

Billionaire's Accidental Wife

Chapter 46

Two weeks ago, Shawn stared out at the empty wall frame of the recently erected high-rise building in his late wife's name. The lower floors had already received walls, but this one – at the top level – had yet to be protected from the elements. He looked at his new building, yet everything now felt empty, dull, and boring without his wife. Catherine, how could he leave her there? left her alone and pregnant? She wanted to come, yet he was too stupid and selfish to leave her instead. Now, burdened by feelings of guilt, regret, and even dismay, he was drowning in his grief. How could everything change from the color rainbow and sunshine to a massive dark and sad downpour of unforgiving rain?

One minute, he had arranged a surprise dinner for them after his grandfather's funeral; the next, he received a call that his vacation house was blown up to pieces and none of them survived, only some scattered pieces of his state and his men and Catherine's corpses. He had never been in grief like that, even when his grandfather died, but losing her, it was a sort of grief that was so tremendous and dark, it was a kind of sorrow and regret that made him wish he had died with her and their unborn child. It was more than painful, and just like now, he had never been bothered by heights, and he wasn't now, even though he knew he was about to die. 1

But how could he orchestrate his revenge if he was dead?

With a setback, he stepped behind as the wind plowed through the fifth-story building platform, blowing his hair around like leaves in a cyclone. He flinched as debris and dust bathed his face as he looked at the massive sight below. But Shawn remained firm, his inner self conjuring up some dark, evil plans for Elizabeth and her men... He had conducted his own investigation and found out that it was Elizabeth and Shawn's cousin Javier who was behind the bombing that resulted in the killing of his wife and unborn child. Up until now, Elizabeth has remained missing and probably hidden. After all, he had made a hit on her head, one million pounds each for her and his cousin, and the waiting was beyond him. He wanted revenge. His hatred was so deep that he wanted nothing but to kill the two.

However, internally, his mind retreated to a reflective state, just as he'd learned to do so long ago when he was a teenager. He dismissed the external elements-the wind, the sounds and shitty odors of the city and stood tight-lipped against the wall. He wanted information about Javier and his mob. Shawn even let Eddie manage some of the espionage, knowing that his butler had spied all over the place. After all, he had been in the field before, and the old man had acquired information that was even confidential. The knowledge he had amassed about the whereabouts of his cousin Javier was so private that even his hired men weren't able to earn it. And knowing that he was involved with criminal organizations, assassins, and data of his crimes, he would never assume his

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cousin was capable of.

Just last week, Eddie's men took Javier's associate, John, from his home in the middle of the night. John's house was torn apart in their search for something. Shawn knew they wouldn't find him. The evidence of his cousin's involvement in his vacation state bombing was not there, yet, anyway. Shawn thought Javier was cleverer than that, and he knew that the man standing behind Javier wanted his grandfather's gold bars and the diamond. There was no way Shawn was going to let Javier possess it though, but knowing that death didn't frighten him. And knowing that Javier's only concern was for his lover, Elizabeth, who was now still missing, was hiding and Eddie believed she knew something about what, and to whom Javier was working on, they might go after her to know more.

Once she was apprehended, Javier could no longer protect her. "This is the last time I'm going to ask you, John. What do you know of Javier's plan?" The voice came from behind Shawn. It was Eddie's, though only by a decade or so. His name was Edmond, and his reputation was darker than most in Mexico's sprawling criminal underworld. John smirked and allowed himself to laugh, "Do I look stupid?" which was rewarded with a swift chop to his stomach and a series of slaps. The laughter turned to coughs as he dropped to his knees, catching himself with his right hand on the dusty concrete floor. John winced but picked himself up quickly.

"Not so funny now, John?" The battered man nodded a few times, still coughing under his breath. "How do you know that, b***h? Y—you don't even realize what I'm laughing at, huh! D -do you think I'll be a-afraid of you? Javier was three times scarier than you all c combined." John coughed again and smirked.

Shawn looked at them in the mirror and closed his eyes for a bit as if telling Eddie what to do.

