

## Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA

### Chapter 56

In another inexpensive inn, Catherine and Shawn spent their night planning and calling a lot of people in the small but decent room. She knew her husband was scheming something big, but her only main concern was her brother, Dave. What if the kidnapers had killed him already and it was too late to rescue him? Not that she didn't trust Shawn and his resources, but she wanted to make the rescue as soon as possible, and sleeping wide awake the whole night made her think about looking for her brother herself. But how? Shawn was her best option, as he knew some people who knew people, and above all, he knew where the underground shelters of Javier's mob were. However, were they even sure it was Javier's men?

Those nagging questions kept taunting her. She knew Javier. He wouldn't make a sudden plan or a move that was unsure and irrelevant, and how did he even know that she was here in Scotland anyway?

Her reverie was halted by an unexpected noise outside their room. The sound wasn't loud, but it didn't take much to rouse Shawn Richmond from his sleep as he watched Catherine combing her hair at the small vanity. "Shawn, I think that wasn't a normal sound, right?" She asked as she stopped her hairbrush in mid-air. Now fully dressed with jeans, a shirt, a winter coat and boots they bought earlier from the gas station, she felt a lot fresher and better. Shawn told her to get rid of their belongings and park the SUV somewhere ten miles from the inn to avoid any secret or hidden tracking device planted by their unknown enemy. They traded their SUV for a decent new Honda Civic, hoping not to attract any unwanted attention. To say that the owner of the Honda was beyond surprised was an understatement.

However, Catherine knew that the noise outside their room wasn't just a normal noise from the innkeepers. Ever since her time in the abduction and her training, she'd been a light sleeper. It was times like this that she was glad for that involuntary habit.

She went to the window as Shawn rolled over to the edge of the bed, slid open the nightstand drawer, and removed his .40-caliber pistol.

The polymer and metal fit perfectly into his palm, his fingers wrapping around it like a glove, and it had been a companion in times of need for a long time now. He'd been a fan of Ruger weapons for a good portion of his life, but once he tried the Springfield, he'd become a convert.

Shawn sighed. "What do you think it is?" He asked while Catherine unhurriedly slipped the curtain from the window. It was right there and then that Shawn noticed that she had a gun in her right hand, the one they purchased earlier from the nearby pub as an additional weapon, but he never thought that Catherine even knew how to use it. But by the way she held it like a pro, he knew she could have expertly used it without a doubt.

Regardless, watching her move like a cat, he knew she wasn't the same Catherine as before. She moved and acted like a well trained assassin... Beautiful and deadly.

Now, though, things are different

Shawn had been through a rough time over the last twelve months. After events in London, he'd had a bitter revelation, one that had shaken him to his core.

In the years of working his ass off, managing a business had become his forte, and with his many rivals and enemies in the open, Eddie had become one of his trusted men who gathered some expert, retired military personnel and became his private security team that guarded

him 24/7. Scotland, nevertheless, was a different place and it would take time for them to come here and rescue him. But he already called Eddie earlier, and the old man told him that assistance was on the way and told them to stay here in the inn until help arrived.

Shawn had taken lives in self-defense. Unlike many poor souls, he wasn't plagued by the faces of those he killed. No, his conscience was clear. But he realized that he had never enjoyed the killing, and that realization had rocked him, and now his only goal was to keep Catherine away from the mess. The key must be found, and if only his grandfather had managed to tell him where he had hidden it, his family wouldn't be fighting over a massive wealth of opportunity. He tried telling them that the key was not in his keeping, but they didn't believe him. Of course, he wouldn't believe him either. After all, he was the favorite grandson of Sir Anthony Richmond, and it was no secret that his relatives hated the old man, and even his first-degree relatives couldn't deny it. They all wanted the key and now Shawn was at a loss because the old man didn't leave a clue or something like a map to start with.

