

Second chance 76

Chapter 76:

Ashely waited until his footsteps faded down the hall. She closed the door and turned the lock.

Click.

“Clear,” she whispered.

Cailin rolled out from under the bed, covered in a coat of gray dust. She sat up, coughing softly into her elbow.

She reached up and caught Ashely’s hand, squeezing it hard. “You saved us.”

“He’s getting too close, Cali,” Ashely whispered, crouching beside her. “The ‘cousin’ story won’t hold forever. He’s going to check — he has the resources.”

“We need to leave. Tonight,” Cailin said, brushing the dust from her clothes.

“He has guards at the gate. We’re trapped,” Ashely reminded her. “And if we run, we look guilty.”

Cailin looked toward the window. The heavy velvet drapes were drawn tight against the dark.

“Then we make him kick us out,” she said quietly. Her eyes were cold and calculating. “We make him want us gone.”

Morning light filtered through the heavy curtains of the dining room, casting long stripes across the mahogany table. Hilliard sat at the head, nursing a cup of black coffee that had gone cold ten minutes ago.

Gavin entered, holding a tablet. He looked as though he hadn’t slept in a week.

“Sir, I traced the number from the kid’s watch,” Gavin said, setting the tablet on the table.

Hilliard leaned forward. “And?”

“It’s a dead end, mostly,” Gavin reported, swiping through the screen. “A heavily encrypted VoIP number, routed through a dozen proxies. The final registration, however, points to a shell corporation in Zurich — untraceable bearer shares. Whoever set it up is a professional.”

Hilliard muttered under his breath and rubbed his temples. A professional. A ghost. It wasn’t the clean answer he wanted, but it matched the sophistication of the woman he was beginning to suspect. Everything had checked out. Too clean.

He didn't know that Cailin had spent the hours between two and four in the morning routing the call logs through her secure server to plant exactly that digital breadcrumb.

Cailin entered the dining room.

She was not wearing the modest, nondescript clothes she usually favored around the house. She was wearing a dress that was a weapon — red silk, fitted to every curve, with a neckline that plunged dangerously low.

Hilliard looked up. His breath caught in his throat.

"Going to work?" he asked. His eyes tracked the movement of the silk against her skin.

"I have a lunch meeting. With a client," Cailin said. She crossed to the sideboard, poured herself a glass of juice, and smiled — though it didn't reach her eyes.

"Which client?" Hilliard stood. The jealousy flared instantly, hot and irrational.

"A gentleman from Italy. He flies in just to see the collection. He's very... hands-on," Cailin said, taking a slow sip.

“You are a married woman,” Hilliard snapped.

“Am I?” Cailin laughed — a brittle sound. “You have a fiancée, Hilliard. Let me live. Or are you keeping me here as a spare?”

“I am not engaged!” Hilliard shouted. The sound of clattering dishes from the kitchen went suddenly silent.