"John, John... How stupid of you to even think that... Perhaps you could enlighten me and all of us." Eddie waved his hand to encompass the other six men in the unfinished skyscraper zone. Shawn's bodyguards all wore black button-up shirts. Of course, the top two or three buttons were undone to reveal the tops of their former gang's signature tattoos. The ink was a common subject for anyone who vowed allegiance to Richmond. While there were variations in the designs, the overarching pattern remained similar. The only thing Eddie could correlate it too was a zip-up dark shirt that stayed unzipped at the top like a pair of open tattooed heads. It was one way people could identify them and stay out of their way. That, or do whatever they told besides they were under Richmond now.

And though Eddie was just an ordinary butler to Richmond, everyone knew he was behind all of the recruiting men for Shawn. After all, those who knew him had been

under the impression that they should respect Eddie or die in vain. Eddie had risen to power quickly within the Richmond secret organization.

Shawn Richmond governed a large gang portion of the city. And no one defied him. To do

so was to be at the wrong end of a horrible death. But John didn't know all of that. In his mind, it didn't change a thing. Shawn was just a businessman, a billionaire. Someone weak and predictable and when John spoke again, it was a word of insult that made Eddie kick him all over again. He did so with persistent intention. Yet John would never bend to this old man, no matter what the threat. He was afraid of Javier the most. "Even if you had the best interrogator or torturer, you wouldn't be able to get something from me. Someone who spent their life trying to cheat, steal, and murder their way to success only looks for the easy path. It is not the way of mine and, therefore, will never be yours to walk."

Eddie pursed his lips and nodded. "You're not wrong, John, I've done all those things. I wasn't born into a life of privilege. But I've built something for myself the best way I could. And I know just how to get into you."

"And once you have something from me, then what? You'll let me go?" John scoffed and spat on Eddie's face. That made Shawn raise his brows, but Eddie remained calm..

"I don't think so, John. But sure, you'll either end up dead or you'll be on our side... I need an inside man, you know."

"Betray Javier? No, I have no intention of deceiving him. I have loftier goals. Once I have Shawn's head, I will find the key to Richmond's wealth. And when that happens, I will be the unquestioned authority of all London's mobs. No one will stand in my way. I will be a king. And my reach will be limitless." John grumbled his last word, not even convinced by his own words.

Shawn frowned at the man. So, Javier wanted his head as well? He thought that this Richmond wealth was indeed a curse as he cast a disapproving gaze like he would at a child trying to steal another cookie from the jar. "Do you really believe it will bring you such power?" He asked.

"Of course, it will. Wealth is everything. Money is everything. Why wouldn't it? It is a symbol of power, leadership. It will lead to admiration from all."

"No," Shawn shook his head as Eddie said, "No, John, Mr. Richmond is right, it will make you a mark. And those who pursue wealth must possess respect. When I look at you, I see no respect. You are a weakling and a clown, bent on concrete gain and whatever happiness life can offer you. The glory will not be yours. It can only be found by a fighter, not a villain."

Shawn nodded as Eddie listened to his captive's rant, but he would hear no more. He held up a finger for silence. Looking down at the ground for a moment, Eddie sniffled and rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. When he looked up, the frustration was gone. His eyes were filled with a horrible determination.

"You're really not going to tell us what we want to know, are you, John?"

The man drew in a long, deep breath and tilted his chin back. He said nothing, which was

all Eddie needed to hear.

"That's fine. We'll find more information about Javier's whereabouts without you. Even if we have to kill your family lover's home, I will know. I will dig into the brain of your lover, and when I'm done, I will have more information about who's behind all of this mess. Understand? You have my word on that. Now, nod if you want to be on our side, or, well, should I remind you that I was known to have Europe's sickest torture method? Shall I put you on the test?"

Shawn stared out across the bright lights of the big city. It cast a pale glimmer into the darkness above, drowning out all but the brightest stars. Eddie grabbed his captive by the back of the blond shirt and jabbed him over to the edge of the building next to Shawn. The wind picked up and blew across their faces. John's fake blonde wavy black hair whipped around with each blast. Eddie held his upper body over the rim of unsmooth concrete, leaning him over so he could see the sidewalk and street below. A few cars rolled by, but most of the sidewalks were clear, save for the random late partygoers. John's eyes widened. Even he wasn't totally immune to fear.

"Last chance, John. Tell me, are you with us or not? I am not a patient man. Maybe Mr. Richmond here is, but I am not, and I will let you go without a doubt. You should know, Edmond the destroyer will never make a joke"

John couldn't help but notice his murderer's look as he trembled in fear and his choice of words that the old man used. Either way, he was a dead man. Whether he told them about

Javier's plan or not, he was going to end up on the pavement below. There was no stopping that now. The only thing he could do was slow them down and hope. "Go to hell."

