

Second chance 17

Chapter 17:

Hilliard caught it with one hand. He didn't even strain. He pushed against the wood, his strength overwhelming her resistance without effort.

He stepped inside. The door clicked shut behind him. He locked it.

"Going somewhere, Cailin?" His voice was dangerously smooth — velvet wrapped around a knife.

Cailin backed away. The hard drive felt like a block of ice in her hand. She slipped it into the pocket of her leather jacket. "Get out of my house," she said.

Hilliard kicked her go-bag aside and took in her appearance. No mask. No wig. Just the woman he had lost.

She looked more beautiful. Sharper. The softness of her youth had been burned away, leaving something crystalline and hard.

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"Five years," Hilliard said, stepping closer. The room felt suddenly small. "You let me mourn a ghost."

“You didn’t mourn,” Cailin spat. “I saw the gala photos. I saw you laughing.”

Hilliard winced. “That was business. This is personal.” He spotted the passport she had left on the entry table and picked it up, opening it to the photo of “Cali.”

“Leaving again? To Europe?” He slid the passport into the inside pocket of his suit jacket. “Not this time.”

Cailin lunged for him. “Give it back!”

He caught her wrists and pinned her against the wall beside the coat rack. The impact knocked the breath from her lungs.

“Let go of me!” She struggled, kicking at his shins.

Hilliard pressed his body against hers to stop her thrashing. The proximity was electric. He could smell her — vanilla and rain. The scent of his memories. It made him dizzy.

“Why did you have the abortion?” he asked. The question that had haunted his nightmares for five years.

Cailin stopped struggling. Her chest heaved against his. Her eyes turned cold and flat.

“Because I refused to let my child have a father who puts his mistress first.”

“There was no mistress!” Hilliard roared, his composure fracturing, the mask cracking.

“Charla was in our home, Hilliard. On the night of my mother’s funeral,” Cailin said, twisting the truth just enough to make it a weapon.

“She was sick!” Hilliard defended, though his voice lacked conviction.

“She was poisonous. And you drank it up,” Cailin said.

Hilliard stared at her mouth. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to shake her. The conflict tore at him from the inside.

“You’re coming with me,” he decided.

“I’m not your property. We’re divorced,” Cailin said.

Hilliard smiled — a dark, humorless thing. “I never signed the papers.”

Cailin froze. Her blood turned to ice. “What?”

“My lawyers received your signature and were instructed to file,” he whispered against her ear. “But the final confirmation notice — the one that would have been sent to you — was intercepted. As far as the state of New York is concerned, you took a long, unauthorized vacation.” He pulled back just enough to look her in the eye. “You’re still my wife, Mrs. Holloway. Legally.”

Cailin felt the trap snap shut around her. The walls of the apartment seemed to close in.