

Second chance 67

Chapter 67:

The phone rang the moment she picked it up.

“Cailin? Are you hurt?” Kegan’s voice came through, low and vibrating with suppressed violence.

“I’m fine. Just locked in,” Cailin whispered, crouching below the window line.

“I will burn that house down. I have a team in Jersey — we can breach in twenty minutes,” Kegan said.

“No!” Cailin hissed. “No violence. If you attack, I become a criminal. I lose custody forever. Hilliard wins.”

“Then marry me,” Kegan said.

Cailin went still. “What?”

“Right now. By proxy. I have the papers drawn up. If you are my wife, I have diplomatic leverage. I can extract you legally — claim you are being held against your will,” Kegan said.

“Kegan, I can’t,” Cailin said, her voice gentle. “I don’t love you like that. And I won’t use you.”

Silence stretched between them. Heavy. Painful.

“Fine,” Kegan said at last. “Then we do it the hard way.”

“I need a job,” Cailin said, her mind already working. “A reason to leave the estate that Hilliard can’t refuse. He respects contracts. He respects business.”

“Obsidian Auctions,” Kegan said without hesitation. “The New York branch needs a new Chief Auctioneer. Silas manages it. He answers to me.”

“Perfect. If I have a signed contract, he can’t detain me without opening himself to a labor lawsuit. He hates lawsuits more than he hates me.”

“Silas is expecting you. Tomorrow at nine AM,” Kegan said. “Aron’s program is creating a five-minute loop in the perimeter sensors near the old oak tree at two AM. The sky-fence in that sector is already down. A car will be waiting.”

“Thank you, Kegan.”

She hung up and hid the phone inside the hollow curtain rod.

Now she just had to get to that interview.

She opened her wardrobe. Most of her clothes had been removed, but the black jumpsuit she had worn for traveling was still there — sleek, professional, and critically, easy to climb in.

She waited for nightfall.

Downstairs in his study, Hilliard sat with a glass of scotch, feeling restless. He glanced at the security monitor on his desk.

In the guest room, Cailin lay in bed reading a book. She hadn't moved in an hour.

He switched off the screen.

He didn't know that the shape beneath the blanket was a carefully arranged pile of pillows, or that the book was propped against the window to conceal the hole she had cut in the screen.

2 AM. The guard change.

Cailin tied the braided sheet rope to the heavy radiator pipe beside the window and tested it. It held.

She checked the burner phone one last time. A single green light confirmed the window's magnetic sensor was offline, exactly as Kegan had promised. Aron's work.

She slipped out the window. The night air was biting cold. She gripped the ivy trellis, using the rope only as backup, and moved slowly downward, finding footholds in the ancient stone.