Eddie's right eye twitched. He took in a quick, nasty breath. "Fool... very well then. "His fingers let go of John's shirt, and gravity did the rest, pulling him down, deliberately at first. By the time he'd passed the floor five stories down, he was speeding toward the street.

To Shawn's surprise, John cried out, the piercing screech shortly consumed by the sounds of the city. He watched the man's whole fall until it came to a quiet end on the asphalt fifty stories below. Eddie, on the other hand, smiled as his nostrils blazed. He glared at the body. He stepped back from the edge and addressed one of the men. "Ashton, take your men, and search his lover's house again for anything." Before the man in question could protest, Shawn raised his hand. "I know you searched thoroughly before. Perhaps there is something we missed the first time, a clue, something that could lead us to Elizabeth or to Javier... something important."

They all nodded.

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Present time

Catherine couldn't believe what she was hearing. She knew she needed to think this through twice before choosing something she would later regret. The room still hasn't come into total focus. Her mind was groggy, numbed by something. Was it lack of sleep or something more disturbing? She shook her head to try to clear her mind. The scene cleared, and with that clarity, a terrible feeling crept into her stomach.

The man who called himself Javier was now standing at the cell door as a burning, acrid cigarette scent filled the enclosure air and seeped into his nostrils, causing him to wrinkle his nose. "D**n it! I hate these guys."

Catherine stood, liquid pooling on the floor at her feet. She'd not realized it at first because of her flip-flops, but she was standing in a small puddle. The liquid oozed off the small bathroom sink and dripped freely down to the floor.

"So Mrs. Richmond, what do you think?" Javier asked.

Questions riddled her mind like bullets from a machine gun. How did this happen? Why did it happen? What did I do to deserve this? How am I going to clean this-up? She thought to herself.

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Catherine's eyebrows started to pinch together in confusion, yet she answered: "Call me Catherine, I'm no longer Mrs. Richmond. For now, you may call me "anything."

"Anything? Well, not that I'm going to blame you. The man left you hanging from your insanity and left you alone. I'll hate him just the same."

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“I don’t care now, Javier, and what happened to Elizabeth? Where is she? I thought she ordered your men to kill me? I am aware of your relationship with the b***h, you know.” Anger boiled up inside her, but she pushed it away, forcing it back down into the depths whence it came. Getting angry wouldn’t solve anything. Right now, she had to clean up the mess with her own wits. There would be plenty of time to work through emotions later. She lifted a foot out of the pool of liquid and stepped over to the sidewall. Looking at nowhere in particular. There it sat, staring at her with an uncaring and righteous glint. Something was missing. And she realized what it was. She shook her head, now remembering how it had all happened. He flashed back to the night before. It had been a crazy morning.

“Um- so smart little girl you are, eavesdropping on my men, yes?”

“Pretending to be fast asleep has earned me the knowledge and all. “You guys run a neat little operation over in London...”

“Oh, well... I admire you, Catherine. Even on the verge of death, you are still able to outrun Elizabeth. I like that kind of power. It will fuel your rage, and you need it.” Javier mumbled, giving her a newspaper. “You might want to check that newspaper.”

“Whatever... Where is the b***h, Javier? I will do anything to get her head.” Yelled Catherine as Javier gave her the newspaper.

It was Shawn and Elizabeth on the front page. Shawn had his usual blank expression and a scowl on his face, while Elizabeth was smiling. They were newlyweds. “How is this even possible? He is married to me. This is...” Catherine breathed in heavily as she asked, her tears beginning to fall down her cheeks. She was slowly creeping out as pain and another heartbreak sped through her heart.

How could he betray her like this? Her baby’s gone, so Shawn married the reason for her pain? She didn’t mean a thing to him? She no longer cared if she was crying or if her silent anger was visible throughout the day. She was disappointed. Her anger crept in. She wanted to hurt them. Javier smirked, “Well, to the world... you are already dead.”

“Well, blame it on Elizabeth She staged everything. Besides, she also betrayed me, using me and my men to get to Richmond You and I were on the same page.”

