

Second chance 50

Chapter 50:

The boys went still. The fear of separation was the only thing stronger than their anger. They shook their heads.

“Go to the safe house,” Cailin whispered. “I will bring Elia when I can. I promise.”

She kissed their foreheads, drawing in the scent of baby shampoo and rain. It gave her strength.

“Go. Now.”

She shut the door and slapped the roof. Ashely nodded, tears in her own eyes, and pulled away.

Cailin stood in the rain and watched the taillights fade.

Four stories up, Hilliard stood at the waiting room window.

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He had watched the woman in the navy dress run toward a black car, lean inside, and reach out to whoever was within. He hadn't been able to see the occupants — the tint was too dark, the rain too heavy. But he had seen the way she moved. The desperation in her posture. The tenderness.

It wasn't a drug deal. It wasn't a business meeting.

It was love. Frantic, terrified love.

He reached for his phone, his thumb hovering over Gavin's contact, ready to issue the command to have the car tracked, stopped, its occupants identified.

"Sir." A nurse appeared breathlessly at his shoulder. "Dr. Evans needs you. Elia is having a mild allergic reaction to the initial topical analgesic. Her breathing is shallow. We need to confirm her medical history before we administer an alternative."

Hilliard froze. The car. The child. He couldn't be in two places at once.

He turned from the window, jaw tight with frustration, as the black sedan's taillights disappeared around the corner of the parking garage. The command to Gavin died on his lips. The opportunity was gone.

"I'm coming," he said, and followed the nurse toward Elia's room.

But his hand remained pressed against the cold glass for a moment longer.

Who was in that car? And why was his wife so terrified of him seeing them?

Cailin returned to the private room, her hair plastered to her skull, her dress damp.

"The coffee machine was broken," she said. It was a terrible lie.

Hilliard stood by the bed where Elia was sleeping. His gaze traveled from Cailin's wet hair to her muddy shoes. He didn't buy it. Not for a second.

But he didn't press. Yet.

"Elia is waking up," was all he said.

A small groan came from the bed. Elia shifted, her face scrunching in pain.

"Mommy?" she mumbled, her voice thick with sleep. "It hurts."

Cailin rushed to the bedside and dropped to her knees. "I know, baby. I'm here."

Elia blinked her eyes open, looking disoriented. "I want the blue candy. From the airport."

Cailin froze.

Blue candy. It was their code. It meant: I want to go home. I don't feel safe.

Hilliard straightened. "I saw a vending machine down the hall. Or I can send Gavin."

"No," Cailin said quickly. "She means a specific brand. The imported ones. They sell them at the gift shop in the lobby."

Hilliard looked at Elia, then at Cailin, sensing the tension radiating off her like heat. Sensing she needed him gone.