

## Second chance 501

### Chapter 501:

Eleanor Morton sat on a velvet antique sofa in the center of the room, leaning heavily on a silver-headed cane. Her eyes locked onto Cailin, filled with the cold, calculating malice of a spider watching a fly hit its web.

Chloé stood slightly behind the sofa, a vicious, triumphant sneer twisting her face.

Sitting on the opposite sofa was Wallace Sterling. The aging Wall Street billionaire swirled a glass of scotch, his greedy eyes roaming up and down Cailin's body.

Twelve black-market mercenaries lined the perimeter of the room, arms crossed, their jackets bulging with concealed firearms.

"You finally crawled back like a beaten dog, Cailin," Eleanor said. She struck the marble floor with her cane. The dull thud echoed through the silent room.

Cailin did not blink. She kept her hands in her trench coat pockets.

"Where is the diary?" Cailin demanded, her voice flat and completely devoid of fear.

Chloé threw her head back and laughed. The sound was shrill and grating.

“You actually believed there was a diary?” Chloé mocked, stepping forward. “Grandmother made that up just to bait you out of your little rat hole.”

Cailin’s jaw tightened. A cold knot formed in her stomach. Kegan’s intelligence network had been fed deliberate misinformation.

Wallace Sterling stood up and set his scotch glass on a side table.

“You cost me three hundred million dollars in options trading at the hotel, you little bitch,” Wallace growled, taking a step toward her. “Tonight, you are going to pay that debt with your body. And then I’m going to take your life.”

At Wallace’s signal, four of the mercenaries drew heavy steel batons and grinned, stepping forward to close the circle around Cailin.

Cailin’s breathing slowed. Her heart rate dropped into a tactical rhythm. Her right hand gripped the handle of the ceramic knife hidden in her sleeve. She calculated the distance to Wallace’s carotid artery. She knew she would take a beating — but she was going to take the old man to hell with her.

Just as the closest mercenary raised his baton, a deafening, mechanical roar shattered the night outside.

BOOM!

A massive armored tactical SUV slammed directly into the wrought-iron front gates of the estate. The sound of tearing, screaming metal ripped through the air as the gates were completely obliterated.

Before anyone inside the foyer could react, six black tactical vehicles swarmed into the courtyard like a pack of starving wolves. Blinding high-beam headlights flooded through the windows, illuminating the room in a harsh, terrifying glare.

The mercenaries froze, dropping their batons and frantically reaching for their firearms.

CRASH!

The massive floor-to-ceiling windows on both sides of the foyer exploded inward simultaneously. A hurricane of shattered glass rained down on the expensive Persian rugs. The cold night wind howled into the room.

Twenty elite operators from the Holloway Shadow Squad breached through the windows in full tactical gear and night-vision goggles. Instantly, a dozen red infrared laser dots painted the foreheads and chests of the black-market mercenaries.

“Drop your weapons! Now!” the Shadow Squad captain roared, his voice amplified through a helmet speaker.

Chapter 502:

The mercenaries looked at the red dots on their chests. They slowly raised their hands and let their guns clatter to the glass-covered floor.

A suffocating, terrified silence fell over the Morton family.

The shattered remains of the front oak doors were shoved open by two heavily armed guards.

Hilliard Holloway walked into the foyer.

He stepped over the broken glass, the shards crunching beneath his expensive leather shoes. He wore a dark shirt, his face pale and covered in a thin film of cold sweat. But the sheer, oppressive aura of violence radiating from him drained all the oxygen from the room.

He looked like something crawling out of a blood-soaked hell.

Wallace Sterling took one look at Hilliard and his knees buckled. He collapsed backward onto the sofa, his chest heaving in absolute terror.

Eleanor's hands shook so violently she dropped her silver cane. It clattered against the marble. She could not comprehend why the CEO of the Holloway empire had brought a private army into her home.

Chloé froze, her arrogant sneer dissolving into pure fear. She took in the armed soldiers, the shattered windows, and the terrifying look on Hilliard's face — and her survival instinct screamed.