But keeping himself and Catherine alive was his only objective. Was he a bad person? Was he evil? He certainly felt that way. Since her supposed death, he had become someone else too and had even gone to therapy, been debriefed in a few instances, and been consoled by his friends more than a couple of times in the last twelve months. While some of it helped, much of it did nothing to alleviate the guilt that riddled his heart. 1 Was he a psychopath? A sociopath? Some other kind of "path" he'd never heard of?

His therapist insisted he was none of those things, but in her eyes, he'd seen a lack of conviction

He felt lost. His guilt was eating him alive, and now that Catherine was with him again, he promised to keep it that way.

The only thing that got him by was reminding himself that those he'd killed were evil. Those who attempted his life deserved it, truly horrible people intent on hurting the innocent just to get the key. It was no longer a secret, and now he knew it wasn't just his

family after it. Even the Russian government and France were after it and some of the zealots who he knew would use it for their own horrible cause. Shawn constantly told himself he was merely a tool, a precision instrument used to root out the bad in the world.

But was he?

He thought he'd gotten away from that the killing, the hunting, the running, and hiding since his grandfather's death. He was constantly aware of his back, of his enemies, those traitors, those who betrayed him, and he was always alert, though it should have resulted in far less death and, at the very least, less intrigue. Now it was starting to feel like the opposite was taking place.

He swung his legs over the bed's edge and planted his feet on the cold floor. The action didn't make so much as a light whoosh or thud. Years of practice had turned moving silently, even in the supposed safety of his room, into second nature.

Shawn reached into the drawer again and removed a different weapon. He stuffed the Springfield into the belt of his pants for a moment as he inspected the new weapon. The sleek black pistol had no hammer, none of the usual trimmings that most weapons display.

"Just some tourists, a gang of bikers," Catherine grumbled. "But they act weird." "How weird?" he asked and stood beside her, kissing her in the neck. That made Catherine groan, "S-Shawn... stop that."

"Um-you smell rather nice, sweetheart," he answered and gave her a quick peck in the cheeks, then inspected his gun. Instead, a blue LED on the side indicated that the magazine was full and completely charged. Shawn sighed and gripped the weapon with resentful fingers. "A biker? in the winter?" he asked as he looked outside.

"I know, it's weird enough that they are here in the outskirts of Scotland."

"Let me call someone. I'll take a picture and let Eddie review it, we will know soon enough."

"Good idea. For now, let me order something for breakfast."

"How about... um- let me eat you instead?"

"Seriously Shawn? We are in the middle of some stupid crises here and that is all you could ever think about?" "Why not? You like it... I want my morning meal as well... your moan and you...your-" "Shawn! Stop." D\*\*n if she wasn't blushing.

“Come on, sweetheart... you’ll be screaming my name soon.” He smirked as he kissed her on the forehead.

“Shut up! You already had your fill last night” She reddened and dialed the reception, thinking about their lovemaking last night and she blushed even more.

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## **Billionaire’s Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA**

### Chapter 57

Ten minutes later, Shawn flinched and was full of doubt when he heard the unwanted noise again and moved away from the bed while Catherine started calling the reception for their breakfast. His left hand unconsciously reached for the gun in his waistband and dragged it out and peeked at the window again.

Shawn’s grandfather once taught him how to use different guns when he was still a child. Back then, he had no idea why his grandfather had a massive collection of various guns and weapons. He didn’t even question why the old man had men all over the mansion, guarding their safety. Not until he was a teenager when he found out that his grandfather was the leader of an organization specializing in unearthing long-lost treasures, but with his grandfather and his team had been sent to the Middle East, Asia, and all over Europe to assist in the recovery and transportation of an impressive chunk of golden treasure, the massive legendary golden Buddha, and pirate treasure rumored to be one part of an ancient civilization’s treasure horde.

The many bars of gold and the golden Buddha that Shawn’s grandfather was charged with watching over had, allegedly, been a gift to one of the prominent families in the Philippines. As the story goes, the remarkable treasure nearly made it to Europe instead of being lost in transit from Asia to Ireland.

