

Second chance 104

Chapter 104:

Cailin ripped off her microphone pack the moment she hit the backstage corridor and threw it onto a prop table. Her hands were shaking with rage.

She headed for the loading dock exit. She needed air. She needed to be anywhere but in a room with those people.

Hilliard intercepted her near the heavy metal doors. "Cailin. Wait."

She didn't slow down. "Go to your fiancée, Hilliard. She needs the attention. She's probably crying about her wrist."

"I didn't authorize that stunt," Hilliard said, matching her pace.

"But you bought the necklace," Cailin accused, spinning to face him. "You funded her circus. You handed her the ammunition."

Hilliard caught her arm. With his free hand, he drew a black velvet box from his jacket pocket.

"I didn't buy it for her," he said.

Cailin went still. She looked at the box. “What?”

“It matched your eyes,” Hilliard said. His voice was quiet and intense. “The eyes behind the veil. I saw them.”

He opened the box. The green diamond blazed under the harsh fluorescent lights of the corridor — breathtaking, twenty million dollars of cold, brilliant light.

“Take it,” Hilliard said, holding it out.

Cailin stared at the stone. “I can’t accept this. It’s inappropriate. It’s insane.”

“Consider it a bonus,” Hilliard said, a faint smirk crossing his face. “For tolerating my family. For winning the wager.”

“Hilliard!” Charla’s voice rang down the corridor. She was coming.

Hilliard snapped the box shut, seized Cailin’s hand, and pressed the box firmly into her palm, closing her fingers around it.

"Hide it. Go," he ordered.

Cailin held the box. It was heavier than she expected.

"Why?" she whispered.

"Because the data may be wrong," Hilliard said, his voice low and fierce, "but my eyes aren't. And what's mine stays mine."

He pushed her gently toward the door.

Cailin slipped out into the cool night air just as Charla rounded the corner behind them.

"Where is she? And where is my necklace?" Charla demanded, scanning the empty corridor.

"The necklace is being polished," Hilliard said smoothly. "Standard procedure for high-value items."

"And Cali?"

"She was fired," Hilliard said. "You won't see her again tonight."

Charla pouted. “Good. She was insufferably rude.”

Outside, Cailin pressed her back against the brick wall of the alley. Her heart was hammering.

She opened her hand. The velvet box sat in her palm.

She lifted the lid. The diamond stared back at her, cold and brilliant and impossible.

He had protected her. He had given her a fortune. He had lied to Charla without a moment’s hesitation.

Why — if he believed the DNA test? If he believed she had a lover waiting in the wings?

The mystery of Hilliard Holloway was deepening, and it frightened her far more than his anger ever had.

Sunlight streamed into the kitchen of the Brooklyn apartment, illuminating dust motes drifting lazily through the air. It was a peaceful morning — a stark contrast to the chaos of the night before.