

Second chance 13

Chapter 13:

Hilliard stopped and scanned the room — the concierge, the bellhops, the tourists.

Then his eyes landed on her.

Elia froze. She swung her legs, trying to look bored.

He walked toward her. His shadow stretched across the marble floor, swallowing her feet, then her knees. He stopped directly in front of her.

“Where did the woman on the bike go?” His voice was low, vibrating in his chest.

Elia pulled the lollipop from her mouth. “I don’t know a bike lady.”

Hilliard leaned down. “Don’t lie to me. You’re the girl from the garage. You bit me.” He held up his hand. The small red crescent marks were still visible on his skin.

Elia’s eyes watered. She looked around for help. “Stranger danger!”

A few heads turned. A concierge took a tentative step forward, but Hilliard shot him a look so cold it could freeze water. The concierge retreated.

Hilliard reached for her wrist, looking for the watch. It was gone.

“Who are you waiting for?” he demanded.

Quality translations on ga/novels.com

Ding.

The elevator doors across the lobby slid open.

Ashley Trevino sprinted out. She was wearing a chic designer tracksuit, her hair pulled back in a slightly messy but intentional ponytail — less panicked spa-goer, more affluent mother whose patience had run out.

“Elia! Oh my God, there you are!” Ashley’s voice was shrill, echoing off the high ceilings.

She practically tackled Elia, shoving Hilliard’s arm aside with surprising force. “I told you not to wander off!” She pulled Elia into a suffocating hug and pressed her lips to the child’s ear.

“Blueberry,” she whispered.

Elia let out the breath she had been holding for ten minutes. She buried her face in Ashley’s tracksuit and burst into loud, theatrical tears.

“Mommy! He scared me!” Elia wailed.

Hilliard straightened up and brushed his sleeve where Ashley had touched him. “Mommy?” he repeated.

He looked at the woman. He recognized her instantly — Cailin’s college roommate. The loud one. The one who had thrown a drink at him at the wedding reception.

“Ashley Trevino,” Hilliard said. Disbelief dripped from every syllable.

Ashley stood, keeping a protective hand on Elia’s head. She feigned shock. “Hilliard? What the hell are you doing harassing my kid?”

“Your kid?” Hilliard pointed at Elia. “She was with the art broker. On a motorcycle.”

“Broker?” Ashley laughed, a nervous, high-pitched sound. “I sent her to the vending machine to get snacks and she got lost! I’ve been looking for her for twenty minutes!”

Hilliard studied them. He took in Ashley’s dark hair, dark eyes, and olive skin. Then he looked at Elia — pale skin, green eyes.

“She doesn’t look like you,” he said flatly.

Ashley bristled and pulled her tracksuit jacket tighter. “She looks like her father,” she snapped. “Who is a deadbeat — much like someone else I know.”

The insult landed. Hilliard flinched. That word had been haunting him all night.

He looked at Elia again. The girl was clinging to Ashley’s leg, gazing up at her with pure adoration.