Shawn’s grandfather didn’t mind these guard-and-move jobs and hunting. His grandfather’s men didn’t do a lot of heavy work, but he started researching the old man’s life, his way of living, his grandfather’s many bank accounts offshore, and even the legendary treasure, and he knew that the old man had accumulated a lot of treasure over the centuries. He even called those former treasure hunters and colleagues of his grandfather’s and still found nothing nearer to a key to any treasure.

Occasionally, since his discovery last year, so many problems have arisen. There were many individuals after it; the Russian mob and its government, France, and even those zealots who Shawn’s bet was was the one targeting Catherine, not to mention his own family and Javier’s gang. Shawn’s immediate concern upon waking was that this was one of those times. What if this time they take Catherine again? What if, “Dammit!” he grumbled under his breath as he went to the suitcase and took his dark, fashionable bulletproof clothing with built-in protection like a bulletproof vest underneath. He knew

from Eddie that with unprecedented levels of crime, random shooting attacks, violent protests, and riots, this equipment had never been more relevant.

“Wear this now, wife,” he said to his wife, while Catherine turned her head and raised an eyebrow. “Not again,” she complained. It was Shawn’s vest, but since the attack in the airport, he let her wear it, and she was never happy about it. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Shawn, wearing that traditional body armor on a daily basis is cumbersome and distracting. I can’t even move properly. I don’t-“.

“No buts, you need this.”

“Shawn, you need that more than anything. You are the billionaire here, remember? Not me.” “You are my wife, Catherine. Your safety matters more than anything else.”

Aww! Her heart... Oh, her hopes and her heart...She might be drooling over how cute and amazing it sounds, but above all, she needs him to tell her he loves her. That all matters to her. “Fine,” she answered, and took it from his hands as he helped her while deliberately touching her breast. “Is that even necessary to-” “Of course,” Shawn smirked. He knew this woman would writhe under him, consumed by the intensity of his hard armor that could impale her at any moment now. He was a skillful lover, as was she. Catherine exuded a sensuality on which he couldn’t peg an age. She had the stamina of a 20-year-old and the virginal zest of one who had just been exposed to the ecstasies and ardor of lovemaking. Yet she had the maturity that could hold her man to her and methods that would extend his indefatigability long after younger men would have slumped in weariness. Nevertheless, Shawn was in his early thirties, but age was only a number. With a hard, strong body built through very difficult times, where a small dip in the awareness of his surroundings could cost him his life, his strength was in his youth, which he still carried in him. He was capable of immense love, of giving, of concupiscence that could carry a lover to dizzy heights. A second later, their lips crushed against each other, his tongue probing in rhythm with his shaft as both her orifices welcomed them gleefully. There was still a lot of time left, with much to explore, much to do...

They clung to each other and kissed again, before she turned abruptly and rushed through the phone when it rang and she started telling the receptionist on the other line about her order. “Yes, that too, and coffee will be fine,” she responded.

She stepped to the left, walked a few paces to a small built-in refrigerator that was built into a wall cabinet, took out a bottle and poured a glass. She placed it on a dainty coaster on the desk in front of him and said, “You need this,” she smiled.

“Oh really?” he replied as he surveyed the room when he heard a small buzzing from somewhere and mentioned it to Catherine to keep still. The small desk in the corner

before him had a fake leather top in a deep shade of burgundy. It was obviously not an expensive piece of furniture. There was an old-fashioned blotter, matching the tabletop, with a couple of inkwells and cheap fountain pens, the type someone would dip into to write or sign. To the right lies an area that doubles up as a small dressing room, with a small square white table, a chair, and an ugly fake flower vase on top, a cheap lantern mounted on the ceiling, a small television screen, a whiteboard, and some small cupboards on the sides. While the room was well lit, there were heavy drapes all around what Shawn figured out to be floor-ceiling windows. "What are you looking at?" He jumped out of his skin when he heard her teasing voice right behind him. "Oh p\*\*\*y baby, I am sorry I startled you. I didn't mean to." she teased again as he snaked her hands on his neck.

