

Second chance 761

Chapter 761:

Robert froze. The blood drained from his face so fast he swayed on his feet. The Sinclair family. They were embedded in the very foundation of his logistics network. One call from Silas, and three of his largest contracts would evaporate before dawn.

"I... I didn't realize," Robert stammered, sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"Take your dogs and back up," Silas ordered, his tone laced with absolute contempt. "You're ruining my view."

Robert swallowed hard. He grabbed the arms of the two guards and pulled them back, retreating into the crowd like a beaten dog. Jeraldine glared at Cailin, but without Robert's muscle, she turned and stormed back to her table.

The surrounding guests whispered frantically. Cailin Morton wasn't just a rogue ex-wife; she was backed by the Sinclair war machine.

Cailin smoothly took a glass of champagne from a passing waiter. She didn't thank Silas. She began to scan the room, her eyes searching for Charla.

High above the ballroom floor, hidden in the shadowed alcove of the second-floor balcony, a man Hilliard's people knew only as Rook stood perfectly still.

He wore an earpiece. He was watching Cailin's every move.

Hilliard, monitoring the feeds from a secure command room downstairs, had given him one absolute, unbreakable order: If anyone physically threatens Cailin tonight, you put a bullet in them. No warnings.

Rook pressed his finger to his earpiece. "Team Three, shift to the nine o'clock position. Close the blind spot near the ice sculpture."

Down on the floor, four men dressed as waiters and wealthy guests moved seamlessly through the crowd, forming an invisible, impenetrable diamond formation around Cailin.

A sleazy tabloid photographer tried to slip past a pillar to get a close-up shot of Cailin's face.

Before he could raise his camera, a "waiter" carrying a tray stepped backward, slamming his elbow brutally into the photographer's ribs. The camera dropped, shattering on the marble floor. The waiter apologized profusely, but his eyes promised violence.

Cailin noticed the movement. She saw the rigid posture of the waiter, the tactical spacing of the men around her.

She had run the underground Vault for five years. She knew elite security when she saw it. These weren't Sinclair men. They were the Shadow Squad. Hilliard's personal guard.

Cailin looked down at the bubbles rising in her champagne glass. A cold, bitter smile touched her lips.

Hilliard was a psychopath. He was building a guillotine for his enemies, while secretly wrapping her in Kevlar. She took a sip of the champagne, waiting for the blade to drop.

Beneath the massive crystal chandelier in the center of the ballroom, Charla English was struggling to hold court.

The dress she wore was a rental — Patricia had maxed out a forgotten credit card to secure it, and the seams were slightly strained at the waist. The circle around her was thinner than it once would have been. Most of the city's real elite already knew about the English family's bankruptcy filing. The few socialites still hovering nearby were either uninformed or simply curious to watch the spectacle up close.

Chapter 762:

Charla raised her left arm, deliberately pulling back the lace sleeve of her gown. Around her neck was a heavy, antique gold necklace set with massive, blood-red rubies.

"It's a Holloway family heirloom," Charla boasted, her voice pitched too loud, the way people speak when they're trying to convince themselves as much as anyone else. "Hilliard gave it to me. Whatever lies he's telling people now, this necklace is proof of what we had."

One of the socialites smiled politely and said nothing. Another quietly checked her phone.

Cailin walked slowly toward the main table, Silas trailing a few steps behind.

Her eyes locked onto the ruby necklace.

The temperature in Cailin's veins dropped to absolute zero. That necklace. The Holloway family heirloom. Five years ago, Charla had used a flawless counterfeit of that exact necklace to fake a story about Hilliard buying her gifts, planting the final seed of doubt that destroyed Cailin's marriage. Now she was wearing the real one. Stolen, then. Not given.

The urge to lunge forward, grab Charla by the throat, and rip the necklace off her neck was a physical ache in Cailin's muscles. Her fingers tightened around her champagne glass until her knuckles turned white.

But she forced herself to breathe. She wouldn't ruin Hilliard's trap. She wanted Charla to fall from the highest possible peak.

Charla spotted Cailin approaching. A cruel, brittle smirk stretched across her face. The triumph in it looked rehearsed, like something she had practiced in the mirror of whatever cheap motel room she was staying in while out on bail.

"Well, well," Charla called out, making sure the whole crowd heard. "Cailin. You actually came. Does seeing me wear this necklace bring back sad memories for you? It must be hard, knowing you were never good enough for the family vault."

