

Second chance 49

Chapter 49:

Her eyes stopped on a black sedan parked near the exit.

It wasn't a Holloway car. It was older, nondescript. But the license plate was familiar — one of the plates Kegan used for his fleet of ghost cars.

Two small heads popped up in the back seat.

Cailin's breath fogged the glass.

Aron. Davy.

Cold, sharp panic flooded her veins. They must have tracked the emergency alert from Elia's smartwatch — the one that monitored her vitals and sent an automatic ping to Kegan's servers whenever her heart rate spiked into a danger zone. They were here. In the lion's den.

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If Hilliard looked out the window — if he saw two boys who looked exactly like him staring up at the hospital — it was over. No more lies. No more godmother stories. He would take them.

She turned abruptly from the window.

“I need coffee,” she said. Her voice came out too high, too sharp. “From the cafeteria. Alone.”

Hilliard looked up. His grey eyes narrowed slightly. “I’ll send Gavin.”

“No!” Cailin gripped her purse with her good hand. “I need to walk. I need space.”

He studied her for a long moment — the desperation, the frantic energy vibrating beneath her skin. He probably took it for trauma. He nodded slowly.

“Ten minutes. Then I’m coming to find you.”

“Fine,” she breathed.

She rushed to the elevator and pressed the button for the ground floor repeatedly, as if force alone could make the machine move faster. When the doors opened, she didn’t go to the cafeteria. She ran for the side exit.

Cool, damp air hit her face as she burst into the parking lot. She ignored the rain soaking her bandage and ran for the black sedan.

The driver's window rolled down. Ashely looked like she hadn't slept in a week.

"Why did you bring them?" Cailin hissed, yanking the back door open.

"We forced her!" Aron said, gripping a tablet, his small face lit blue by scrolling code.

"Elia's heart rate went to one-forty," Davy said from the other side of the seat. His eyes were cold, terrifyingly calm. "Who hurt her?"

Cailin's heart broke. They were five years old. They should be worrying about Legos, not heart rate monitors.

"It was an accident," she lied, reaching in to touch Davy's cheek.

"Liar," Davy said. He turned the tablet around. "We hacked the hospital admission. It says burn. Thermal injury."

"Is it the Bad Lady?" Aron asked. His voice was quiet. Dangerous.

Cailin took both their hands. Her own were shaking. "Listen to me. You cannot be seen here. You have to go."

"We want to see Elia!" Davy shouted, tears finally breaking through.

Cailin covered his mouth instantly. "Quiet. The Bad Man is upstairs."

"Hilliard?" Aron's face darkened. The name was a curse word in their vocabulary.

"He will take you away if he finds you," Cailin said, looking into their identical green eyes. "He will take you, and I won't be able to stop him. Do you want that?"