"You scared me," he almost screamed then pecked a short kiss on her cheek "...and yes, I like p\*\*\*y, but I'm looking for a recording device or a hidden camera... but I think p\*\*\*y is what I'm hoping for." He smirked.

"Seriously, Shawn? Really? A camera?" Ignoring his earlier words, "...In this cheap inn? They couldn't even afford a better shower curtain, yet a hidden camera?" She answered amusedly. "You have a point, I'm just overreacting, I guess." he agreed, yet he had the same nudging feeling that someone was watching them.

Catherine smiled as she caressed his arms down to his hands, then let go of them immediately and unexpectedly. Shawn didn't think it was deliberate, but his mind till now hadn't registered how her soft, delicate hand felt on him. It felt perfect.

"Please sit down, Shawn. Stop pacing. You are making me dizzy. This room is not wired for anything. Would you like some tea instead? I have also asked for a light mind tea. But if you want something else, just say so."

"I will have a little bit of what you are having." He had the sneaking suspicion that she had done some research on him and knew he liked mint tea now, or that it was just a coincidence; after all, she had been his secretary for two years, but he had always ordered coffee instead of tea, and he had started drinking mint tea instead a year ago.

Catherine smiled, knowing exactly what was on his mind, and noticed that Shawn was a lot leaner than a year ago, more muscular, but his abdomen was still flat. His eyes were still a deep blue-green, his hair was now cut short, he was clean-shaven, and she got a whiff of his musky aftershave.

Then a knock on the door stopped her reverie. He looked towards the door behind her and nodded. "Let me take the door, go behind me and get your gun." "Shawn?! That is just the innkeeper with our breakfast." "I hope so," he replied, and stepped through the door, peering through the peephole and nodding. "Yap... just the innkeeper. Let us first drink some tea, and breakfast, of course."

Catherine rolled her eyes.

The burly guy at the reception walked in with the tea and breakfast tray, left it on the desk, and made a hasty exit, which wasn't normal at all. But then, maybe here in Scotland it was?

Noticing an unknown feeling, Catherine sensed Shawn walking in and then out. Yet moments before, he had crept up on her cat-like and caught her off guard in the same moment she kicked him in where the sun doesn't shine. That earned him a heartfelt groan, "F\*\*k it, wife! Is it just me? F\*\*k!" He danced like a madman while Catherine rolled her eyes, "I told you to never do that... and yet you did it again. Serves you right."

"Jesus, woman... I was just about to hug you from behind." "Then why didn't you say so?" She snickered and helped him sit on the edge of the bed, abruptly holding the thing between his legs. "Shall I massage it for you?" She bit her lips and smiled sweetly... "Do you need help with that hard thing?"

"Definitely," Shawn growled as he kissed her.

## **Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA**

Chapter 58 An hour later, the couple had finished their early morning s\*x and breakfast. To say that Catherine was satiated was an understatement as she finished her bacon, pancakes and eggs.

Shawn padded across the room on the b\*\*\*s of his feet. His footfalls didn't make a sound. He'd even learned the creaks of every plank covering the floor for just such an occurrence. Again, old habits.

He reached the doorway and looked around the corner. The inn's corridor was empty, devoid of life or movement of any kind.

The musty, bleached smell of the hallway had evaporated recently, but still, Shawn's nose went deaf to the scent of old stone, wood, upholstery, and books, cheap soap, antibacterial tissues, and cleaning products. The only smell he detected now was the lingering scent of Chinese incense, probably from a single cone left by an Asian tourist performing his late night prayer ritual.