The remaining socialites exchanged uncertain glances. A few of them had already heard that the engagement between Charla and Hilliard had been dissolved. The name "Holloway" coming out of

Charla's mouth felt faintly absurd, like a dismissed employee still using her former company's letterhead.

Cailin stopped a few feet away. She didn't look angry. She looked at Charla with a chilling, profound pity.

"Stolen goods usually carry a curse, Charla," Cailin said softly. "Doesn't it burn your skin?"

Charla's face flushed with rage. She opened her mouth to scream an insult.

At that exact moment, a waiter walked past Charla, carrying a massive silver platter of French escargot. The heavy scent of garlic, butter, and rich seafood hit the air.

The smell hit Charla's nose.

Her stomach violently cramped. A wave of intense nausea, born from days of barely eating, too much cheap wine, and the grinding anxiety of bail conditions and court dates, shot up her throat.

Charla's eyes went wide. She slapped her hands over her mouth. Her face turned a sickly shade of green.

"Urgh—!"

Charla doubled over, shoving a socialite out of the way. She dry-heaved violently, her body shaking as she barely managed to keep from vomiting all over the expensive Persian rug.

The crowd gasped and stepped back in horror.

Chapter 763:

Patricia English rushed forward, grabbing her daughter's shoulders. But instead of looking worried, Patricia's eyes lit up with a manic, greedy fire. She saw an opportunity.

"Oh my god!" Patricia shrieked, her voice echoing across the silent ballroom. "Charla! Your delicate stomach! Are you... are you pregnant?!"

The word hit the room like a bomb. Pregnant.

The socialites gasped again — though this time the sound was more confused than awed. Several of them had heard the rumors: that Hilliard had ended the engagement, that he had told Charla, plainly and in front of witnesses, that the child she carried was not his, that the DNA would prove it. The whispers that followed were not the warm murmurs of dynasty and inheritance — they were the sharp, uncomfortable kind.

Charla stood up slowly. She wiped her mouth with a napkin. Her brain raced back to the dark hotel room, the stranger whose name she had not asked, and her missed period. Hilliard had already said it to her face: the child is not mine. He had said it calmly, without cruelty, which had somehow made it worse. But her mother's voice was louder than truth right now, and the lie felt like oxygen.

A wave of desperate, cornered euphoria washed over her. She pushed her shoulders back and rested both hands on her flat stomach. She looked directly at Cailin, reaching for the old expression of victory, finding only a pale imitation of it.

“It seems,” Charla announced loudly, “there will be an heir.”

She did not say Holloway. She could not. The word had been taken from her.

Patricia was crying something between tears of joy and sheer panic. She fussed over her daughter. “Darling, you’re delicate now. That necklace looks so tight. Let me loosen the clasp for you.”

Patricia reached for the clasp.

Charla snatched her arm back like a feral dog protecting a bone. She clutched the rubies, her eyes wild and paranoid.

“No!” Charla snapped. “This is mine. It’s the only thing I have left. I will never take it off!”

The socialites were no longer pretending to smile. A few had already drifted quietly away. The ones who remained watched with the careful, wide-eyed attention of people witnessing something they would describe later in hushed voices — a woman in a rented dress, out on bail, clutching a stolen necklace and announcing a pregnancy that the father had already publicly disavowed, in a room full of people who knew all of it.

Cailin watched the pathetic display. Charla was clinging to a stolen necklace and a delusional pregnancy, believing she was a god. She had nothing left — no family fortune, no Holloway name, no engagement, no freedom. Only the necklace, cold against her skin, and the story she was still trying to force the world to believe.

Cailin turned to Silas. She didn't even glance back at Charla.

"Get a drink, Silas," Cailin said, her voice dead flat. "The execution is about to begin."

Charla grabbed her heavy skirts and practically sprinted out of the ballroom, flanked by two security guards.

Chapter 764:

She burst into the VIP women's restroom and slammed the door, locking it.

"Anna!" Charla screamed.

Anna scrambled out from a bathroom stall, looking terrified.

"Go to the pharmacy in the lobby," Charla ordered, her eyes burning with the kind of obsession that only the truly cornered can produce. "Buy every brand of digital pregnancy test they have. Run!"

Five minutes later, Anna returned, breathless, shoving a plastic bag into Charla's hands. Charla snatched it and locked herself in the largest stall.

Minutes ticked by. The silence in the bathroom was heavy.

Suddenly, a high-pitched, hysterical scream echoed from the stall.