"Mr. Holloway!" Chloé gasped, stumbling forward, her voice a desperate, pleading whine. "Thank God you're here! This is all a misunderstanding! Cailin — that psycho — she broke in! We were just defending ourselves!"

She reached her hand out, attempting to grab Hilliard's arm.

Hilliard did not even look at her.

The moment Chloé's fingers came within an inch of his sleeve, Gavin Thorne stepped out from behind him.

Gavin raised his leg and delivered a brutal, merciless kick directly into Chloé's stomach.

Chloé let out a sickening, breathless shriek. The force lifted her off her feet. She flew backward and crashed heavily onto the marble floor, sliding through the broken glass. She curled into a tight fetal position, vomiting bile onto the expensive rug, unable to draw a breath.

Hilliard kept walking. His dark, murderous gaze swept past the groveling billionaires and the bleeding mercenaries.

His eyes locked entirely onto Cailin standing in the center of the room.

The terrifying, psychotic rage on his face instantly melted away, replaced by a raw, desperate, and agonizing wave of pure concern.

The grand foyer was dead silent. The only sounds were the cold wind whistling through the shattered windows and Chloe's pathetic, wet wheezing from the floor.

Hilliard walked slowly toward Cailin, the glass crunching beneath his boots with every measured step.

As he closed the distance, the terrifying, violent aura that had paralyzed the room vanished completely — as if a switch had been flipped.

The ruthless tyrant of Wall Street stopped two feet away from her. He slightly bowed his broad shoulders, physically lowering his posture.

"Are you hurt?" Hilliard asked.

His voice was incredibly soft — a raspy, trembling whisper. He looked at her as if she were made of the most fragile, priceless porcelain, keeping his hands at his sides, terrified that even reaching out to touch her might cause her to shatter.

Chapter 503:

Cailin looked at his pale face. She saw the heavy sheen of cold sweat on his forehead. She saw the dark, wet stain of fresh blood seeping through his black shirt, right over his cracked sternum.

Her stomach gave a strange, uncomfortable lurch, but she instantly crushed the sensation. Her eyes remained flat and cold.

"I am fine," Cailin said, her voice completely devoid of emotion.

Hilliard let out a slow, shaky breath. The rigid tension in his jaw relaxed just a fraction.

He slowly turned his back to Cailin, facing the rest of the room.

The moment he turned around, the gentle, broken man disappeared. The demon returned. His eyes locked onto Eleanor Morton with a stare so lethal it made the old woman's blood freeze in her veins.

Eleanor gripped the armrest of the sofa, struggling to project authority.

"Hilliard," Eleanor forced the words out, her voice trembling. "This is a private Morton family matter. You have breached our estate with an armed force. You are violating federal law!"

"Law?" Hilliard let out a dark, hollow laugh. It was the most terrifying sound in the room.

Gavin stepped forward. He pulled a thick stack of financial documents from his jacket and threw them directly at Eleanor's feet. The papers scattered across the floor.

"Ten minutes ago," Hilliard said, his voice dropping to a mechanical, absolute zero, "the Holloway Group initiated a massive short-selling attack on every shell company under the Morton name. We have severed your credit lines and frozen your liquid assets."

Hilliard took a slow step forward.

"You are currently seven hundred million dollars in debt," Hilliard stated. "If I nod my head right now, by tomorrow morning, every single one of you will be living on the streets."

Eleanor's face turned the color of spoiled milk. The remaining strength left her body.

"You..." Eleanor choked, staring at the financial ruin scattered on the floor. "You are destroying a century-old family... for this discarded whore?"

"Discarded?"

The word triggered a violent explosion in Hilliard's chest.

He lunged forward, grabbing the collar of Eleanor's expensive silk blouse with his massive hand and violently yanking her upward, lifting her half off the sofa.

"Listen to me, you rotting corpse," Hilliard snarled, his face inches from hers, saliva flying from his lips. "She is the only wife of Hilliard Holloway. She is the ancestor I worship with my own blood!"

