

Second chance 30

Chapter 30:

“To ruin Charla’s night,” she answered honestly. It was the best kind of lie — one wrapped in truth.

Hilliard smirked, a fleeting expression that didn’t reach his eyes. “You succeeded. She’s hysterical. She thinks you put a voodoo curse on the electrical system.”

“Good.” Cailin sipped her sparkling water.

“But you risked a great deal, coming back into my orbit. Why?” He leaned forward, elbows on his knees. “You’re hiding something, Cailin. Something big.”

“Some things are better left lost, Hilliard.”

“I disagree. I find everything I look for.”

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He reached into his pocket and produced the crinkled yellow candy wrapper, setting it on the table between them. Then he began smoothing it out with his index finger, pressing the wrinkles flat, over and over.

Cailin stared at it. The gesture was a silent declaration of war. I know someone was there.

"Do you like lemon drops, Cailin?" he asked softly.

"No," she said, her voice steady. "Too sour."

Hilliard looked up and locked his eyes on hers. "I think you've developed a taste for a lot of new things in the last five years. Motorcycles. Hacking. Children."

"I told you. Godchildren."

Hilliard picked up the wrapper and twirled it slowly between his fingers.

"We'll see."

New York greeted them with a torrential downpour. The sky was a bruised purple, dumping sheets of rain onto the Teterboro tarmac.

The jet landed smoothly and taxied to the VIP terminal. Hilliard escorted Cailin down the stairs beneath a massive black umbrella held by a driver. A convoy of black SUVs waited at the edge of the tarmac, engines idling, exhaust curling in the cold air.

The door of the lead SUV swung open. Charla English stepped out, immaculate in a white trench coat despite the weather, her face twisted into a scowl.

“You brought her?” Charla screeched over the roar of the rain. “To New York? Are you insane, Hilliard?”

Hilliard ignored her. “Get in the car, Cailin.”

At that moment, the black Bombardier jet taxied into an adjacent parking spot at a safe distance. Its engines whined down. The stairs lowered.

Ashely Trevino burst out first, clutching an umbrella that immediately inverted in the wind. Behind her, the triplets scrambled down the stairs. Ashely struggled to juggle their backpacks and her own carry-on, her attention momentarily divided.

Elia was doing a desperate potty dance.

“I need the potty!” she cried, her voice cutting through the wind.

Before Ashely could grab her, she broke free. She darted away from the chaos of the luggage and ran toward the VIP lounge entrance, head down against the driving rain, not looking where she was going.

She slammed straight into a pair of long legs standing near the SUVs.

The impact knocked her backward. She slipped on the wet tarmac and landed hard on her bottom.

Hilliard looked down. A small girl in a yellow raincoat lay at his feet.

He crouched instinctively, the umbrella tilting to shield them both. "Careful."

Elia looked up. Raindrops clung to her eyelashes. She saw the face — the sharp jawline, the grey eyes.