“All I know is, she kidnapped and tortured me... and your men, Javier”,

“Well, my men helped with the kidnapping from Richmond’s vacation manor. But, memories flooded her mind. She’d been on her morning walk, then came back and made her milk. She left it there on the table when her phone rang. Then the last thing she remembered was that she suddenly felt sleepy and drowsy. Something has happened. Someone put something in her milk.

“Since you prefer not to beat around the bush, Catherine, I will extend the same kindness to you to save time for both of us.”

“That would be wonderful, Javier. Then I can get back to my plan to kill Elizabeth.” She thought, nothing but revenge. She wanted her dead. She wanted to inflict such pain beyond the b***h’s comprehension

For a second, Javier seemed fascinated. “I assure you, Catherine, we are on the same team. I’m hoping we can make that an official position.”

There it was again, a quotation from some sort of invitation, a request? Perhaps a demand. What was he getting at?

“I have to admit,” Javier said. “You are something else, Shawn was lucky to have but obviously, you are just like one of his women. He married. Elizabeth that fast? Luckily, we have a common goal.. to take Elizabeth.”

“I thought she was on your side?”

“Yes, before she betrayed me and went under the table and ordered a hit on my head after she used my men for her cause,’ he muttered, raising his eyebrows. “But you have to know this girl, you can come up with all the justifications you want for vengeance, yet it will always be the work of an inner temper and thus can never represent your best or what you could have been capable of. You need to move smarter, not harder. You and I will be a better team. You come highly recommended by my men, by the way. I can help you with your training. I can help you, I will train you, make you strong, powerful, deadly and train you as a world-class assassin... or a spy... you call it whatever you want

She just stared at him.

Javier raised his leg and crossed it over the other to ease the circulation. “Let me be blunt, Catherine. I know about your background. You, your brother Dave, your friends, Jane and Chelsea were under my watch. You have a choice but it’s all up to you. One call, just one call, and they will be taken care of.”

“F**k you! Leave them out of this.” She grumbled in frustration. Fear creeping in.

“Oh, woman, of course, as long as you comply with my demands.

“You are using me.”.

“Of course I am. That’s why I didn’t kill you when Elizabeth told me so.’

She ignored the last part and focused on the word he kept using as if it made everything clear.” Why?”

“Well,” he elongated the word for dramatic effect. “My group had been wiped out. Half of us were in prison. We are a small operation now, hiding in plain sight.”

“What do you want? So, you’re spies or assassins, what?” She muttered in visible frustration.

Javier refolded his hands across his lap. “I need an inside man at Richmond. Both-when the situation necessitates it. However, we do our best not to get involved in the intelligence counterintelligence of my cousin. I know he had his own men. My boss, however, wanted something from Richmond. That’s why I need you. Everything, of course, will be covered and, for the most part, someone will let you know your next move. For now, however, I’ll have a few months to train you with our world-class assassins and experts.”

“That’s debatable.” She said and began pacing inside the cell.

He allowed a quiet snort to escape his nose. “Indeed.”.

Catherine sighed, “if your boss has everything covered, what is it you do, exactly?”

He drew a long breath. “Smart question. Most of my men are constantly focused on each other’s assignments, but there is only so much they can do. I wanted you to hand me the key.

“Key for what?”

“You’ll know soon enough.”

“Javier, get to the point.”

He didn’t flinch at her brusqueness. “I have received information that there is a new group after the key-as we speak-”

“So? Take them out, you can do that, right?”

“Why do you think I’m talking to you?”

Her frown deepened. “No. I mean, have one of your men take them out.”

“I wish it was that simple, Catherine. You see, my gang is wanted all over Europe. You will be our first choice-should you decide to come work for us.”

She pressed her back against the chair.

“What is it to me?”

“Good questions.”

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One year later, Scotland.

Once Catherine awakened and sat up, the rays of sun streaming in through the windows immediately blinded her. Her vision was blurry and her hair was a mess as she yawned and tried to get her thoughts together.

She instantly noticed that there was a space on the mattress where Dave should be.

She blinked twice, she was alone in the apartment. It was too silent, too steady and cold.

