

Second chance 511

Chapter 511:

Hilliard let out a sharp, muffled grunt of pain. His massive hand shot out — not to strike, but to grab Davy's wrist, desperately trying to restrain the out-of-control child before he could strike again. Instead of pushing the boy away, he pulled Davy against his chest to lock his arms down.

"Let me go! You murderer!" Davy screamed, thrashing wildly in Hilliard's grip.

Davy opened his mouth and bit down viciously on Hilliard's forearm. His teeth sank deep into the flesh. Warm blood instantly welled up, soaking into the sleeve of the hospital gown and dripping onto the floor.

Hilliard didn't even flinch. He just held the boy tighter.

Tears spilled over Hilliard's eyelashes, tracking down his pale cheeks.

"I'm sorry..." Hilliard sobbed, burying his face into the hood of Davy's jacket, inhaling the scent of his child. "I'm so sorry... Daddy is here."

Aron stood a few feet away. His eyes were completely devoid of emotion. He watched the pathetic display of the man bleeding on the floor and felt absolutely nothing.

Aron raised his wrist and pressed a button on his smartwatch.

A micro-taser concealed in his sleeve deployed.

Zzzzap!

A bright blue arc of electricity shot out, striking Hilliard directly in the back of the neck.

The high voltage ripped through Hilliard's already ruined nervous system. His muscles violently spasmed. His arms lost all their strength and fell to his sides.

Davy immediately shoved Hilliard backward and scrambled out of his grip. He wiped a smear of Hilliard's blood off his mask, glaring down at the paralyzed man with pure disgust.

"The security grid is rebooting. We are leaving," Aron commanded with chilling calmness.

Aron pulled a small, grey cylinder from his pocket and threw it hard against the floor. A thick, blinding cloud of white smoke instantly erupted, filling the corridor and completely obscuring Hilliard's vision.

Hilliard lay paralyzed on the floor, his thigh bleeding, his heart shattered. When the smoke finally cleared, the hallway was completely empty.

The electrical paralysis slowly faded from Hilliard's muscles.

He gritted his teeth, grabbing the wall to drag himself up from the floor. He reached down and yanked the bloody tactical pen out of his thigh. A fresh stream of dark blood ran down his leg, staining the grey hospital pants.

He didn't hit the emergency alarm. He followed the faint, wet footprints the boys had left on the linoleum, dragging his bleeding leg toward the emergency stairwell.

Inside the concrete stairwell, Aron and Davy were sprinting down the steps, heading for the blind spot in the subterranean parking garage.

They reached the heavy, fireproof steel door leading to the ground-floor lobby. Just as Aron reached for the handle, a loud commotion echoed from the other side. The sound of heavy boots and the rapid clicking of camera shutters bled through the steel.

Preston Holloway was walking through the lobby. He was pushing Jeraldine Holloway in a wheelchair, surrounded by a dozen Blackwater security contractors. It was a highly orchestrated PR stunt to show the media that the Holloway family was united and recovering.

Aron immediately grabbed Davy's shoulder, pulling him back. They pressed themselves against the wall beside the small, rectangular glass viewing window on the door.

Suddenly, the hospital's main security grid finished its reboot cycle.

Chapter 512:

Beep. Clack.

The electronic mag-lock on the fire door engaged automatically, sealing the boys inside the stairwell.

The loud mechanical clack echoed in the lobby.

Preston stopped walking. He frowned, looking toward the fire door, assuming a paparazzi rat had snuck into the building.

“Open it,” Preston ordered his lead bodyguard.

The massive guard swiped his master keycard. The heavy steel door was yanked open.

The guard immediately shined a high-powered tactical flashlight directly into the dark stairwell. The blinding beam hit Aron and Davy perfectly. They raised their arms to shield their eyes. As a guard lunged forward to grab him, Davy twisted away, and in the struggle, the guard’s hand caught the edge of his mask, yanking it down around his neck.

The moment the light illuminated their features, all the oxygen vanished from the lobby.

Jeraldine Holloway, who had been sitting catatonic in her wheelchair, suddenly gasped. Her eyes widened to the point of tearing.

