

Second chance 15

Chapter 15:

But the final slide was the one that broke him. It was a financial analysis tracking Cali's early seed money, highlighting a series of anonymous, untraceable cryptocurrency transfers through a shell corporation.

"The encryption protocol," Gavin added quietly, pointing to a line of code on the screen. "Our tech division flagged it. It's a proprietary variant — highly unusual. They said it bears a striking resemblance to a theoretical model that won a university cybersecurity competition years ago. The project was registered to a Cailin Morton."

Hilliard's heart hammered against his ribs. The blood rushed in his ears.

He looked back at Ashley. The "cousin" story fell apart in his mind. Ashley wasn't visiting a cousin. She was visiting her.

"You're lying," Hilliard whispered.

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Ashley stiffened. "Excuse me?"

“Cali isn’t your cousin,” Hilliard said, walking closer, looming over them both. “Cali is Cailin.”

Ashley let out a sharp, nervous laugh. “Cailin is dead to you, Hilliard. Let it go.”

“She’s alive,” Hilliard said. The words tasted like ash and hope at once. “And she’s here.”

He stood abruptly. The realization was electric, surging through his limbs and making his hands shake.

“Gavin, watch them. Don’t let them leave.”

He walked to a quiet corner of the lobby and pulled out his phone. He dialed a number he hadn’t called in years — the landline at the Holloway Estate.

It rang three times.

“Holloway residence,” a butler answered.

“Put my grandfather on,” Hilliard said.

A moment later, Amerigo Holloway’s voice came through the line. “Hilliard. It’s late.”

"Grandfather," Hilliard said, his voice trembling with suppressed rage. "Tell me the truth about Cailin."

A long silence stretched across the line.

"Come to the study, Hilliard," Amerigo said at last, his voice calm and resigned. "It's time."

Hilliard stormed into the Holloway Estate, bypassing the servants who tried to take his coat. He didn't stop until he reached the heavy oak doors of the study.

He threw them open.

Amerigo Holloway sat by the fire, a glass of scotch in his hand and an old photo album open on his lap.

"Is she alive?" Hilliard demanded, slamming his hand onto the antique desk. The sound echoed like a gunshot.

Amerigo didn't flinch. He closed the album slowly. "Sit down, boy. You're making a scene."

Hilliard remained standing, his chest heaving. "Did you know?"

“Of course I knew,” Amerigo said, his voice a low rumble of disappointment. “I helped her leave.”

The confession hit Hilliard like a physical blow. He staggered back a step.

“You?” Hilliard asked. “You value the family name above all else. Why help a runaway? Why help her humiliate me?”

“Because you were destroying her,” Amerigo said sharply, looking up with hard eyes. “And because she was carrying the future of this family — a potential you were too blind and too arrogant to protect.”

Hilliard missed the hint about the heirs. He was too consumed by the betrayal.

“Where is she?” Hilliard growled.

“She goes by ‘Cali’ now. She’s a broker — very successful,” Amerigo said, a note of pride threading his voice. “She built an empire from nothing. Unlike you, who inherited one.”