The empty space was even more apparent now that she was alone. Dave and she have no furniture, no food, and barely any money. And neither of them has a job. It would take months to get the place back to its former classy glory. Maybe, coming to him was a mistake. She probably made too many mistakes. Yes, just a week ago, Catherine was able to escape Javier’s men. It was no easy feat. It was carefully planned. She managed to befriend one of her trainers and gave the poor man a knockout, then flew under a different name, with a fake passport. With her hair very short, contact lenses, and emo dark outfit, no one recognizes her. Months of training made her aware of everything. Buckets of sweat, a tin of blood, and an unhealed wound from her training exercise made her different from who she really was. Her motivation was to haunt Elizabeth. It was the only thing she could think of. She knew she was now ready for the real world, and so she arranged and planned a thorough escape and went to Dave’s here in Scotland. It was risky, wagering her brother’s life was never on her bucket list, but he was the only one who could help her, so she ransacked his old apartment, and maybe it was sheer luck that Dave was here, and knowing full well that Javier was coming after her and probably too unhappy about her escape, she became obsessed with Dave’s security.

“Where the hell was he?” She grumbled under her breath. What if something happened to him? What if Javier had been her brother? She shivered at the idea.

Looking at the almost empty space, she had no clue how to get them back on their feet, and she was quite nervous about beginning the process of renewing her life. She didn’t tell Dave everything, just a few bits and pieces of her lost memory. She was sure Dave was too happy to even question her story or the credibility of it. After all, she was a

changed woman now. She was the total opposite of herself before. She became cold. It was quite the opposite of her previous friendly demeanor. She even told Dave to never let Shawn know about her. She made him promise. Yes, Dave was very upset and angry about her unborn child. But she knew her brother was more than grateful that she was alive after all this time. He even told her about his grave, their friends' grief from her sudden death, and how upset and sad Jane and Chelsea were. How Shawn grieves her death How he manages to silence the media. Dave even questions the woman's burnt corpse, which they hurriedly buried during her funeral. It was so burned that no one recognized it wasn't even Catherine. And yet, everybody believed it was her.

She got up from the mattress on the floor and made her way to the small bathroom. She allowed the water to wash over her too-pale skin and jet-black short hair. Despite the cold temperature, she found the water incredibly relaxing.

The water was a symbol of her freedom as it washed over her body. Drip by drip, it encompassed her, releasing her trapped senses and conflicted sentiments. It reminded her that she was home and she was no longer burdened by the horrible life she had lived back then. Javier's hand. It was probably decent prisoner ground. She had been guarded 24/7, with only ten minutes of freedom in the bathroom. They trained her well, from guns to hand-to-hand combat to sword fighting. Catherine was no less than a tool. A tool for Javier's boss, greater plans to take the key to Richmond's gold and diamonds.

He stepped out of the shower and grabbed her towel quickly. She tiptoed on the white, creamy tiles and maneuvered her way around the empty apartment towards Dave's suitcase in the corner.

She pulled on a pair of jeans, a plain dark t-shirt, and Dave's girlfriend's favorite converse shoes. It felt wonderful to be out of those stiff workout clothes and be back in her own comfort zone. Maybe she will start planning her life now. What was she supposed to do? Everything was dull now, even her love for Shawn was forgotten. She seldom thinks about him anymore. Because whenever she does, she still feels the pain of betrayal, and even when Dave mentioned that Shawn never remarried nor married Elizabeth, the pang of pain was still there. Perhaps she was wrong? Maybe Shawn cared for her? But what happened to them exactly? She had more questions than answers.

But looking at herself in the mirror, she felt like herself again, perhaps a little empty and cold, but she was still her.

Just then, the door opened and Dave walked in, carrying two brown bags. She was dressed in black pants and a bright yellow shirt. She appeared flustered but natural.

She quite likes this look on him. The eye bags were gone.

"Dave? Where the hell have you been? I told you to-" she said irritably as she ran over to him and helped with the bags, setting them down on the kitchen counter.

“Stop mothering Catherine.”

“I was worried, Dave. I told you to always tell me.”

“Come on, I just went to the grocery store. “He said with a smile. Looking at his big sister, Dave thought that she was no longer there. But unlike the Catherine he once knew, something in her had changed drastically. She had that look. The look of a soldier came from the war. She was always alert and... damned if he could put a word to it. But even so, he was grateful that she was alive and well. Maybe her little amnesia about what she was saying took a toll on her. Not that she didn't believe her, but it was too easy. Somehow, his sister was not telling her the truth. “Come on ... Catherine, don't give me that look, but anyway, don't you look cute? It's been a while since I've seen you in jeans and a t-shirt.”