She grabbed the armrests and violently pushed herself up, standing on her own two feet for the first time in days.

She stared at the two identical, perfectly sculpted faces in the stairwell. The high cheekbones, the deep-set eyes, the arrogant, cold glare — it was like looking at a photograph of Hilliard when he was five years old.

“My God...” Jeraldine let out a shrill, hysterical shriek. Tears flooded her face.

Preston froze. His jaw practically unhinged. He had built his entire takeover strategy on the fact that Hilliard had no male heirs. Now, two pure-blooded Holloway males were standing right in front of him.

“The bloodline...” Jeraldine screamed, stumbling forward like a madwoman, reaching her shaking hands toward the boys.

“Don’t touch us, you old witch!” Davy spat, his amber eyes flashing with lethal aggression.

Aron immediately stepped in front of his brother. His hand dropped to his tactical belt, his fingers wrapping around the pin of a high-explosive flashbang.

“Grab them!” Preston roared, his shock instantly turning into ruthless greed. “Do not let them escape!”

The dozen Blackwater guards drew their stun batons and surged forward, forming a massive wall of muscle that blocked the only exit.

Just as the lead guard reached his massive hand out to grab Aron’s shoulder —

BANG!

A deafening gunshot echoed down the concrete stairwell.

A 9mm bullet smashed into the concrete step exactly one inch away from the guard’s boot, sending sharp fragments of stone flying into the air.

Everyone in the lobby froze in absolute terror. They looked up into the darkness of the stairwell.

Hilliard Holloway stood on the landing above them.

Chapter 513:

He was holding a black Glock 19 that Gavin had secretly slipped into his hospital room closet for emergencies — grabbed before he dragged himself out to follow the blood trail. He was panting heavily.

Blood dripped from his thigh and seeped through his chest bandages. He leaned heavily against the railing, his gun hand trembling uncontrollably, using his other hand to brace his wrist and keep the weapon steady.

He looked down at the men trying to take his sons. The look in his eyes was not human. It was the look of a starving lion protecting its cubs.

He slowly lowered the barrel of the gun, aiming the laser sight directly at the center of Preston's forehead.

"If anyone touches a single hair on their heads," Hilliard gasped, his voice a raw, breathless rasp that barely carried over his own ragged breathing, "I will blow your brains all over this lobby."

The smell of burnt gunpowder filled the narrow concrete stairwell.

Hilliard's hand was shaking so violently the red laser dot quivered on Preston's forehead.

"Hilliard! Have you lost your mind?!" Jeraldine shrieked, her voice echoing shrilly off the walls. "I am your mother!"

Preston recovered from his shock, his face twisting in rage. He pointed a trembling finger up the stairs. "Put the gun down! Those are the heirs to the Holloway empire! They must be brought back to the estate immediately for protection and re-education!"

“Re-education?” Hilliard let out a dark, hollow laugh. The sound was filled with years of self-loathing and agony. “You mean brainwashing. Like you did to me. Turning them into cold-blooded monsters.”

Hilliard dragged his bleeding leg down the steps. He moved slowly, placing himself directly between the Blackwater guards and his two sons. He became a literal wall of flesh and bone, shielding them from the family that had destroyed his life.

Aron watched Hilliard’s broad back. His finger remained hooked on the flashbang pin, his eyes calculating the shifting variables.

“Don’t think this makes us grateful,” Davy hissed from behind Hilliard, his voice dripping with venom. “You are just like them.”

“I know,” Hilliard said softly, not turning around. “I don’t expect your forgiveness. But even if I have to die on these stairs today, they are not taking you.”

Jeraldine watched her son point a gun at his own family for two boys she had never met. She trembled with rage.

“They have Holloway blood in their veins! They belong to the family!” Jeraldine screamed, trying to push past a guard to reach the boys.

BANG!

Hilliard pulled the trigger without a microsecond of hesitation. The bullet shattered the tile floor right at Jeraldine's toes.

Jeraldine shrieked and collapsed backward onto the floor, staring at her son in absolute horror.