He looked down the length of the hallway again in both directions and then slipped out of his room, wearing nothing but pants and a dark T-shirt. The corridor's only source of light came from the white little wall lamps and a tabletop electric candle lamp sat on a black iron vase every ten feet along the walls. Based on the ugliness and the dust of shafts, they'd been never cleaned and were never replaced ever since. It was eight o'clock in the morning. Shawn wouldn't want that janitor's job, whoever was burdened with it.

He halted. There was the sound again. It came from the reception. A thud. Not overwhelmingly loud, but enough for his ears. "Sweetheart, did you hear? Those sounds are back."

"Really?" Catherine asked and stood, went to his side of the door and listened, "Yes...um-very odd. Right?" "We need to go now. I'm not comfortable with those bikers." Shawn muttered and went inside the door, took the gun and put on his shoes. Catherine followed.

A while later, they stepped out of their room and made their way down the stairs toward a set of double doors that hung open. They reached the next hallway and stuck their heads through. "Why is it too dark inside this inn? Have they never heard of opening the window?" Catherine whispered. A dim, flickering light emanated from the reception doors to their left. It was the side entrance to the small waiting room. They couldn't see inside since the doors' panels were stained with yellowed glass, as were other windows that lined the wall, but the light from within was still visible through the swirling colors of a colorful lantern on the wall. "This

even in the morning, and not mentioning that I only saw two people here, one on either side of us, makes it even creepier."

"Agree," Shawn replied, he knew that if he went through the side door, he'd have only a few seconds to get the drop on the intruder. The second they realized trouble was there, the bad guys would take off toward the main entrance and escape out the front door, if they were indeed the bad guys after them. However, if they worked their way around to the other entrance, they'd have the same problem, only with the side door being the escape as opposed to the front.

He glanced to his left at a closed-door and narrowed his eyes. Then he smirked. "Don't move. Stay right there." He gestured to Catherine. He opened the closet door near the stairs and

pulled out a broom. It took less than ten seconds for him to wedge the broomstick through the handles, effectively barricading the door. Now if the bad guys only had one way out, it would be through the front, where he would be standing.

Shawn walked around to the reception area and found no one, "Odd," he grumbled under his breath as he motioned to Catherine to follow him. Nothing more than a narrow hallway where newly arrived guests could gather. There was barely enough room for twenty people. He'd wondered if that was by design: get them in and out as fast as possible.

He reached the two main doors that opened to the two aisles dividing the pews in the living room and stopped. He gripped the old handle with the tips of his fingers and

gently pulled back, dragging the door open as slowly as possible to prevent any sort of sound that would

alert anyone.

As the door cracked open, inch by inch, Shawn peered through the widening gap toward the front entrance of the parking lot outside.

Someone wearing a face mask, matching long-sleeve shirt, pants, and brown boots crouched outside the inn, doing nothing but staring at the suspension parts.

The parking lot was a big gilded bike with a strange dark design. It was a bizarre piece of machinery, but Shawn wasn't one to judge the interior design. And at the moment, he simply didn't care. "Where is everyone?" Catherine whispered.

"That's the million dollar questions." Shawn furrowed his forehead as they passed through the big bikes, like a vapor sifting through the morning mist. He was as undetectable as any deadly criminal in the world. He'd focused on one of the things he'd focused on during recent months: retraining, and relearning the ways of stealth to hone his skills back to the razor

sharp edge they'd been in his prime. Catherine followed his steps toward their decent Honda Civic and drove fast enough for any of the bikers to notice that they were missing.

Chelsea sat quietly, legs crossed, fingers curled up to the ceiling. Her eyes were closed. Her chest rising and falling in rhythm would have been almost undetectable by a visitor. The open door to the deck allowed a gentle breeze to roll into her home, wash over her, and tickle the stick of incense sitting to her left, propped up in a golden censer and sending the tendrils of gray smoke in several directions.

