

Second chance 27

Chapter 27:

Hilliard grunted and shifted in his chair. He didn't get up.

Cailin exhaled slowly. It was going to be the longest night of her life.

Sunlight assaulted the room through the sheer curtains, promising a beautiful day that Cailin felt entirely unprepared to face. She hadn't slept. Every muscle in her body was coiled tight, waiting for the inevitable disaster.

Hilliard groaned and stretched in the armchair. He looked stiff, his suit rumpled, a shadow of stubble darkening his jaw. For a moment, he looked human. Vulnerable.

Then a sharp knock at the door shattered the illusion.

"Sir? It's Gavin," a muffled voice came from the hallway.

Hilliard stood, rolling his neck. He moved the armchair aside and opened the door. "Come in."

Cailin sat up in bed and pulled the duvet tight around her chest, shooting a desperate glance at the closet doors. Stay put. Just a little longer.

Gavin entered, looking tired but efficient, a tablet in his hand.

“Report,” Hilliard commanded, walking into the en-suite bathroom. He left the door open and splashed cold water on his face.

“The blackout was a targeted hack, sir,” Gavin said, standing in the middle of the bedroom. “We traced the signal source.”

Hilliard emerged and dried his face with a white towel. “Who was it? Corporate espionage? A rival firm?”

“No, sir. It originated from inside the hotel network — the guest Wi-Fi.” Gavin swiped the tablet screen. “Security cameras caught three suspects in the stairwell on the fourth floor.”

Hilliard lowered the towel. “Suspects?”

“Yes. Three children. Highly skilled ones. They bypassed the firewalls in seconds using a brute-force algorithm disguised as a video game.”

Hilliard’s mind flashed back. The “Baby Davy” contact. The “Godson.” The child who had bitten him. The pieces clicked into place with chilling certainty. This was no coincidence — it was a coordinated effort, and Cailin was at the center of it. But confronting her now would be pointless; she would only lie again. He needed to get her back to New York, onto his own turf, where her allies couldn’t reach her so easily.

He turned slowly to look at her. His eyes were dark, calculating.

“Three children,” Hilliard repeated softly. “Do you know any hackers, Cailin?”

Cailin feigned a yawn, stretching her arms above her head. “I know art collectors, Hilliard. Not cyber-terrorist toddlers. Maybe it was some guests’ kids pulling a prank.”

“Too coincidental,” Hilliard muttered, playing along for now.

He walked back into the bedroom.

“Search the floor again, Gavin. Every room. Find those kids,” he ordered.

“Yes, sir.” Gavin nodded and left, pulling the door closed behind him.

Hilliard stood in the center of the room. He looked at Cailin, then turned toward the wardrobe.

“I need a fresh shirt,” he said, walking to the closet.

Cailin stopped breathing. Her lungs burned. She gripped the sheets until her knuckles turned white.