"They will never carry the Holloway name," Hilliard stated, his voice dropping to a freezing, absolute zero. "That name is a curse, and I won't let them bear it. They are Mortons. They are Cailin's sons. That is all that matters."

Preston realized negotiations were useless. He locked eyes with his lead security contractor and gave a sharp nod.

"He is mentally unstable," Preston ordered coldly. "Disarm him and secure the assets."

The twelve Blackwater guards drew their tasers and heavy tactical batons. They began to advance up the steps, their boots thudding against the concrete.

Chapter 514:

Hilliard didn't step back. He racked the slide of the Glock, chambering his final round. His eyes burned with the psychotic calm of a man ready to die.

"Come on," Hilliard roared, the sound feral and terrifying. "Let's see who is faster."

Just as the guards lunged forward, Aron rapidly tapped a sequence of commands into his smartwatch.

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP!

The hospital's emergency fire alarm system was manually overridden. A deafening, ear-piercing siren instantly shattered the tension in the building.

A second later, the high-pressure sprinkler system in the ceiling of the stairwell activated. Freezing cold water blasted down like a monsoon, instantly soaking everyone to the bone.

The sudden deluge blinded the Blackwater guards. The water short-circuited their tasers, causing sparks to fly and breaking their tactical formation entirely.

"Go!" Hilliard shouted.

He didn't fire his weapon. Instead, he slammed his shoulder into the heavy side door that led to the loading dock alleyway, shoving it open.

He turned to Aron and Davy. The freezing water plastered his hair to his face, washing the blood down his chest. He looked at them with desperate, pleading eyes.

"Run through there. Gavin is waiting outside. Go!"

Aron stared at Hilliard for one long, complex second. He saw the man who had destroyed their mother, now offering his own life to buy them time. Aron didn't say a word. He grabbed Davy's arm and sprinted through the open door into the rainy night.

Davy paused right at the threshold. He looked back at Hilliard, his lips parting slightly, but he swallowed whatever words he had and disappeared into the darkness.

Hilliard watched them vanish. A massive, crushing weight lifted off his chest.

He turned back around, blocking the open doorway with his body.

Preston wiped the water from his eyes, staring at the empty space where the boys had been. His face twisted into a mask of pure, unadulterated fury.

"Break his legs!" Preston screamed at the guards.

Hilliard looked at the advancing wall of mercenaries. He opened his hand and let the empty Glock clatter onto the wet concrete.

He stood in the freezing rain, spreading his arms wide, and let out a loud, broken laugh of absolute relief.

“Come on,” Hilliard whispered to the approaching violence. “I owe her this blood.”

He closed his eyes, waiting for the heavy steel batons to shatter his bones.

The heavy steel fire door slammed shut behind them, cutting off the muffled sounds of brutal blows and Hilliard’s suppressed, agonizing groans echoing from the depths of the corridor.

Inside the hospital’s subterranean parking garage, the emergency alarms were blaring. The shrill, mechanical shrieks bounced off the low concrete ceiling, vibrating right into the marrow of their bones.

Aron gripped Davy’s wrist and pulled his younger brother through the maze of thick concrete pillars. Their wet tactical boots slapped against the damp pavement.

Behind them, the harsh, blinding beams of tactical flashlights sliced through the darkness.

“Spread out! Seal the exits!” a rough voice echoed over the alarms.

Aron ducked behind a massive concrete support column, dragging Davy down with him. His chest heaved. He peered around the edge of the cement.

Chapter 515:

Four Blackwater security contractors, fully armored in black tactical gear, were fanning out across the main exit ramp. They moved with military precision, completely blocking the only physical path out of the underground structure.

The security captain stepped forward. He raised a heavy riot gun equipped with a Taser projectile launcher. The red laser sight swept across the dark corners of the garage.

“Come out with your hands on your heads!” the captain barked, his voice echoing off the walls. “Step out into the light, right now, or we will deploy high-voltage rounds!”

