfamiliar to them all.

“What is Scentbane?”

“A rare, intricate poison carried by fragrance. It’s mild in quantity, but its complexity makes it extremely difficult to treat.” He shook his head gravely.

Caitlin’s heart sank. “Master Aurelius, can you save my brother? Please—I beg you!” She clutched his sleeve, tears falling.

Aurelius looked at her with weary compassion and sighed again. “You’ve come all this way. How could I stand by and do nothing? But I must examine him myself. Where is he now?”

“In the US,” Caitlin admitted. “We didn’t bring him to S-country because it was too dangerous. Please, will you come with us?”

The elder nodded. “Very well. Let me prepare. Alicia, help me gather my supplies.”

“Yes, Master.”

She guided him into the apothecary, where shelves were lined with medicines. Aurelius wrote out a list, and Alicia fetched the items, packing antidotes and remedies.

“Everything’s ready,” she said, bundling the herbs and vials. Then she hesitated.  
“Master... **is** Scentbane truly curable?”

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65 vouchers

“It depends on the dosage,” Aurelius answered. “Lighter cases can be purged. Severe cases— like Caitlin’s brother—are far more complicated.”

Alicia’s jaw tightened. “Who would create such a poison?”

Aurelius

gave a weary sigh. “Do you remember Quarta?”

Alicia froze. “You mean... your first disciple, Quarta?”