“Next time, please leave me a note. You have me worried there.”

“Find...it's not like someone's going to kidnap me here. We are both penniless.” He joked, but yes, it's true. After her supposed death, he stopped painting and worked as a farmer's apprentice on the outskirts of the city. It was just sheer luck that his apartment was still empty when his landlord accepted him here last month. Maybe the old man still thought that he was still associated with Richmond, after all, he was the one who helped him before. But after Catherine's funeral, he stopped accepting his help and came back to Scotland.

“Never, never joke about it, Dave. I wouldn't be able to come back to my senses if I lost you too.” She began to step backward. At that same moment, Dave saw her as weak as her old self. But seeing her in pain and such sadness made him want to kill those who hurt her. Maybe someday, she will tell him everything.

“Ok, I'm sorry...” he said sweetly, grabbing an apple from one of the bags and propping himself up on the counter. “Where did you go this morning?” changing the subject, he asked:

“Just here... never left the house.” She answered with a little whimper.

“Oh, well, I just had to take a walk. It was so beautiful outside. I really missed going for walks in the neighborhood. I forgot how gorgeous the mornings are here. Then I went to check on my stuff in old storage, which should be delivered in two days, and then I went to the farmers' market for some groceries.”

“Good,” she let out a deep sigh. Dave could tell-being home was making her emotional and scared. Scared with whom?

He added, “Oh, well sis, it's so good to be home, right? Stop thinking and help me with breakfast. And I'm sorry for what happened, but don't think about it now, OK? We can do this together. Us. Just us.”

“Just us...” she nodded. The last thing she wanted to do was ruin the mood by diving back into the mess with Shawn and what happened. Dave reached out and rubbed her arm in comfort.

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She took a sharp breath in and spoke again, “Shawn never loved me and I really didn’t think it through before I made the decision to get married and live with him. It was a mistake. We had such a wonderful life there in London, just us and my goldfish. I never should’ve given it up. I’m so sorry for what happened to us, Dave. I’m so selfish.” She hopped off the counter and Dave embraced her in a warm, tender hug. “Silly... you did everything for me, Catherine. Don’t you think Shawn didn’t tell me about your contract? About you, sacrificing your whole life to give me an easy one? You did everything for me. You are never selfish. Never. You have to understand that.”

“I am so disappointed in myself, Dave,” she continued

“No..Don’t be. You are amazing. It’s me who wanted to apologize...I’m your brother. I should’ve known better. Please forgive me, Catherine,” he sniffles, holding him tighter.

“Dave, please stop crying. You don’t have to apologize.” She pulled away and stared into his cloudy eyes.

“Fine... but Catherine, it’s so good to have you back... how about Jane and Chelsea?” Dave added with a small smile.

“Not yet. I will inform them soon. But not now.”

He nodded.

The next day, it was barely three o’clock in the afternoon, and the movers were already there with their furniture that had been cooped up in storage for a few months.

As soon as they entered the apartment, Catherine slipped into manager mode. She was now bellowing out instructions on where everything needed to go, so Dave got started on the design

layout of the place.

As soon as an item or box was put down, he moved it around and added his special decorative touch to make the apartment feel homier. Soon, Catherine will have completed the living room. It was decked out with the same creamy rug Dave had had for years, a polished coffee table, a plush golden-colored sofa, and a few family photos hanging on the walls.

The next things they did were hang white curtains above the sliding door that leads onto the balcony and add a few souvenir lamps to give the flat a different look.

Catherine had to admit that she enjoyed watching the transformation take place. She was completely in her zone, designing each room. Adorning also brings back fond memories of Dave and her that she thought were lost.

Dave cannot hide the happiness he felt seeing his sister direct the movers like a professional. Here she was, bustling about the place, her face damp with sweat.

Long after the movers had gone, Catherine and Dave were still busy rearranging the furniture.

ng the kitchen, she was focused on her room. Maybe this new life wasn't that bad. She thought to herself. But of course, she knew better. Her life would never be the same again, for now. She needed to do this to forget everything. Forget Shawn, her baby, and Javier and his men. Förget Elizabeth while the workload was full-on, she could not be any happier. This was what she needed most before thinking about her plans.

Just as she moved her dresser up against the wall opposite her bed, she heard a soft knock on the main door.

