

Second chance 47

Chapter 47:

The curtain swept shut, a flimsy blue barrier between her and the man who was both her savior and her jailer.

“We need to cut the sleeve,” a doctor said.

The sound of scissors through fabric. Cold air on raw, blistered skin. Cailin hissed and arched her back.

Through the thin curtain, she could hear them.

“I want the child checked too,” Hilliard’s voice came, low and insistent. “Check her for splashes.”

“No!” Elia’s voice was high and terrified. “I want Mommy!”

Cailin’s heart shredded. She tried to sit up. A nurse pressed her shoulder down gently.

“Stay still, ma’am. We need to apply the saline.”

“Elia,” Cailin whispered.

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“She is fine.” Hilliard’s voice came from directly the other side of the curtain. “She is just scared.”

Minutes stretched. The pain dulled to a throbbing ache as the lidocaine gel took effect. They bandaged her arm from wrist to elbow.

“Second-degree,” the doctor told her, peeling off his gloves. “Painful, but no permanent nerve damage. There will be a scar, though.”

Cailin sagged against the pillow. A scar. Just another one to add to the collection Hilliard Holloway had given her — visible and invisible alike.

The curtain swept back. Hilliard stood in the gap, impeccable save for the damp patch on his shirt where the rain had caught him. His eyes were tired.

He stepped closer, his hand hovering near her shoulder. He didn’t touch her, as though he understood that one touch would shatter the fragile truce of the emergency room.

His phone rang.

The sound was jarring in the small cubicle. He pulled it out. The screen lit up: Mother.

He frowned and stepped away, walking several paces down the hallway before answering.

“Mother, I know,” Hilliard said. His voice shifted — losing the raw urgency of minutes ago, settling into the polished, metallic timbre of the CEO. “No, we cannot move on this yet.”

Cailin strained to hear, her heart hammering.

“The press is already sniffing around the hospital,” he continued, pinching the bridge of his nose. “If police cars show up at the estate tonight, the stock will tank by morning. The merger is in three days.”

A pause. Then: “Yes. We call it a domestic accident. A spilled pot of tea. Keep the board calm.”

Cailin felt cold. Colder than the rain outside. Colder than the grave she had buried her mother in.

He hung up and turned back. He looked at her bandaged arm, then at her face. He must have seen what was in her eyes — the absolute, hollowed-out devastation.

“Elia is resting in the private waiting room with Ashely,” he said. “We should prepare a statement.”

Cailin let out a laugh — dry and broken, the sound scraping her throat.

“A statement?” she said. “Charla tried to burn my daughter. And you are worried about the stock price?”

“We have no proof of intent yet, Cailin,” Hilliard said, using his reasonable voice, the one that closed deals. “We must be cautious.”

“Cautious?” She pushed herself upright, ignoring the dizziness. “You are protecting her.”