

Second chance 65

Chapter 65:

Beneath a blanket tent she had constructed in the corner of her room, Cailin sat on the floor with the sewing needle in her hand. She wasn't mending clothes.

She was using the needle to bridge a connection on the circuit board of the disassembled radio.

She needed a transmitter. Just a short burst. She worked by the light of a flashlight pen she had lifted from the doctor's coat pocket the day before. Her fingers were cramped from the precision of it, but she didn't stop.

Hours passed. Outside, the wind howled.

Finally, a crackle of static hissed from the speaker.

She tuned the dial to a low frequency — one used by truckers and local ham radio enthusiasts.

"Mayday. Blue Bear. Mayday," she whispered into the makeshift microphone, which was simply the speaker wired in reverse.

Static.

She tried again. "Kegan. Asset One needs extraction."

A voice cut through the white noise — not Kegan. A stranger. A trucker somewhere on the interstate.

"Asset One? This is Dispatch. Who is this?"

"Please," Cailin said. "Call this number. Tell them 'The Auction is open.'" She rattled off Kegan's secure line.

"Lady, are you crazy?" The trucker laughed, the sound thin and distant.

"I'll pay you. Venmo. Just do it," she pleaded.

The connection crackled. Then silence. The battery she had scavenged from the smoke detector died.

Cailin threw the radio across the room. It struck the padded wall with a dull thud.

Damn it.

The tech route had failed. She couldn't rely on a stranger.

She crossed to the window. It was locked, reinforced glass. But the screen — the screen was old.

She looked down. Three stories. Directly beneath the window, a trellis covered in thick, ancient ivy clung to the stone wall. It looked sturdy.

If she couldn't call for help, she would have to go and get it herself.

She looked at her reflection in the dark glass. She looked tired and battered. But her eyes were clear.

The atmosphere in the breakfast room the following morning was brittle.

Hilliard sat at the head of the table reading the Wall Street Journal. Jeraldine sat to his right, sipping tea with her pinky extended, her gaze fixed on Elia with an icy fury she barely bothered to conceal — a statue of simmering rage, waiting for the confirmation she knew was coming.

Elia sat across from Hilliard, her feet not quite reaching the floor, pushing a piece of melon around her plate with her fork.

"Use your fork properly, Elia," Jeraldine scolded. "A lady does not play with her food."

Elia tightened her grip on the fork into a fist. "I want Auntie Cailin."

"She is in timeout," Hilliard said without lowering the paper.

"Grownups don't get timeouts," Elia said.

"Bad grownups do," Hilliard replied.

"You are the bad one!"

She loaded the melon onto her fork and catapulted it across the table.

Splat.

The piece of cantaloupe struck the back of Hilliard's newspaper and slid down, leaving a wet orange trail.

"Elia!" Jeraldine gasped, clutching her pearls.