Charla kicked the door open. She was shaking violently, tears streaming down her face, ruining her expensive makeup. In her hands, she clutched three plastic sticks.

Thousands of readers on .com

All three displayed two solid pink lines. Pregnant.

Charla stared at the three tests, and laughter clawed its way out of her throat — sharp and fractured, nothing like the laugh of a winner. It was the sound of a drowning woman closing her fist around a reed.

"It's mine," she whispered, her voice trembling. "The baby is mine. That's enough."

She pressed the tests hard into her palm. Hilliard had said the child wasn't his — but how could he be certain? He couldn't. If she could get this baby into the open, if she could stand in the Holloway ballroom and announce it in front of everyone, there was still a thread to pull. The family's bankruptcy.

Her mother's debts. The bail conditions that could drag her back to a cell at any moment. All of it could still unravel in her favor.

She raised her eyes to Anna, cowering by the sinks. There was something in Charla's gaze that only people with nothing left ever carry.

"Tonight, I have to be on that stage before the announcement ends."

Charla tossed the tests into her designer clutch. She threw open the bathroom door and marched back toward the ballroom, each step driven not by confidence but by the reckless momentum of someone who has already lost everything and is betting on one last hand.

Inside the grand ballroom, the lights dimmed. A single, brilliant spotlight hit the center of the stage. The symphony orchestra swelled into a dramatic, triumphant chord.

Charla walked to the front VIP table, her mother holding her arm. She straightened her spine deliberately, letting the curve of her abdomen speak for itself, casting a long, loaded glance toward Cailin, who stood quietly near the back.

The gold-jacketed MC stepped up to the microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the MC's voice boomed. "Tonight, we witness the dawn of a new era for the Holloway dynasty!"

“Please, direct your attention to the main screen, and witness the future!”

Charla held her breath. She gripped her mother’s hand, her heartbeat so violent she could feel it in her throat — the moment Hilliard’s name appeared, she would rush that stage and force him to acknowledge this child in front of every person in this room.

Chapter 765:

Above the stage, the massive, multi-million-dollar LED dome screen flared to life.

Golden rose petals fell across the digital display. Elegant, cursive text faded into view:

[Honored Matriarch: Charla English]

The corner of Charla’s mouth had barely begun to lift. She raised the hem of her gown, preparing to step forward.

Then the second line of text appeared.

[Accompanied by: Preston Holloway]

The symphony orchestra stopped playing instantly, ending on a harsh, discordant screech of violins.

The ballroom plunged into a terrifying, absolute silence.

Charla's foot hovered in the air. The half-formed smile froze on her face and slowly collapsed, piece by piece, into a mask of pure horror. Her pupils dilated until her eyes looked entirely black.

"Preston?" Charla whispered. The word came out hollow, like air escaping a punctured lung.

The entire crowd turned their heads in unison, looking away from Charla and staring at the VIP table on the far right.

Preston Holloway, Hilliard's aging, disgraced cousin, was sitting there with a glass of red wine. When he saw his name on the screen next to Charla's, his hand jerked violently. The dark red wine splashed all over the front of his white tuxedo shirt.

"What the hell is this?" Preston roared, jumping to his feet. "Turn that off! Who's running the control room?"

Charla lurched toward the stage — not charging, not triumphant, but stumbling forward like something that had already been broken and simply hadn't stopped moving yet. She knew exactly what this meant. She had no road left. She ran anyway.

"It's a mistake! Fix the name! The announcement is for me and Hilliard! Turn it off!"

The MC backed away from her in terror.

At the VIP table, Patricia English groaned and collapsed backward in her chair, fainting cold. Richard English yanked out his phone to call his security team, but the screen read: NO SIGNAL. The room was electronically jammed.

Cailin stood in the shadows, watching Charla tear at her own hair in panic. Cailin's amber eyes were cold and unblinking. The blade was falling.

Charla grabbed a heavy microphone stand and tried to smash the LED screen.

Suddenly, the golden text vanished.

The screen flickered, and a new video began to play. It was dark, illuminated only by the red glow of a hotel bedside lamp.

The real execution had begun.

The massive LED dome screen above the stage crackled with high-definition clarity.

The video playing was shot from a hidden camera angle, looking down at a luxurious hotel bed.

Charla English appeared on screen. She was wearing a sheer, black lace corset. She was holding a small glass vial filled with clear liquid. She looked directly at the camera, a sick, predatory smile on her face.

“Just a few drops,” Charla’s recorded voice echoed through the ballroom’s state-of-the-art surround sound system. “And Hilliard won’t remember a thing. But he’ll definitely remember getting me pregnant.”