"I'll get it!" Dave called out from the kitchen. "It must be the last mover dropping off the oven..."

Catherine peered out of her bedroom window to see him hop over some boxes, rolled up wallpaper, tools, and other various items.

When he finally reached the door, he swung it open and froze.

"D*****d... who is it?"

When he did not answer her, Catherine let go of the dresser and walked out of her bedroom.

As soon as she was close enough to see the person at the door, her breath caught in her throat.

What the hell was he doing here?

Shawn stood in the doorway, motionless. "Catherine?"

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“C-Catherine! You are alive!” Shawn stood at the door, shocked and just staring at her in utter disbelief. Shawn knew he was gaping at her. He had received information from one of his men that he had seen someone like Catherine at Dave’s apartment. He even sent a picture. Yes, the picture was not as clear as it should be because it was taken far away, but it definitely looked like his wife, so he arranged a quick flight to his private jet immediately. And no, he wasn’t disappointed. There, she was standing at the kitchen door, his wife, Catherine, with very short hair, well-defined feminine muscles that weren’t there before, her tummy flat, her eyes cold, raw, and lifeless.

“Catherine?” He whispered under his breath. The only word he could muster. He was at a loss for words because he was not sure how a soul as pure as hers had survived this long in this world with so many of his enemies. Looking at her made his heartbeat so fast that it echoed through his ears, deafening him. She was not only soft-hearted, but she was also tough enough to stay alive, hidden away from That takes a kind of bravery that she was still processing, hence the silence.

“Oh...” was all Catherine could muster up as she covered her mouth in disbelief. He was here? Why? How?

Dave still did not move or speak and just went back to his phone. Gestures for Shawn to come inside.

The silence continued, causing Shawn to shift his feet with discomfort.

“I hope I’m not intruding,” he finally said in a soft tone, but his eyes clearly never left Catherine. He wanted to just scoop her up and embrace and kiss the hell out of her, but Dave was eyeing him like a hawk eyeing his prey. Catherine just stared at him. Unmoving.

He looked so handsome, usually with his furrowed forehead and his hands wedged in the pockets of his expensive pants. The long sleeves of his white-buttoned shirt were rolled to his elbows, revealing his tanned forearms and a small ‘Catherine’ tattoo that she had never seen before. His dark wavy hair was slicked back in the usual style, although the Scottish wind seemed to have misplaced a few strands.

She was breathless at the sight of him, and boy was he s**y. It was as if she was meeting him for the first time.

“Come on in, Shawn,” Dave replied warmly. Catherine could tell she was also shocked to see him out of his formal dress wear.

But this look suits him much better. Her breathing was still heavy as he made his way inside the apartment. She had tried so hard to forget about him, yet she knew deep inside her heart. She was still in love with the man..

“I apologize for showing up unannounced...” As he spoke, he moved further into the apartment and stood directly in front of her. “Catherine...” He walked past Dave and embraced Catherine so tightly. The shock was gone as he caressed her cheek, still amazed to see her alive. “God, you’re alive! Oh, Catherine...”

They locked eyes, and his intense gaze sucked her in like it always does..

“What happened? Please tell me... the child... our baby?” He asked, as if somewhat scared of her

response.

But her tongue was trapped between Shawn’s appearance and her rapid heart rate.

After another few moments, she composed herself. “Shawn... what on earth are you doing here?”

“Catherine... please...I need to know? Who took you? Who hurt you? Please, where have you been all those months I’ve gone insane? I thought I had lost you. Did you know how devastated I am?”

“Because I lost your heir?”

“F**k no! Because I lost you, dammit! It’s all my fault. I left you there alone with the... Hell f**k. I’m so sorry. Yes, I care about the child as I care about you. But... It’s all my fault. It’s all my...” Shawn breathed in and said, “I really wasn’t happy with the way things went down in my life since you’ve been gone.” He inhaled deeply. Catherine could tell there was a great deal of weight attached to the words he was struggling to say. She didn’t think she had ever seen him so nervous, so furious at himself and so relieved at the same time. It was quite a stretch from the poised Mr. Richmond.

Dave cut in, “alright... I have to go get some tea in the f*****g coffee shop while you two stand there and watch each other’s eyes like you are about to f**k here in my living room. Feel free to keep it a little silent, yes?” He grumbled and left them as he closed the door.