Davy gritted his teeth. His amber eyes burned with cornered aggression. He reached down and gripped the handle of his tungsten-steel tactical pen, his knuckles turning completely white. He was ready to fight to the death.

Aron pressed a hand against Davy’s chest to hold him back. His amber eyes were completely cold, his brain rapidly calculating the variables. Four armed men. Open ground. No cover.

The survival rate of a physical confrontation was absolute zero.

The captain’s laser sight suddenly locked onto the edge of their concrete pillar. The red dot hovered inches from Aron’s face.

The captain’s finger tightened on the trigger.

At that exact microsecond, a deafening, mechanical roar tore through the garage.

A massive, black, bulletproof Cadillac SUV came tearing down the entrance ramp. The engine screamed like a starving beast. The heavy steel grill smashed directly through the automated toll barrier, shattering the wooden arm into a hundred flying splinters.

The SUV did not slow down. It went into a violent, chaotic drift. The tires shrieked against the concrete, sending up a thick cloud of acrid white smoke, before the massive vehicle slammed to a halt — positioned perfectly horizontally between the two boys and the four Blackwater guards.

The SUV's high beams flashed on. The blinding halogen light hit the security team directly in the eyes. The captain flinched, throwing his arm up to shield his face, temporarily blinded.

The driver's side window rolled down smoothly.

As Aron's smartwatch had pulsed with the emergency beacon — sending his and Davy's skyrocketing heart rates directly to a secure server — Cailin had immediately initiated the exfiltration protocol. She now sat behind the wheel. Her face was as pale as a corpse, drenched in a cold, unnatural sweat. Underneath her coat, a specialized, rigid exoskeleton brace, custom-built by Kegan's engineers, locked her atrophied spine and shoulders into an upright position. Her veins bulged against her translucent skin, flooded with a dangerous, experimental cocktail of military-grade neuro-stimulants just to force her paralyzed muscles to obey.

She raised her right hand, holding a black Glock 19. Her arm was perfectly straight, but a violent, microscopic tremor rattled the barrel, betraying the agonizing, tearing pain ripping through her muscle fibers.

“Get in,” Cailin commanded.

Her voice was not loud. It did not shake. But it carried an aura of absolute, lethal authority that sucked all the oxygen out of the garage.

Chapter 516:

The security captain froze. His finger went rigid on the Taser trigger. The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He looked into Cailin’s dead eyes and knew, with absolute certainty, that if he twitched a single muscle, this woman would blow his brains out.

Aron and Davy did not waste a single millisecond. They moved with perfect synchronization — darting out from behind the pillar, yanking open the heavy rear doors of the Cadillac, and throwing themselves into the backseat like two agile leopard cubs.

The heavy doors slammed shut.

Cailin’s fingers brushed a sequence of commands onto a touch panel integrated into the steering wheel, activating the vehicle’s tactical assisted-driving mode. Instantly, Kegan’s pre-programmed evasion routes took primary control, her hands now only needing to make micro-adjustments. She slammed her foot onto the gas pedal. Every turn of the heavy steering wheel felt like crushed glass grinding in her shoulder joints.

The SUV’s massive tires spun, burning rubber against the concrete. The vehicle shot forward like a bullet leaving a chamber, tearing up the exit ramp and bursting out into the freezing Manhattan night.

The Blackwater guards recovered their vision and raised their weapons, aiming for the tires.

But Cailin was already gone. She whipped the heavy steering wheel, letting the onboard computer execute a flawless evasive maneuver. She cut violently across three lanes of dense city traffic, weaving through the yellow cabs and delivery trucks, instantly losing the pursuit.

Inside the cabin of the SUV, the silence was suffocating.

The only sound was the heavy, ragged breathing of the two boys in the backseat.

Cailin stared straight ahead at the road. Her hands gripped the leather steering wheel so hard her knuckles were stark white. Her stomach cramped violently — a sharp spike of pain radiating from her healing ulcer, brought on by the sheer, paralyzing terror of almost losing her sons.

She glanced in the rearview mirror.

Aron and Davy were soaked to the bone from the hospital's sprinkler system. Their black tactical gear was dripping wet. Davy had a fresh, bleeding scrape across his left cheekbone.

