

Second chance 66

Chapter 66:

Hilliard lowered the paper. He didn't look angry. He looked — almost amused. He studied the smear on the newsprint for a moment.

"Why am I the bad one, Elia? Tell me," he said calmly.

"Because you made Mommy cry! In the big house!" Elia blurted.

The room went dead silent. Even the maid stopped pouring coffee.

"Which big house?" Hilliard asked, his voice careful and slow.

"The one with the columns. Before we went on the plane," Elia said, her face scrunching as she tried to remember.

Hilliard didn't flinch, but his focus sharpened to a point. Columns. The Grand Hotel in Geneva. And we. He had been so consumed by Cailin and Elia that he hadn't scanned the surroundings for anyone else. Had another child been there, hidden in plain sight?

“You made her cry yesterday! When you yelled!” Elia quickly corrected herself, sensing the danger in the silence.

Hilliard let his expression relax slightly, allowing her to believe the correction had landed. “I see.” But the word stayed with him. We. Cailin had been there with Elia. Who else?

Gavin entered the room and moved quickly to Hilliard’s side, bending to whisper in his ear.

“Sir, the second lab just called,” Gavin said, his voice tight. “They’re claiming the hair sample was degraded. Insufficient DNA for a full profile.”

“How?” Hilliard hissed. It was a fresh sample. This wasn’t a physical problem — it was a digital one. Kegan’s work. A second hack. A warning.

“Their system flagged it as contaminated,” Gavin confirmed. “They can’t proceed. They need a blood sample or a fresh buccal swab.”

Hilliard looked at Elia. She was glaring at him, utterly defiant. If he forcibly swabbed her mouth now, she would scream. She would hate him for it. Kegan had cornered him neatly.

“Fine,” Hilliard said, his voice like ice. “I’ll get it myself. Tonight. When she sleeps.”

Upstairs, Cailin was watching through the crack in her door. She saw Gavin leave. She saw the frustration etched into Hilliard's face.

The test had failed. Again. She had bought herself a few hours.

But only hours.

She went back to the bed and began tearing the silk sheets into long strips, braiding them together and testing the strength of the weave. It was a cliché. It was desperate.

But she was a mother. Desperation was her fuel.

Outside, a faint buzzing drifted past the window. Cailin froze.

A drone. It was flying in a sector of the sky that should have been blocked by the estate's anti-drone perimeter. This wasn't Holloway security.

Was it Aron?

Cailin rushed to the window. The drone hovered just outside the glass — small, a commercial model painted matte black, with a tiny claw attachment beneath its frame.

It tapped on the glass. Tap. Tap. Tap.

Cailin fumbled with the latch and managed to force the window open a crack. The drone maneuvered with practiced precision and dropped a small object onto the sill before zipping away, disappearing into the tree line in seconds.

It was a burner phone.

Aron. My brilliant boy.