A collective gasp sucked the oxygen out of the ballroom. Several older socialites covered their mouths in shock.

Chapter 766:

Charla stood on the stage, staring up at the screen. A scream of pure, primal agony ripped from her throat. She threw herself at the heavy audio cables running along the edge of the stage, tearing at them with her bare hands, breaking her acrylic nails, trying to cut the power.

But the system was locked.

The video on the screen cut to the next scene.

Charla was on the bed, straddling a tall, muscular man whose face was hidden in the shadows. She was moving frantically, her head thrown back.

The sound of her loud, uninhibited moans blasted through the speakers, echoing off the crystal chandeliers.

Richard English charged the stage. He grabbed Charla by the shoulder, spun her around, and slapped her across the face with all his strength. The crack echoed loudly.

“What have you done?” Richard roared.

Charla fell to the floor, her lip bleeding. She pointed frantically at the screen. “That’s Hilliard! I swear it’s Hilliard! He’s going to announce our engagement!”

The video on the screen suddenly paused.

The image digitally zoomed in on the man’s face in the shadows. The brightness was artificially enhanced.

It was not Hilliard Holloway.

It was a handsome, slightly cheap-looking man with a panicked expression.

A text box popped up next to his face on the screen:

Identity: Kyle Vance. Profession: Escort/Body Double. Rate: \$2,000/hour.

The ballroom erupted. It wasn't just shock anymore; it was brutal, merciless laughter.

"She slept with a hooker!" a hedge fund manager yelled over the noise.

"She thought she was pregnant with the Holloway heir, and it's a gigolo's baby!" a socialite shrieked with laughter.

The mockery hit Charla like physical bullets. She curled into a ball on the stage floor, pressing her hands over her ears, sobbing hysterically. Her reality was completely destroyed.

The paparazzi at the back of the room broke through the barricades, their cameras firing like machine guns, capturing Charla's ultimate degradation.

Suddenly, a bright spotlight snapped on, illuminating the second-floor VIP balcony.

A life-sized, photorealistic hologram of Hilliard Holloway flickered into existence. He was seated in a large, throne-like chair, projecting an image of absolute power despite his physical absence. He wore a pitch-black tuxedo. He held a crystal glass of whiskey. His face was a mask of absolute, terrifying calm. He looked down at the chaos like a god observing insects.

The laughter died down as the crowd noticed him.

Charla looked up through her tears. She saw the hologram. The humiliation morphed into toxic hatred.

“You did this!” Charla screamed, pointing a shaking finger at the balcony. “You set me up! You monster!”

Hilliard didn’t speak. The hologram simply raised its whiskey glass toward her in a silent, mocking toast, and drank it down.

Cailin watched from the floor. She felt no pity. She looked at Charla’s neck. The heavy ruby necklace had scratched Charla’s skin during her frantic struggles, smearing blood on the white Vera Wang silk.

The massive screen flickered again.

The sex tape vanished. It was replaced by drone footage of a collapsed building in Brooklyn, followed by high-resolution scans of the English Group’s secret bribery ledgers and offshore bank transfers.

Chapter 767:

Richard English stared at the financial documents. His knees gave out. He collapsed onto the floor next to his daughter. He knew his life was over.

The heavy oak doors at the back of the ballroom were violently kicked open.

A dozen FBI agents and SEC investigators wearing tactical vests stormed into the room, their badges raised, handcuffs clinking at their belts.

The FBI agents shoved their way through the paralyzed crowd of billionaires and socialites. They marched straight to the front of the stage.

Two agents grabbed Richard English by his armpits and hauled him to his feet.

“Richard English,” the lead agent barked, his voice cutting through the murmurs. “You’re under arrest for securities fraud, bribery, and seventeen counts of manslaughter. You have the right to remain silent.”

Richard didn’t fight. He hung between the agents like a slaughtered pig.

Two female agents approached Charla. They grabbed her arms and yanked her up from the floor.

“Let go of me!” Charla shrieked, thrashing wildly. The delicate lace of her million-dollar gown ripped loudly. “I am a Holloway! You can’t touch me!”

The sound of slow, heavy footsteps echoed on the grand staircase.

Hilliard Holloway, in his motorized wheelchair and pushed by Julian, was descending via a hidden ramp to the ballroom floor. As he approached, the FBI agents instinctively took a half-step back, yielding space to the true king of New York.