Catherine blushed and stepped a little away from Shawn. “Well, it’s a long story. Can I offer you a drink? My apologies for the state of the apartment, we’re just trying to get things organized.”

Never before had Shawn noticed how time was so much like water; that it can pass slowly, a drop at a time, even freeze, or rush by in a blink. The clock announced it was measured and constant, tick-tock, part of a logical world; the clock lies. The past years without her had passed like thousands of camera frames per second shown one at a time. It was that mundane, lifeless. In this slow-time bubble, the birdsong was louder, the apathy was colder, and the colors were brighter. All the while, his insides felt as if

there was nothing there, nothing to need feeding, nothing to need anything at all, but then she was now standing over him. Warmth, breathing, still as beautiful as ever.

“God, I miss you so much,” Shawn mumbled as he looked at her lips.

His eyes were locked on hers, and she flinched under his penetrative gaze.

“Um-“She ushered them into the living room. They sat down on the couch, and Shawn took another deep breath before speaking.

“I feel like there are a lot of words left unsaid from the last time we saw each other. Between all the silent fighting and me ignoring you. If only I had brought you with me, but I was too scared that I would be ambushed again. That is why I left you there. I’m so sorry, Catherine. If I could turn back time... I-”

“Stop right there. We can’t do anything about it. I lost my baby and...” it was time to let her heart out as she sobbed on Shawn’s shoulder. They both cried. Both are bereaved by the loss of a loved

one. After Catherine’s heart broke, she bled an ocean through her eyes. Her sadness eats her soul as it feels wafer-thin. Her body trembled and chilled from crying so hard on Shawn’s shoulder. However, even this magnitude of grief passed. And while it does, she learns more about pain than she ever wanted to know. Then she remembered it. Then she used it as the fuel she needed to create a world with less suffering. Or, at least, that was what she did

suffering. Or, at least, that was what she did for months, and she saw a lot of people doing the same thing in many different ways. Broken-hearted was a tough roll of the dice, but if she knew how to transform that raw pain into her strength, her soul-roared yet again, with Shawn crying with her, grieving the loss of their child. She just wanted to melt into her tears until they were both empty on the inside.

Twenty minutes later, both dried their eyes and caressed each other. “I don’t think anything was cleared up. But the first thing I need to do is apologize to you, Catherine, for the harsh way in which I spoke to you before I left. I was so devastated by my grandfather’s death that I wasn’t able to see clearly that you wanted to come with me. I was just too worried that they may come after you.”

“Who?”

“The one who wanted my wife and child dead. I have enemies, Catherine. Since my grandfather left me something, my own family was after me. They wanted it.”

Catherine couldn’t pretend to understand what he was thinking, but he had the right to talk about it like that. So she ended up telling him everything, about how Elizabeth

losing her child while Shawn clenched his fist like he was about to attack someone. But she never mentioned Javier recruiting her as their inside spy. She didn't know if it was better to tell Shawn, but she wouldn't want Javier to target Shawn instead. For now, she needs to keep it to herself.

"Elizabeth made sure that my life was a living hell. I was brought back to health all over again, then the torture repeated. It was a loop, a never-ending pain. I wished for a quick death, but it never came.

"The b***h will pay. I will. f**k! I'll kill her slowly for doing it to you... I will."

"She is mine, Shawn! Promise me! She is mine to kill." Her eyes were blurry with hatred. The animosity in her voice was clear. Fury roared through her heart and soul. It was like eating her inside out. Changing her. Shawn just stared at her. "I can't promise you, Catherine. She will pay dearly for that, I promise you." His own fury vibrated through his being as he burned with anger and frustration. Something was wrong with Catherine. That he knew something was way deeper, darker. Like she was someone else entirely. She became different, and Shawn couldn't blame her.

"She took my... she knew very well I was p-pregnant, but she, s-she never stops... she wants the baby dead. She wanted me dead just because I was married to you."

"I'm sorry, sweethearts. It's all my fault. But listen, I know you're angry." He turned away from her and looked back at his finger where he still wore their wedding ring. "But I need you to understand that I care about you deeply and that everything we had was real. The truth is... I-I care about you so much. But I don't want you to get involved in it if you think you are likely to do so. This is my war. I will take care of it."

"Hell no! Do you think I survived just to hide?"

He cut in. "Catherine, listen up, I can't make it if something happens to you. I can't lose you again."

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