Cailin's throat tightened. She swallowed the bile rising in her throat and kept driving.

Forty minutes later, the Cadillac rolled into a dark, abandoned industrial alleyway in Brooklyn. Cailin pressed a button on the sun visor. A heavy steel roll-up door slowly ground open. She drove the SUV inside, and the steel door slammed shut behind them, sealing them inside the hidden safe house.

Cailin put the car in park and turned off the engine.

The moment the engine died, the neuro-stimulants began to crash. Cailin let out a ragged, suffocating gasp. Her hands, previously locked on the wheel in a death grip, completely gave out. She slumped forward, her forehead resting heavily against the leather steering wheel, her entire body shaking violently from the catastrophic physical backlash.

It took her three agonizing minutes just to unbuckle her seatbelt. With Ashely rushing over to support her weight, she managed to drag herself out of the car without a word. Leaning heavily against a metal cabinet for support, she pulled out a white first-aid kit and limped over to the leather sofa in the center of the room.

Chapter 517:

Aron and Davy climbed out of the car and stood in front of her.

Cailin opened the kit. She took out a cotton swab and soaked it in rubbing alcohol. She reached out and gently dabbed the bleeding scrape on Davy's cheek.

The sharp sting of the alcohol made Davy suck in a breath of cold air. His small shoulders flinched, but he stubbornly held his ground. He didn't pull away.

"I'm sorry, Mommy," Davy whispered, his voice incredibly small.

Cailin's hand stopped.

The cold, lethal operative vanished. Her eyes instantly turned red. Her chest heaved. She dropped the cotton swab, fell to her knees, and pulled both of her sons into a crushing, desperate hug.

She buried her face in their wet shoulders, feeling the rapid, steady beating of their hearts against her chest. She squeezed them so tight her arms shook.

"I would rather die," Cailin said. Her voice was a raw, trembling rasp, filled with absolute terror. "I would rather die a thousand times than let you two do something that dangerous ever again."

Aron slowly pulled back from the hug.

He looked at his mother. His amber eyes did not hold the warmth of a five-year-old child. They held the cold, calculating logic of a seasoned tactician.

"Mommy, hiding will not solve the problem," Aron stated flatly. "The Holloway family knows we exist now. They control half of Wall Street. They have unlimited resources. The hunt will never stop."

Cailin's brow furrowed deeply. Her stomach twisted. She knew Aron was stating a factual reality, but her maternal instinct violently rejected it.

"I don't care," Cailin snapped, her voice hard. "I will not use my children as bait."

Davy clenched his small fists at his sides. He stepped forward, his amber eyes burning with a dark, violent fire.

"They killed Elia," Davy growled, his voice vibrating with pure hatred. "They stole the quiet life we were supposed to have. We are going to make them pay."

Cailin stared at the burning vengeance in her youngest son's eyes. A cold chill ran down her spine. The hatred in his face looked exactly like Hilliard's when he was pushed to the edge.

She tried to assert her absolute authority.

"Adult wars are fought by adults," Cailin said, her tone leaving no room for argument. "Your only mission is to stay safe. I am sending you back to Europe."

Aron didn't argue. He simply raised his left wrist and tapped the screen of his smartwatch. A micro-holographic projector hummed to life. A glowing blue, three-dimensional blueprint of the massive Holloway estate on Long Island materialized in the air between them, highlighting the complex security grid, the biometric locks, and the armed patrol routes.

“Breaching this fortress from the outside requires a small army,” Aron said, pointing his small finger at the heavily guarded master server room in the center of the estate. “But destroying it from the inside only requires two Trojan horses.”

Davy’s lips curled into a cold, cruel smirk that looked entirely unnatural on a child’s face.

Chapter 518:

“They are desperate for pure-blooded male heirs, aren’t they?” Davy asked, his voice dripping with dark mockery. “So we will hand-deliver exactly what they want.”

Cailin stared at the glowing blue hologram, then at her two sons.

