

Second chance 62

Chapter 62:

Hilliard sat at the head of the long mahogany table, impeccable in a fresh charcoal suit, not a hair out of place, betraying nothing of the turmoil from the Brooklyn raid.

Gregg English stood at the opposite end, his face flushing a deep, unhealthy red. He slammed a folder onto the table.

“This was an act of war!” Gregg shouted, spittle flying. “We demand a federal investigation! My daughter was depicted as a witch on national television!”

“We have traced the signal,” Hilliard said calmly, tapping his tablet. “It was a localized breach. It is contained.”

“Contained?” Gregg sputtered. “It is slander! It is a direct attack on the English family name!”

“The caricature was artistically crude,” Hilliard said, “but metaphorically speaking, not entirely without basis.”

Several board members coughed to cover their smiles. Everyone in the room knew Charla wasn’t exactly a saint.

Gregg turned purple. "You are protecting someone, Hilliard. I can smell it."

"I am protecting the stock price from a drawn-out legal circus," Hilliard countered, his voice hardening. "A federal investigation opens our books to the SEC. Do you want them looking at your offshore accounts, Gregg?"

The room went silent.

Gregg played his last card. "If you don't act, the English family will reconsider the joint venture in Dubai."

Hilliard rose from his chair. He seemed to grow taller, his shadow stretching the length of the table.

"Do not threaten me, Gregg. I know about your liquidity issues. You need this merger far more than I do."

Gregg went pale. He sat down, deflated.

"Meeting adjourned," Hilliard said, walking out before anyone could object.

He needed air. He needed distance from the sharks. But as he turned the corner toward his office, another shark was waiting.

Charla.

She wore oversized sunglasses and a silk scarf, playing the victim to the hilt. "Hilliard, darling," she cooed, reaching for his arm. "My father is just so upset. You understand."

Hilliard stepped out of her reach. "He is being dramatic, Charla."

She lowered her sunglasses, narrowing her eyes. "It was her, wasn't it? Cailin."

Hilliard paused. "Why would you say that?"

Charla shrugged. "She has always been jealous. And she has those shady friends in Europe. The ones she ran away to."

"She is not capable of this," Hilliard said smoothly. He wasn't protecting Cailin because he forgave her. He was protecting her because she was his.

"Oh?" Charla smirked. "Maybe she hired someone. A lover?"

The word hit him like a physical blow.

“She was gone for five years, Hilliard,” Charla whispered, stepping closer. “Do you really think she was a nun? A woman like that needs attention. Maybe this hacker is her boyfriend.”

A surge of something violent rose in Hilliard’s throat. The thought of Cailin with another man — a man who might have fathered those children, who helped her, who knew her secrets, who had been there while Hilliard was left in the dark — made his blood boil.

He walked away from Charla without a word, his pace quickening.

He pulled out his phone and called Gavin.