She finished her daily thirty-minute meditation with a deep exhale and then gradually opened her eyes. The London morning sun cast a warm glow over the entirety of the city. She rose from her meditation pose and padded over to the door. Her red yoga pants shimmered in the breeze. Chelsea stood there for a moment, sensing something was really wrong like someone was watching her as she took in the view from her fiftieth-floor apartment looking out over the London skyscraper below.

The morning sun struck her pale skin and warmed it instantly against the breeze. Her dirty, curly blond hair wafted now and then as the wind picked up and then died down again. It brushed against her ears, but she didn't care, didn't even notice much. Her attention was on something else, something disturbing. It was like a woman's intuition, instinct... someone was watching her and she felt it like a second skin.

Chelsea gazed down at the city she loved, the city that had made her who she was, a landscape shaped by concrete, metal, and glass. It wasn't loved that filled her heart,

though. It was boredom and exhaustion. Everything was mundane since Catherine's death. She and Jane seldom met nowadays, and even Dave went back to Scotland. Yet she had many friends, but they were like stones. She found them anywhere and everywhere, yet she also knew that friends like Catherine and Jane were like diamonds, ...rare.

She sighed as she thought about Dave.

A thick haze of vapor hung around the center of downtown London. Winter was soon to come. It was nearing the end of that time of year when the mist and snow would blow away and clear skies would once more return to the city. At the moment, however, it lingered like a dirty mist that seemed more like a permanent resident than a seasonal annoyance.

She sighed and whirled away from the sight, closing the glass door shut on the balcony in the process.

Chelsea had moved to London several months before, desperate to carve out a name for herself in the business world and become a famous businesswoman rather than a blonde, pathetic, stupid female underwear model. She knew millions of other people wished for the same thing, but she always knew she'd make it. Her father's wealth was beyond her. She wanted to have a name on her own in the business world, but with her model-kind look, men seldom took her seriously. She had the look, the talent, and the drive that pushed her to do anything-almost anything-to become a businesswoman, but it was a risk. A risk she was willing to take no matter what.

And she wanted to rise to the top. Maybe she did, but with the help of Catherine's billionaire husband. But she didn't want Richmond's help. She wanted to succeed on her own.

Part of why she always figured she'd be wealthy and famous was due to the fact she had nowhere to go but up. Her father wanted to help, but of course, being hard-headed, she declined the old man's help.

She'd never grown up in a poverty-stricken home in a poverty-stricken neighborhood. Chelsea had everything, and yes, she had watched his father beat up his mom more times than he could count, usually after a day of meetings and more meetings, but sometimes when his father would lose on a contract to his rival. Those were the most violent, after a day of lubricating his mind with booze and testosterone. Chelsea had fought her dad off a few times, once she'd matured and grown big enough after her father was a small man, fat and bald, the total opposite of her mother. There were many times, though, when she'd lost that battle of the brain and his dad would beat her up instead. Maybe the old man was just as insecure as his pride, but her mom loved him just the same and it was no secret that her dad had changed since he had associated himself with treasure hunting, which was by far the most ridiculous thing ever, and she

knew that her dad was a member of a zealot religious enthusiast, a cult or whatever he called it nowadays, and since she left her home, she stopped caring.

One such time has pushed Chelsea to leave for good. She'd felt guilty about leaving her mother in that situation, but she also felt like there was no other option. It hadn't always been that way. Prior to her father's company disaster that flooded the business world, they'd been a pretty normal, broken family. His father had spiraled into depression after nearly a year of being out of work.

Her father had a drinking problem before, and now, since he became foolish with his so-called

religious zealot group, he was a changed man. Maybe it was for his own good... she doesn't know.

Running the company was all he'd known. He couldn't just up and move to some other business town. London was his life. It was his existence. So, the drinking began, and so did the abuse towards her mother. Chelsea never forgot the cause, even after she left, but recently, her dad was into something else, treasure.