The physical exertion tore at his chest. A fresh wave of agony hit him, but he didn't even flinch.

"And you sewer rats dared to use her mother to set a trap for her?"

Hilliard shoved Eleanor backward. The old woman crashed into the sofa cushions, her entire body shaking violently. She couldn't speak. Her mind was completely broken by the sheer, psychotic level of protection Hilliard was displaying.

The entire room was paralyzed by shock. They had always treated Cailin as a piece of trash to be traded. They had no idea she had a rabid, bloodthirsty lion standing in her shadow.

Wallace Sterling realized he was going to die.

He slowly slid off the sofa, dropping to his hands and knees, trying to crawl toward the hallway in the shadows.

Chapter 504:

“Stop,” Hilliard commanded without even turning his head.

Two Shadow Squad operators stepped forward. They raised their assault rifles and drove the heavy polymer stocks directly into the backs of Wallace’s knees.

Wallace let out a high-pitched scream. He crashed down onto the floor, his bare knees slamming directly into the shattered glass. The sharp shards sliced through his expensive trousers, and dark red blood instantly pooled on the marble.

“Mr. Holloway! Please!” Wallace sobbed hysterically, pressing his face against the floor. “This has nothing to do with me! Eleanor offered her to me! I didn’t want her!”

Hilliard walked slowly toward the bleeding billionaire.

“You said she owed you three hundred million dollars in options?” Hilliard asked, looking down at Wallace as though he were a crushed insect.

“No! No debt! She owes me nothing!” Wallace screamed, shaking his head frantically.

“That is unacceptable,” Hilliard said. The corner of his mouth twitched into a cruel, sadistic smile. “A debt owed by the Morton family must be paid by the Morton family.”

Hilliard slowly turned his head.

His dead, predatory eyes locked onto Chloe, who was still curled on the floor, clutching her bruised stomach.

A perfectly twisted, permanent punishment formed in his mind.

Hilliard's gaze rested on Chloe like a physical weight.

"Bring her here," Hilliard ordered.

Two Shadow Squad operators grabbed Chloe by the arms. They dragged her across the glass-covered floor and threw her down right next to the bleeding Wallace Sterling.

Chloe screamed in terror, her hands frantically trying to brush the glass shards off her dress. "Let me go! What are you doing!"

Hilliard looked down at Wallace, who was still kneeling in a pool of his own blood.

"You like young, pretty Morton girls, don't you, Wallace?" Hilliard asked, his voice dripping with lethal mockery. He pointed at Chloe. "Does this collateral cover your three hundred million dollar loss?"

Wallace blinked. He looked at the terrified, crying Chloe, and then looked up at the absolute murder in Hilliard's eyes. His survival instinct kicked in instantly.

"Yes! Yes, it is more than enough!" Wallace nodded frantically, ignoring the pain in his knees. "I will marry her! I will have my lawyers draft the contract tonight!"

"No!" Chloe shrieked. Her eyes widened in sheer, unadulterated horror. She looked at the seventy-year-old, bleeding, pathetic man beside her. "I won't marry this disgusting old pig! Grandmother, save me!"

She reached her hand out toward Eleanor.

Eleanor sat frozen on the sofa. She slowly closed her eyes and turned her head away. If sacrificing Chloe meant saving the family from a seven-hundred-million-dollar bankruptcy, it was a necessary trade.

Chloe saw her grandmother turn away. Her world completely shattered. A suffocating wave of despair crashed over her. She finally understood the exact, terrifying helplessness Cailin had felt when the family sold her out.

Gavin Thorne stepped forward. He pulled a pre-drafted, highly aggressive prenuptial and asset-transfer agreement from his briefcase and dropped it on the floor between Wallace and Chloe.

Chapter 505:

"Sign it," Hilliard commanded. "Have the marriage registered before sunset tomorrow. If you fail, both of your families will be erased from Wall Street."

Wallace grabbed a pen with trembling hands and scrawled his signature. He then grabbed Chloe by the back of her hair, ignoring her hysterical screaming, and forced her thumb onto an ink pad, pressing it violently onto the contract.

