

Second chance 53

Chapter 53:

The drive back to the estate was silent. Elia slept in the back seat, sedated by pain medication and exhaustion. Cailin stared out the window, clutching her bandaged arm.

When they arrived, Hilliard carried Elia to the guest room — not the Blue Room, but a warmer suite near the nursery he had built years ago. A nurse was already waiting inside.

Once Elia was settled, Cailin marched straight to Hilliard's study. She didn't knock. She threw the double doors open.

Hilliard was standing behind his desk, pouring a drink. Amber liquid splashed into a crystal glass.

"Play the footage," Cailin said.

Hilliard didn't look surprised. He nodded to Gavin, who stood by the wall screen.

The screen flickered. The sunroom appeared. They watched it together — the trip, the splash, the scream.

Hilliard froze the frame.

Charla's face, a split second before the fall. There was a micro-expression: a tightening of the lips, a slight narrowing of the eyes. A smirk.

"She enjoyed it," Cailin whispered. The rage was a physical thing in her chest, hot and suffocating. "She wanted to hurt her."

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Hilliard stared at the screen. The muscle in his jaw ticked in a steady rhythm. He finished his drink in a single swallow.

"Well?" Cailin stepped closer to the desk. "Call the police. Have her arrested."

Hilliard set the glass down. The sound of crystal on wood was sharp.

"We can't," he said, his voice heavy.

"What?" Cailin's voice rose. "You saw it. It's right there."

“The English family owns fifteen percent of our preferred stock,” Hilliard said. He sounded tired. “If I arrest her today, they dump it. The company crashes. We lose billions.”

“So Elia’s pain is worth what, exactly? Is that the exchange rate for a child’s skin?”

“Billions, Cailin. And thousands of employees’ livelihoods,” Hilliard said, trying to be the rational anchor in her storm. He didn’t add the real reason — the one solidifying like ice in his gut. A public arrest is too clean a death. I’ll let the merger proceed, absorb their assets, and then gut their entire family from the inside. They’ll lose more than a reputation. They’ll lose everything. But he couldn’t tell her that. Not yet.

“I will deal with Charla. Privately. She will be exiled from New York society. I will cut her off entirely.”

“Exiled?” Cailin grabbed a heavy marble paperweight from his desk and hurled it at the wall.

A crack. Plaster dust rained down.

“She should be in a jail cell!” Cailin was shaking. “You are choosing your money over a human being!”

Hilliard came around the desk and caught her wrist before she could reach for anything else.

“Trust me,” he said. “I will destroy her. But I have to do it my way.”

"I trusted you five years ago." Cailin pulled away, her eyes bright with angry tears. "Look where that got me."

She walked to the door and turned back one last time.

"If you won't protect her, I will. And you won't like my methods."

She slammed the door.

Hilliard stood in the silence. He looked at the frozen smirk on the screen.