## **Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA**

Chapter 59 Chelsea slipped on a blue button-up short-sleeve blouse and looked at the wall. She had a copy of every fashion show poster for every gig she'd ever been to. At the moment, there were thirty-seven, and each one had brought her hundreds of thousands, if not millions. Her net worth at the time was over seventy-five million dollars and was going up every day thanks to her ingenious investing procedures and continuous searching for more investment endeavors.

S

ON

Chelsea Lim earned a reputation for herself, amassed a fortune, and established a legacy. Almost, anyway.

There was only one thing for her to do: run her own business under her own name. 'C.Clean Fashion'

BEDE!

Her ideas flitted around the beautiful skies in her head like leaves in a thoughtful autumn breeze. She plucked one from a long time ago when she was just starting in the fashion business. Back then, she was nothing more than a wealthy half-Asian and half-British pampered brat. Then, with the assistance of her mother's friend, something happened.

Chelsea was invited to a seminar hosted by a well-known eco-friendly fashion guru, Roberta Wasson. She'd leaped at the chance, yearning with every fiber of her being to meet the famed guru, whom she'd admired and tried to mimic her entire life. With the assistance of her mother and her unending support. She gradually established her reputation.

She never had the opportunity to shake hands with Ms. Wasson. Too many people were clamoring for a photo and a short handshake, or even the chance to get within a few feet of the famed fashion expert. While Chelsea was upset not to be able to meet someone she admired, Wasson's keynote speech had inspired her to the core. Chelsea obviously had selfish ambitions of being more renowned and wealthy than her father, as well as a fashion icon. Even after the fashion guru's speech, those aspirations remained a driving force in her life.

She, on the other hand, had another motivation for her meteoric success.

Dit

Chelsea identified Ms. Wasson as a trendy dreamer, a speaker, and a wonderful woman right away. The woman had spent a significant amount of money on initiatives involving the use of clean, eco-friendly materials. She'd started a project called Pristine Fashion, but despite her best efforts and massive sums of money, the idea had no impact. Chelsea stood by and watched Pristine Fashion implode. It reminded her of some of the other non-profits she'd seen spring up out of nowhere. Wasson's squads would occasionally make headlines for their anti-animal cruelty efforts, particularly against individuals who used animal leather, fur, and exotic skin-hide. Others have tried similar tactics to prevent the slaughter of alligators, furry animals, and other such creatures to deter some mega-corporations from killing endangered animals and creatures and destroying their natural habitats.

However, it appeared that the law was always in favor of major corporations.

But it wasn't just the massive beings that caused havoc on the world's ecosystem. Ordinary people did far more than their fair share.

Chelsea was witness to it on a near-daily basis. And it had become one of her goals to adapt fashion to a more environmentally friendly use. Her company's mission was to create

synthetic leather, fur, and fabric without harming endangered species.

Because she understood the fashion Guro was ethical and her cause was ambitious enough, she also knew it was achievable with better leadership and money. Taking on this expedition was extraordinary, Chelsea recalled. Before Wasson's speech, she'd known that people should do more to care for our home planet, and take care of those

lovely almost extinct creatures but what difference could someone like her make? After all, she was a nobody.

But that was no longer the case.

She'd contemplated doing what Wasson had done: pouring millions of dollars into new programs to help drive back the scourge while continuing to murder animals for personal benefit. She may even join Wasson's movement, substantially doubling their influence and spending power. Maybe it's attainable with Shawn Richmond on her side. If only Catherine were still living. She was fully aware that her friend would gladly lend her a hand.

Chelsea, however, realized that wouldn't work. Shawn had his own issues, particularly with the epidemic, and the hotel and tourism businesses were on edge. He had his own issue to deal with, and she didn't have the fortitude to add to it. Her plan, nevertheless, was insufficient. It

ste of both time and money. Without the assistance of a powerful individual. Could her father possibly assist her?

She noted to call the old man later, maybe her over zealot father could ring some important people and gain their aid.