Hilliard watched the pathetic display for a moment before turning his back on them. They were garbage, and they had been disposed of.

He walked back toward Cailin.

The violent energy drained from his body again. He stopped in front of her. He slowly raised his right hand, his fingers trembling slightly, and reached out to gently take hers.

“Let’s go home,” Hilliard whispered, his eyes filled with a desperate, begging light.

Smack.

Cailin raised her hand and slapped his away with brutal force. The sound echoed sharply through the foyer.

“Do not touch me,” Cailin said. Her voice was colder than the winter wind blowing through the broken windows. She took a deliberate step backward, increasing the distance between them.

Hilliard's hand hung frozen in the air. A sharp, physical ache radiated from the center of his chest, making it impossible to draw a full breath. He slowly pulled his hand back, his eyes dropping to the floor.

Just then, the encrypted comms in Gavin's ear crackled frantically.

"Sir, an unidentified armored vehicle just breached the outer perimeter. Signal jammers are active. It seems they exploited a blind spot in our comms network," a sniper reported.

Before Gavin could raise his weapon, a slow, mocking sound of clapping echoed from the darkness beyond the shattered windows.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

"What a spectacular display of a hero saving the damsel, Mr. Holloway," Kegan Aguirre's voice drifted in.

Kegan stepped through the broken window frame. He wore a dark grey, tailored trench coat, and he moved with the absolute, arrogant confidence of a man who owned the shadows.

Instantly, every Shadow Squad operator raised their assault rifles, laser sights aimed directly at Kegan's chest.

Kegan didn't even blink. He ignored the guns entirely and walked straight toward Cailin.

Hilliard's pupils constricted. The primal, territorial instinct of an alpha male exploded in his blood. He immediately stepped sideways, using his broad body to physically block Kegan from reaching her.

"Get out," Hilliard growled. His voice vibrated with a deep, guttural threat. "You have no business here."

Kegan stopped two feet away and let out a dark chuckle.

"I am here to pick up my ally," Kegan said, staring directly into Hilliard's eyes. "Is that a problem?"

The word ally hit Hilliard like a physical blow to the skull. The blood roared in his ears. His hands curled into massive fists, the knuckles popping loudly in the quiet room.

"Relax," Kegan sneered. He reached into his coat pocket and produced a small, encrypted black USB drive, holding it between two fingers and extending it toward Hilliard.

"What is this?" Hilliard demanded, his chest heaving as he fought the urge to rip Kegan's throat out.

Chapter 506:

"The complete dark web communication logs," Kegan said, his eyes turning deadly serious. "Charla English hiring the assassins to kill Cali at the hospital."

Kegan took a step closer, invading Hilliard's personal space.

"I know you are setting a trap for her," Kegan whispered, his voice dripping with condescension. "But you move too slow. Consider this a wedding gift from Cali and me."

Without waiting for Hilliard to take it, he aggressively shoved the USB drive directly into the breast pocket of Hilliard's dark shirt.

Kegan then stepped around the frozen billionaire. He walked up to Cailin and smoothly, naturally placed his arm around her shoulders.

"Let's go, Cali," Kegan said.

Cailin's entire body went rigid the moment his hand touched her. Every instinct screamed at her to shove him away. But she forced her muscles to relax. She did not pull away. She knew Hilliard was watching. She needed to use Kegan's touch as the final, absolute blade to sever Hilliard's psychotic delusions. She let Kegan guide her through the broken glass and out into the cold night, leaving Hilliard standing alone in the ruins of the foyer.

The freezing night wind whipped across the Long Island estate.

Cailin walked beside Kegan, her flat shoes crunching on the gravel driveway. They headed toward a sleek, black Aston Martin parked just beyond the destroyed iron gates.

“Cailin!”

The desperate, ragged shout tore through the wind.

Hilliard stumbled out of the mansion. He was moving too fast for his broken body. His heavy boots slipped on the gravel.

He lunged forward and grabbed Cailin’s wrist. His grip was terrifyingly strong for a fraction of a second, but the moment his skin touched her freezing flesh, he yanked his hand back as if he had been burned.