The realization hit her like a physical blow to the chest. These were not normal children. They had been raised by Kegan Aguirre, the most ruthless warlord in Europe. They had been trained to think like predators. They were no longer chicks needing to be hidden in a nest.

“Do you have any idea what will happen if your identities are compromised?” Cailin asked, her voice shaking. “If you fail, the captivity you will face inside that house will be worse than death.”

Aron reached out and tapped his watch, shutting off the hologram. The blue light vanished.

He looked directly into Cailin’s eyes.

“Rule number one of infiltration, Mommy,” Aron said, his voice perfectly steady. “Never let the prey know the hunter is already inside the cage. We are ready.”

Cailin’s mind reeled. Every protective instinct screamed at her to refuse, to lock them away where the world couldn’t touch them. But Aron’s chilling logic was undeniable. Passive defense was a slow death. They would be hunted forever.

She looked at their determined faces — a terrifying echo of her own resolve — and felt a wave of cold dread wash over her. It was a choice between two hells.

After a long, agonizing silence, she finally gave a single, sharp nod, her heart breaking with the decision.

“If this is the only path,” she whispered, her voice hollow, “then burn them to the ground.”

The next morning, a thick, cold fog rolled off the Atlantic Ocean, blanketing the North Shore of Long Island.

The Holloway estate loomed in the mist like a massive, gothic fortress. The sprawling stone architecture and the towering wrought-iron gates reeked of century-old money and suffocating, oppressive power.

Inside the main house, the atmosphere in the luxurious mahogany study was explosive.

Crash!

Preston Holloway grabbed a priceless Ming dynasty porcelain vase from a side table and hurled it violently against the stone fireplace. The antique shattered into a thousand jagged pieces.

Jeraldine Holloway sat in her custom wheelchair near the window, nervously twisting a silk handkerchief around her fingers. Her knuckles were white. Her eyes were wide and manic.

“The bloodline,” Jeraldine muttered, rocking back and forth slightly. “They have the Holloway eyes. They are the pure male heirs. We must find them. We have to bring them home.”

Preston gritted his teeth, adjusting the cuffs of his tailored suit. He needed those boys. If he controlled the direct male heirs, his position as acting chairman of the Holloway Group would be legally untouchable.

Suddenly, a very faint, high-pitched beep echoed in the study.

It was the highest-level security alert, indicating someone had physically touched the intercom button at the main outer gates of the estate.

The heavy oak doors of the study opened. The head butler rushed into the room. His usual stoic, professional mask was completely gone. His face was pale, his eyes wide with absolute shock.

Chapter 519:

He held a secure, encrypted tablet in his trembling hands.

“Sir,” the butler gasped, extending the tablet toward Preston. “You need to see this.”

Preston snatched the tablet and glared at the live security feed.

His heart slammed against his ribs. The breath completely left his lungs. He froze, staring at the screen as if he were looking at a ghost.

On the screen, standing just outside the massive wrought-iron gates of the estate, were two small boys.

Aron and Davy stood shoulder-to-shoulder, dressed immaculately in custom-tailored, British-style trench coats. The collars were popped against the morning chill. Each boy held the handle of a vintage, genuine leather suitcase.

They stood perfectly still, their posture rigid and aristocratic, staring directly into the security camera lens with absolute, chilling calm.

“My God...” Jeraldine gasped.

She had wheeled herself over and snatched a look at the screen. Tears of pure, hysterical joy instantly flooded her eyes.

“It’s them! It’s the boys!” Jeraldine shrieked, her voice cracking with manic delight. “They came back! They came home to us!”

Preston’s greed instantly overpowered his shock.

He pressed the communication button on his lapel mic. “Open the main gates! Right now! Pull all armed security personnel back to the perimeter. Do not frighten them!”

Outside, the heavy, motorized gears of the wrought-iron gates groaned loudly. The massive metal doors slowly swung inward, opening like the jaws of a giant beast preparing to swallow its prey.

Aron and Davy did not flinch at the loud mechanical noise.

