

Second chance 105

Chapter 105:

Cailin stood at the counter, sipping her coffee. The black velvet box lay open beside the sink. The green diamond inside seemed to drink the morning light, casting fractured rainbows across the ceiling. Her hand still trembled faintly as she remembered Hilliard pressing it into her palm.

Elia padded into the kitchen, rubbing sleep from her eyes. She pointed a small finger at the box. "Ooh, pretty glass, Mommy!"

Cailin snapped the box shut before Elia could get any closer. "It's very pretty, sweetheart, but it isn't a toy." She carried the box to a hidden panel in the pantry and placed it inside a small, heavy safe. "That glass costs more than this entire building."

Ashely, who was buttering toast at the counter, choked. She coughed violently. "He gave you the Ocean's Tear? The actual necklace?"

"He called it a bonus," Cailin sighed, turning the key in the safe. "He shoved it into my hand and told me to run."

"He's trying to buy you back," Ashely said, wiping crumbs from her mouth. "That's a down payment on a soul."

Aron walked in holding his tablet, his expression serious. "Mommy. You're trending."

He held up the screen. The headline blazed: CHARITY AUCTION DISASTER: CALI VS. SOCIALITE.

“Comments are ninety percent Team Cali,” Aron reported. “They hate Charla.”

“Chloe resigned this morning,” Cailin said, a grim smile touching her lips. “I checked my email. I won the bet.”

“So we stay?” Davy asked hopefully from the table, looking up from his cereal.

“We stay. For now,” Cailin said. “The position is secure.”

Her phone buzzed on the counter. A text from Hilliard.

Dinner tonight. To celebrate your win. 8 PM. The Ritz.

“He’s persistent,” Ashely observed, reading over Cailin’s shoulder.

“I have to go,” Cailin said, pressing her fingers to her temples. “If I refuse, he may start looking at the DNA test again. He’s suspicious — I saw it in his eyes.”

“Go. We’ll be fine,” Ashely assured her.

Her phone buzzed again. A different number.

She picked it up.

You won the battle, cousin. But I know your secret.

It was Chloe.

Cailin’s blood went cold. Which secret?

Another text followed.

I saw the contact list on your phone when you left it on the desk that day. Just for a second, before you kissed him. Asset 1, Asset 2, Asset 3.

Cailin remembered. In the panic of the kiss, she had left her phone face-up on the desk. One careless moment.

What are Assets, Cailin? Or should I ask Hilliard?

Cailin's fingers hovered over the screen. Chloe was fishing — she didn't know what they were, but she knew they mattered.

Cailin typed back: Business contacts. High-value clients. Try me, and I sue you for breach of confidentiality.

She deleted the thread immediately.

"Trouble?" Ashely asked, reading Cailin's face.

"A loose end," Cailin said, her jaw tight.

She knew Chloe had taken a photograph. Changing the labels now was pointless — the damage was done. She opened a secure messaging app and typed quickly.

Code Red. Chloe Morton saw the Asset designators. She's threatening to expose them to H. We need a new protocol, and we need to know exactly what she's planning. Now.