“Don’t go with him,” Hilliard begged.

His chest was heaving. He was breathing through his mouth, gasping for air. The dark red blood had completely soaked through his black shirt, spreading in a massive, horrifying stain across his abdomen.

He made no attempt to hide the blood. He stood there, letting the wind hit his bleeding wounds, using his physical destruction as a pathetic, desperate plea for her sympathy.

Cailin stopped walking.

She turned around and looked at him. Her eyes tracked slowly down to the massive bloodstain on his chest, then back up to his pale, desperate face.

There was no shock in her eyes. There was no pity. There was only a suffocating, absolute numbness.

“Hilliard,” Cailin said. Her voice was so quiet it was almost carried away by the wind, but every word was a surgical blade. “Do you honestly think bleeding in front of me will wash away what you did?”

Hilliard’s breath hitched. He stared at her, his eyes wide and terrified.

“Every time you try to play the savior,” Cailin whispered, her voice laced with pure venom, “it just makes me sick to my stomach.”

The words slammed into Hilliard’s chest with more force than a bullet.

Chapter 507:

His tall, imposing frame physically swayed. The adrenaline that had been keeping him upright evaporated. He looked like a man whose spine had just been snapped.

“Go back and prepare for your Century Engagement,” Cailin sneered, turning her back on him. “I wish you and Charla a lifetime of misery.”

She walked to the Aston Martin, opened the passenger door, and slid inside without looking back once.

The massive V12 engine roared to life. The black car tore down the dark road, its taillights disappearing into the night.

Hilliard stood entirely alone in the freezing courtyard. The wind whipped his hair across his forehead. He looked like a broken, abandoned ghost.

“Boss...”

Gavin walked up quietly from behind. He unfolded a heavy wool overcoat and draped it over Hilliard’s shivering, bleeding shoulders.

Hilliard did not move for a long time.

Slowly, he reached into his breast pocket. His trembling fingers pulled out the black USB drive Kegan had shoved in there. He stared at the small piece of metal.

The pathetic, heartbroken despair in his eyes began to recede, replaced by a dark, suffocating, and absolute hatred. The Wall Street wolf was back.

“Send these dark web logs to the legal team,” Hilliard commanded. His voice was a mechanical, grating rasp. “Tell them to accelerate Charla’s bail process. I want it finalized in twenty-four hours. I want her moved into the Holloway estate by tomorrow night.”

Gavin’s eyes widened. “You are pulling the net in early?”

“I want her to fly to the absolute peak,” Hilliard said, his fist closing tightly around the USB drive until the plastic casing cracked. “Because when she thinks she has everything, the fall will shatter every bone in her body.”

Inside the mansion, Wallace Sterling was already dragging a hysterically sobbing Chloe toward the back exit, desperate to finalize the marriage contract before the markets opened.

Hilliard turned and walked toward his armored SUV. Gavin opened the door and immediately handed him a bottle of high-grade painkillers and a roll of sterile gauze.

“Back to the hospital,” Hilliard said, swallowing two pills dry. He leaned his head against the window and closed his eyes. He had to keep his body functioning just long enough to finish the slaughter.

Miles away, inside the warm cabin of the Aston Martin, Kegan handed Cailin a thermos of warm water from the center console.

“You were brutal to him back there,” Kegan said, a faint trace of probing in his tone.

Cailin held the warm thermos and stared blankly out the window at the blurred streetlights.

“Showing mercy to a monster is just cruelty to yourself,” Cailin said flatly.

She kept her face perfectly still. She didn’t tell Kegan that the moment she saw the fresh blood pouring from Hilliard’s chest, the hand hidden deep inside her trench coat pocket had started shaking uncontrollably.

High above the chaotic streets of Manhattan, inside a sprawling Park Avenue penthouse, Charla English stood in front of a massive, floor-to-ceiling gilded mirror. She was trying on a pure white, custom-made haute couture gown that had been flown in from Paris just hours ago.

