

Second chance 69

Chapter 69:

“Boss?” Chloe laughed nervously, rubbing her wrist. “Silas, she’s a runaway. She’s completely unhinged.”

Silas ignored her. He gave Cailin a slight bow. “Welcome, Ms. Morton.”

The staff in the hallway had stopped moving, curiosity rippling through the room. Before whispers could take hold, Silas turned to the two guards with quiet authority.

“This is the new Chief Auctioneer,” he said, his eyes settling on the head of security. “This entire wing is now under her authority. Clear the floor. Everyone out. Ms. Morton requires privacy to inspect the new acquisitions.”

The head guard gave a curt nod, his eyes widening slightly. “Yes, sir.” He turned and raised his voice. “Alright, you heard him. Back to your stations. Prep for the main gallery opening.”

The staff was efficiently ushered out of the corridor, Chloe swept along with the rest, her protests lost in the general shuffle. Only Silas and the two senior guards remained.

“Your private office is ready, ma’am,” Silas said, gesturing toward the heavy oak doors at the end of the hall. “The inventory list is on the tablet.”

Cailin straightened her jacket. She was Cali now.

“Let’s get to work,” she said. “I want the inventory list for the Modern Art sale.”

Silas handed her a tablet. “Already prepared.”

Chloe’s face had turned blotchy with fury. “I’m the Senior Manager! You can’t place someone above me without notice! I’ve been here three years!”

“This is a directive from the Owner,” Silas said calmly. “Do you have a problem with the Board?”

Chloe closed her mouth. But her eyes screamed murder.

Cailin walked into the main gallery and scanned the paintings on the walls.

“That Basquiat is a replica,” she said, pointing to a canvas in the corner. “Look at the brushwork on the crown — too hesitant. Remove it.”

The curator gasped. “But the provenance—”

“Fake,” Cailin said. “I verified the original in Zurich two years ago. Take it down.”

She moved through the room like a storm, calling out errors and adjusting lighting. She was in her element.

Back at the Estate, the sun was rising.

Hilliard woke and checked the monitor on his desk. The book hadn’t moved.

He zoomed in. No rise and fall of breathing beneath the blanket.

He was out of his room in seconds, and kicked the guest room door open.

Empty.

The braided sheet rope swung gently in the morning breeze outside the open window.

“Find her!” Hilliard’s voice echoed through the house.

His phone rang — the landline from his office. He snatched it up.

“What?”

“Mr. Holloway,” a calm voice said. “This is Silas from Obsidian Auctions. We are calling to confirm Ms. Morton’s employment verification.”

Hilliard went still. “She is with you?”

“She is our new Chief Auctioneer, sir. She is currently cataloging Lot 45.”

Hilliard let out a short, incredulous laugh. She hadn’t run to a lover. She had run to a job.

“I’m coming over,” he said, and hung up.