Looking at her wall. Chelsea shifted her gaze to the enormous lizard on a shelf above the fireplace. She possessed several, and the golden deity's four limbs curved out in all directions, having been presented to her by her Asian mother. One hand held a beautiful white flower, the other a silver stone on a finger, and the fourth a long golden sword.

Chelsea had been raised an agnostic, but after entering the fashion industry, she studied numerous religions, the most prominent of which were Hinduism and Buddhism. While she did not limit her beliefs to a particular dogmatic theology, she did consider a few of them to be more significant than others for her life's path. Buddhism had a great influence on her, teaching her the importance of meditation and the importance of bringing one's mind to a state of silence to link it to the surrounding world. Hinduism brought its own set of advantages, particularly in terms of environmental balance.

She also absorbed beliefs from other religions, much like a person might choose different types of food from a buffet. It worked for her, giving her a stronger sense of purpose and increasing her desire to make a significant difference in the world. Chelsea appreciated Wasson and the work she and others had accomplished. It was the only way they were aware of. Or, at least, that's what they wanted the public to believe.

She silently nodded at the idol before turning away and walking to a marble staircase. The stairs split, with one side running up to the second story and the other leading down. She took a left and started down the stairs, treading carefully out of habit rather

than the urgency to keep quiet. After all, it was her house. She did, however, have one visitor waiting for her below.

Chelsea arrived at the lowest landing and entered a vast, finished basement. In the corner, a fireplace crackled, more for show than for warmth. The center of the wall was mounted with a 65-inch flat-screen television. The bar in the opposite corner to the fireplace was her favorite feature. The old rosewood finish on the counter, façade, and shelving behind the bar added a sense of old-world class to the area, which otherwise featured contemporary comforts and

design.

PAIN

This had turned into her own office. The workstation's glass surface was squeaky clean, laptops, printers with only the keyboard, mouse, and a notepad with pen cluttering it. Yet none of these were the reasons for her fall to the ground floor. She walked across the room, bending her head to look out the large windows that overlooked the mountains and river beyond. As the downtown skyline remained partially obscured in the distance, she was reminded of the air pollution once more. Nonetheless, the nagging feeling remained. It was as though someone was keeping an eye on her. The penultimate corner on the left featured a smaller window, which was closed and draped in black blinds. While Chelsea Kim's property was safe, it was never a bad idea to be cautious. Especially in light of what she was about to do.

She was going to call her father's very personal number.

After a series of rings, her father answered.

"Father?"

"My daughter, what sorcery is this? Why have you been calling me in the middle of the night?"

"I'm fine dad, thanks for asking..." She rolled her eyes, "Typical..." Her father was never the caring one. "It's morning here, dad."

"Not here in the Philippines, dear." "You are in the Philippines? What are you doing there? I thought you were in Ireland?" "Yes, I came here straight. Actually, I-I'm still at the airport going to my hotel... So what urgent matter are you brewing for me now?"

"Well... What are you doing there, dad?" "Business, of course. Gold, dear, tons of gold bars."

"Gold bar? Father, are you not even done with treasure hunting? That golden bar is a fake. I bet it is..."

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“No, it’s not... I will have the key soon, daughter

“A key? To what? A treasure? You’re watching too much conspiracy.” She smiled, knowing full well her father was creasing his brows on the other line. “Father, you are seriously out of your mind. Still talking about the Buddha, huh?”

“Yes, and this time. I almost had it... was...”

“Don’t worry, Dad, it’s none of my business, all I need is your assistance. I need you to call someone for me. I need their support.” Chelsea explained what she needed, and after a series of more arguments, the old man finally agreed and promised to call someone before ending their call. By then, Chelsea didn’t notice that red blinking light on the lizard’s eyes, listening and recording whatever occurred between their conversations.

And someone on the other end, watching and listening, smiled... Knowing full well... Her grand plan was taking place.