Chapter 508:

She looked at her reflection and let out a breathless, ecstatic laugh.

Just two hours prior, Hilliard’s legal team had called. The federal bail was completely finalized. The charges were stalled.

But the real victory was the dress. Hilliard had ordered it sent to her, along with a formal, handwritten invitation to move into the Holloway Long Island estate tomorrow.

“I won,” Charla whispered to her reflection, her fingers tracing the delicate lace on her collarbone. “Cailin is probably rotting in a gutter, and I am going to wear the crown.”

She walked over to a marble wet bar and poured a glass of vintage champagne to celebrate her absolute triumph over the world.

She raised the crystal flute to her lips and took a deep sip.

As the cold liquid hit her throat, the penthouse doorbell chimed sharply. Charla frowned. She set the glass down and walked to the foyer.

Sitting on the marble console table was a small, unmarked black box. She hadn't heard the private elevator open. Her hands trembled slightly as she lifted the lid.

Inside rested a single, high-resolution photograph — a bright pink windbreaker, soaked in seawater, washed up on a rocky shore. Attached was a note written in jagged red ink: The ocean is cold, Auntie Charla.

Charla dropped the box. Her breathing became erratic. She stumbled back to the wet bar, desperate to calm her nerves. She grabbed her champagne flute and took another massive gulp.

Instantly, a thick, hot, metallic taste exploded on her tongue. It tasted like rusted iron and salt.

Charla gagged. She pulled the glass away and looked down.

The bubbling, golden champagne inside the crystal flute was gone. Instead, the glass was filled with a thick, viscous, dark red liquid.

Blood.

“Ahhh!” Charla let out a piercing scream.

She violently hurled the glass away. It smashed against the hardwood floor. The crystal shattered, and the dark red liquid splattered across the expensive rug and the hem of her pristine white gown.

She scrambled backward, her high heels slipping, until her spine slammed hard against the wall. Her chest heaved violently. Cold sweat instantly broke out across her forehead, ruining her makeup.

“Breathe, Charla... just breathe,” she muttered frantically, pressing her hands against her racing heart. “It’s just the stress. It’s just the FBI stress.”

She squeezed her eyes shut, counting to three.

When she opened them again, she looked at the floor. The liquid soaking into the rug was pale yellow. It was just champagne.

She let out a long, shaky exhale, sliding down the wall slightly. It was just a hallucination.

Then, from the dark hallway leading to the master bathroom, she heard a sound.

Drip... Drip... Drip.

Charla's entire body went rigid. The penthouse was completely empty. She had fired all the maids yesterday.

"Who is there?!" Charla yelled. Her voice cracked with terror.

Chapter 509:

She grabbed a heavy, solid silver letter opener from the console table. Her knuckles turned white as she gripped the sharp metal. She crept slowly down the hallway, her breath catching in her throat.

The bathroom door was slightly ajar. The room inside was pitch black. The dripping sound was louder now.

Charla shoved the door open and slammed her hand against the light switch.

The bright vanity lights flickered on.

Water from the silver faucet dripped slowly into the massive porcelain bathtub. But the water wasn't clear. It was a pale, terrifying shade of pink.

Lying in the center of the bathtub, with her back turned to the door, was a little girl. The girl was wearing a bright pink windbreaker. The fabric was soaked, clinging to her small frame. Her dark, wet hair was plastered against her pale neck.

Charla's blood instantly turned to ice. Her lungs seized.

It was the exact pink windbreaker Elia had been wearing the day she was thrown into the ocean.

"You... you're dead," Charla choked out, her whole body shaking violently. The silver letter opener rattled in her hand.

The little girl in the bathtub slowly turned her head.

The face looked exactly like Cailin's, but where her eyes should have been, there were only two empty, black holes leaking dark red blood down her cheeks.

"Auntie Charla..." the girl whispered. The voice was a sickening, watery echo. "The ocean is so cold... why did you push me?"

"Shut up! Shut up! Go away!" Charla completely lost her mind.

