

Second chance 102

Chapter 102:

Silas signaled immediately. Two large guards appeared and took Chloe by the arms. She kicked and screamed as they removed her from the stage.

“Cali,” Hilliard said, his tone returning to something quieter but no less commanding. “Continue the auction.”

Cailin looked up at the box.

She nodded.

She had won.

Security escorted a sobbing Chloe out through the side exit. The heavy doors slammed shut, cutting off her wails.

Cailin took a slow breath. She adjusted the microphone.

“Now,” she said, her voice smooth as silk, “for the main event.”

The screen behind her illuminated. A massive green diamond necklace filled it — stones the color of the deepest ocean.

“The Ocean’s Tear,” Cailin announced. “Starting bid: five million dollars.”

Paddles flew up instantly.

“Six million,” a man in the front row called out.

“Seven million,” a woman in red countered.

In the VIP box, Hilliard watched without blinking. He stared at the diamond on the screen. It was the exact shade of Cailin’s eyes — the eyes he had glimpsed behind the veil, the eyes he had been unable to forget for five years.

Charla tugged his sleeve. “I want it, Hilliard! It matches my dress perfectly!” She pointed to her teal gown.

Hilliard ignored her. He raised his paddle.

“Ten million,” Hilliard said.

The room went quiet. That was a significant jump — dominant and aggressive.

“Ten million, going once...” Cailin chanted, her gaze moving steadily across the floor.

A man in the back row, a phone pressed to his ear, raised his paddle. “Twelve million.”

Cailin recognized him immediately. A proxy agent. And she knew exactly who was on the other end of that line. Kegan.

Hilliard’s eyes narrowed. He recognized the suit. That agent didn’t work for any local collector.

“Fifteen million,” Hilliard said. His voice was cold steel.

The proxy touched his earpiece, listened for a moment, then nodded. “Sixteen million.”

Charla gasped. “Hilliard, that’s far too much! It’s just a necklace!”

“Twenty million,” Hilliard said. He wasn’t looking at the screen. He was looking at the proxy.

He wasn't buying a necklace. He was fighting the other man — the ghost Cailin had invented, the rival who had lit up the sky for her.

The proxy touched his earpiece again. He listened. Then he lowered his paddle. Kegan had folded — he had driven the price high enough to bleed Hilliard, and that was victory enough.

"Sold!" Cailin brought the gavel down with a sharp crack. "For twenty million dollars, to Mr. Holloway!"

The sound echoed through the hall like a gunshot.

Charla squealed and threw her arms around Hilliard's neck. "Oh, thank you, darling! You absolutely shouldn't have!"

Hilliard didn't return the embrace. He sat stiffly, his gaze fixed on Cailin below.

Cailin felt a pang of bitterness so sharp it tasted like bile. Twenty million. He had spent twenty million on the most beautiful thing in the room — and given it to the woman who had tried to take her daughter.

She held her professional mask in place. She had no choice.

“Thank you all for coming,” she said.