

Second chance 46

Chapter 46:

In the back of the vehicle, Hilliard held a cold compress from the first-aid kit against Cailin's arm. While her attention was fixed on soothing Elia, he quietly pulled out his phone and typed a message to Gavin, his thumb moving fast.

Sunroom. Lock it down. Collect everything the child touched. The cup from yesterday, the bear, the broken china. Everything. Run the test. Now.

He put the phone away and watched them — Elia curled on Cailin's lap, clutching her shirt, refusing to let go.

"She called you Mommy again," Hilliard said quietly.

"She was scared," Cailin whispered, her eyes closed against the pain.

"She was terrified. For her mother," Hilliard corrected.

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Cailin opened her eyes. She found the certainty already settled in his gaze.

He knew. He didn't have the proof yet, but he knew.

"Just get me to the doctor, Hilliard," she said, her voice thin.

"I am focused," Hilliard replied. "On everything."

He reached out and rested his hand gently on top of Elia's head.

"Everything has changed, Cailin."

Cailin knew he was right. The carefully constructed wall of lies she had built over five years had just been demolished. The ride from the estate's private medical wing to the city had been a blur of flashing lights and wailing sirens. The on-call doctor — a man paid handsomely for his discretion — had taken one look at the blistering skin on her arm and the raw terror in Elia's eyes and made the call.

"This is beyond my capabilities. The child needs a pediatric burn specialist, and Mrs. Holloway requires a full trauma workup. I've alerted Mount Sinai. The Holloway Wing is expecting you."

The tires of the black SUV screeched against the wet pavement of the emergency room entrance. Rain lashed the windows, distorting the red neon hospital sign into bleeding streaks of light.

Before the vehicle had fully stopped, Hilliard was out. He didn't wait for the driver or the orderlies. He ripped the back door open, cold damp air rushing in to mix with the smell of wet leather and Cailin's fear. He scooped her up. The movement jarred her arm, and a white-hot spike of pain shot to her shoulder. She bit her lip hard enough to taste copper, refusing to scream.

He carried her through the sliding glass doors, bypassing the triage nurse who had begun to rise with a clipboard.

"My wife," Hilliard said, his voice cutting across the room. "Severe thermal burn from boiling water. Immediate attention."

His tone was a battering ram, demolishing any thought of bureaucratic procedure. He knew the hospital was part of a foundation that had received millions in Holloway grants; his name was its own form of insurance. His authority was a physical weight in the room — it cleared paths, silenced murmurs, and bent the world to his will.

Doctors swarmed. A gurney appeared.

"Hilliard," Cailin gasped, grabbing his lapel with her good hand. "Elia. Don't let anyone question her."

"Focus on breathing," he said, his jaw set like granite. He placed her on the gurney, his hands lingering for a fraction of a second at her waist — warm, solid — before he stepped back.