She let out a hysterical, feral scream and lunged at the bathtub. She raised the silver letter opener and began stabbing wildly at the girl in the pink jacket — over and over, screaming until her throat bled.

Finally, her arm gave out. She stopped, panting heavily, and looked down.

The bathtub was completely empty. There was no water. There was no girl. There were only deep, violent scratches gouged into the expensive porcelain from her weapon.

Clatter.

The letter opener dropped from her numb fingers.

Charla collapsed onto the cold bathroom tiles. She pulled her knees to her chest, rocking back and forth, her pristine white gown ruined.

“I am Mrs. Holloway...” Charla giggled, the sound sick and broken. Tears streamed down her face. “No one can hurt me... I won...”

In the empty, silent penthouse, Charla English’s mind had completely fractured. The psychological warfare Cailin had planted in her brain was tearing her apart from the inside.

And she had no idea that this terrifying mental collapse was merely the appetizer for the slaughter Hilliard was preparing for her tomorrow.

The next morning.

Inside the VIP wing of the Holloway Private Hospital, the air smelled of sterile alcohol and ozone.

Hilliard Holloway had just endured a grueling, two-hour secondary surgery to re-suture his torn sternum. He wore a loose, grey hospital gown, and he had explicitly refused the wheelchair the nurses offered.

He walked slowly down the empty, silent corridor, his hand pressing heavily against the wall for support. He needed to force his muscles to remember how to move. He needed to be physically ready for the engagement party tonight.

Chapter 510:

At the far end of the corridor, near the heavy steel doors of the server room, the ceiling vent rattled.

The metal grate was silently pushed aside. Two small figures, dressed in identical black tactical hoodies and black face masks, dropped silently to the linoleum floor. They moved with the terrifying, practiced agility of young leopards.

It was Aron and Davy. They had utilized the backdoor Trojan program on the USB drive Gavin had previously given Cailin, temporarily blinding the security cameras and thermal sensors on the VIP floor for exactly three minutes. They had crawled through the narrow maintenance shafts to bypass the

Blackwater guards. Their mission: infiltrate the hospital's internal servers and erase any medical data Preston might have gathered on Cailin.

Aron immediately pulled a portable decryption device from his pocket and attached it to the electronic lock of the server room. Davy stood at the corner, his amber eyes scanning the hallway for threats.

Hilliard turned the corner.

He stopped dead in his tracks.

The two boys froze. The air in the corridor instantly turned to solid ice.

Hilliard frowned. He assumed they were the lost children of a VIP patient. But then his eyes tracked down to the heavy tactical belts around their waists and the specialized decryption tool in Aron's hand.

"Who are you?" Hilliard asked, his voice cold and authoritative. "How did you get up here?"

Davy slowly turned his head.

He looked up at Hilliard. Above the black fabric of the mask, Davy's amber eyes burned with a pure, unadulterated hatred.

Hilliard's heart physically skipped a beat.

Those eyes — the shape of them, the stubborn, lethal coldness in them — were a perfect, terrifying mirror of Cailin's eyes.

"You..." Davy growled. His voice was a low, vibrating snarl of pure malice. "You are the butcher who killed our sister!"

The words hit Hilliard like a bolt of lightning straight to the brain.

The memory of Cailin screaming in the ICU flashed in his mind. I have two sons. Aron and Davy.

"My... my sons?" Hilliard whispered.

His pupils dilated. His entire body began to tremble. The imposing billionaire vanished, replaced by a desperate, broken man. He took a staggering step forward, reaching his shaking hands out toward them.

"Don't touch me!" Davy roared like a cornered wolf pup.

Davy reached to his belt and pulled out a heavy, tungsten-steel tactical pen. Without a microsecond of hesitation, he charged directly at Hilliard.

Hilliard saw the weapon. His combat instincts flared and he immediately tried to pivot his body to dodge the strike. But his torn sternum and the lingering effects of the painkillers made his movements sluggish. He couldn't clear the distance in time.

Shhhk!

The sharp alloy tip of the tactical pen drove deep into the muscle of Hilliard's thigh.