They stepped forward in perfect unison. Their expensive leather shoes crunched against the imported gravel of the long, winding driveway. They walked with the slow, deliberate, and entirely arrogant stride of kings inspecting their newly conquered territory.

Two rows of uniformed maids and suited bodyguards lined the edges of the driveway. The staff stared in awe. The sheer, overwhelming alpha aura radiating from these two five-year-old boys was terrifying — a perfect, concentrated dose of Holloway arrogance.

Preston practically sprinted out of the main house, pushing Jeraldine’s wheelchair down the marble steps of the grand portico.

“Children!” Jeraldine cried out, her voice trembling with emotion. She reached out her shaking, wrinkled hands, desperate to pull them into a hug. “My poor, beautiful children. You are finally home.”

As her hands neared them, Aron executed a flawless, subtle pivot. He stepped slightly to the side, completely avoiding her physical touch. At the same time, he bent at the waist, performing a perfect, impeccable European aristocratic bow.

“It is a pleasure to formally meet you, Madam Jeraldine,” Aron said. His English carried a crisp, flawless upper-class accent. His tone was perfectly polite, yet entirely devoid of warmth. “I am Aron. This is my younger brother, Davy.”

Jeraldine’s hands hovered awkwardly in the empty air.

But instead of feeling insulted, a wave of intense, fanatic admiration washed over her face. This was pure, unadulterated aristocratic breeding. It was everything she worshipped.

Preston forced a warm, sickeningly sweet smile onto his face. He stepped forward, playing the role of the benevolent uncle.

Chapter 520:

“How did you boys get here all by yourselves?” Preston asked, his eyes darting toward the empty driveway behind them. “Where is the woman who took you? Where is Cailin?”

Davy's face instantly twisted into a mask of profound disgust. He wrinkled his nose, as if Preston had just mentioned something foul-smelling.

"We don't need a crazy woman who only knows how to hide in dirty alleys," Davy sneered, his voice dripping with contempt.

Aron adjusted the cuffs of his trench coat, his amber eyes locking onto Preston.

"We calculated the variables," Aron stated, his voice carrying the chilling, precise logic of a child who had been taught to view the world as a chessboard. "Since we carry the blood of this empire, it is only logical that we claim the wealth and status that belongs to us. Living in a dirty slum diminishes our future value. We are Holloways. We belong in a castle, claiming everything that is rightfully ours."

Preston's breath hitched.

The sheer, calculating, ruthless greed in the boy's words was like a shot of pure adrenaline straight to his heart. It was the exact, cold-blooded capitalist mindset that the Holloway family valued above all human emotion.

"Exactly!" Preston laughed loudly, clapping his hands together. All of his remaining suspicion evaporated. "You are absolutely right! You are true Holloways!"

Preston looked at the boys, his mind already spinning with plans to manipulate their greed and use them as perfect, obedient puppets for the board of directors.

The head butler stepped forward, bowing deeply. He reached out and respectfully took the heavy leather suitcases from the boys' hands.

"Please, come inside, my young masters," Jeraldine said, her eyes practically glowing with possessive hunger. "This entire estate, and everything the family owns, will belong to you."

Aron and Davy turned toward the massive oak doors.

For a fraction of a second, the two brothers exchanged a subtle, hidden glance. Deep within their amber eyes burned a layer of solid, glacial ice — an ice cold enough to freeze this entire estate and burn it to the ground.

They stepped over the threshold, their shoes sinking into the priceless Persian rugs. The Trojan horses were officially inside the city walls.

One mile away, parked on a high, wooded ridge overlooking the estate, Cailin sat in the driver's seat of the black SUV. The engine was off. The cabin was freezing. She held a pair of heavy, military-grade binoculars to her eyes, staring through the fog at the main gates.

She watched the heavy iron doors slowly grind shut, locking her sons inside the vampire's nest.

Her fingers gripped the steering wheel so hard her joints ached. Her stomach churned with a sickening mix of terror and pride.

“Tear it all down,” Cailin whispered to the empty car. “Tear it all down, my beautiful boys.”

The grand living room of the Holloway estate was a monument to excessive wealth.