Hilliard stopped directly in front of Charla. His black eyes were empty voids.

“You thought a cheap drug could trap me?” Hilliard’s voice was amplified by the room’s acoustics. “I hired that escort. I picked him out. And I watched the cameras roll while you made a fool of yourself.”

Charla stopped struggling. The absolute cruelty of his words shattered her final delusion. She fell to her knees, the FBI agents struggling to hold her up.

“Hilliard, please,” Charla begged, snot and tears running down her face. “I did it because I love you! Please don’t do this!”

Hilliard looked at her with pure disgust. He gave a cold, sharp nod to Julian.

Julian stepped forward and delivered a precise, brutal kick to Charla’s shoulder, sending her sprawling onto the carpet.

“Did you think about mercy when you tried to burn Cailin alive?” Hilliard snarled. “When you manipulated my own family to try to kill my daughter?”

Hearing Cailin's name triggered a final, psychotic snap in Charla's brain. She whipped her head around and spotted Cailin standing calmly in the crowd.

With a feral scream, Charla ripped her arm free from the agent and lunged at Cailin, her broken acrylic nails aimed at Cailin's eyes.

Before Charla could take two steps, three members of the Shadow Squad materialized from the crowd. They slammed Charla face-first into the floor, pinning her arms behind her back.

Cailin walked forward slowly. The crowd parted for her.

She stopped next to Charla's pinned body and crouched down, her face a mask of cold marble.

Chapter 768:

Cailin grabbed the ruby necklace around Charla's neck. With a brutal, twisting motion, she snapped the clasp and pulled it free. Charla screamed in pain as the gold scraped off a layer of her skin.

Cailin stood up, holding the necklace. She pulled a silk handkerchief from her pocket and meticulously wiped Charla's blood off the rubies.

"You wore this for five years," Cailin said, her voice dropping the temperature in the room. "It's time it went back to its rightful owner. Enjoy hell, Charla."

The FBI agents hauled Charla up and dragged her out of the ballroom. Her hysterical screams faded down the hallway.

Hilliard turned his attention fully to Cailin. He took a step toward her.

Suddenly, Silas Sinclair stepped out of the crowd, smoothly inserting himself between Hilliard and Cailin. He had a lazy smile on his face, but his eyes were sharp.

“A brilliant performance, Mr. Holloway,” Silas announced loudly. “But you seem to have forgotten something.”

Hilliard’s jaw clenched. “Stay out of this, Sinclair. This is Holloway business.”

Silas chuckled. He reached into his velvet jacket and pulled out a heavy envelope sealed with the Sinclair crest. He held it up for the entire room to see.

“This isn’t your business anymore, Hilliard,” Silas’s voice boomed.

He ripped the envelope open.

“Based on the finalized DNA results,” Silas declared, looking around the silent room, “I am officially announcing on behalf of Sebastian Sinclair...”

Silas turned and looked at Cailin.

“Cailin Morton is the direct, legitimate bloodline of the Sinclair family. She is the first-in-line heir to the Sinclair global empire.”

The ballroom went completely dead. Hilliard’s eyes widened in shock. Cailin gripped the ruby necklace tightly in her hand.

Silas Sinclair’s voice, clear and sharp in the suffocating silence of the Plaza Hotel ballroom, stretched out, leaving the elite guests completely paralyzed. A smug, predatory smile rested on his lips.

Gregg Holloway slammed his heavy fist onto the VIP table. The clinking of crystal silverware broke the dead air. He pointed a shaking finger at Silas, his face turning a mottled red, and loudly dismissed the Sinclair claim as a pathetic, low-class con designed to embarrass his family.

Jeraldine Holloway stood up abruptly. Her heavy silk gown rustled against the chairs. She pointed a trembling finger directly at Cailin, accusing her former daughter-in-law of hiring actors and forging documents to ruin the impeccable Holloway reputation.

Cailin remained an unreadable mask of cold marble. She refused to justify Gregg’s desperate insults with a single word. Her fingers tightened around the heavy gold and ruby necklace she had just ripped from Charla’s throat moments earlier. The sharp edges of the jewels dug into her palm, the physical pain keeping her grounded.

Hilliard Holloway, already positioned at the center of the ballroom floor in his motorized wheelchair with Julian steadfast at his side, tore his empty black eyes away from Cailin and Silas. His breathing was shallow from his fractured sternum, but his aura was lethal. He wasn't about to let the Sinclairs hijack his stage before he finished destroying his enemies.

Chapter 769:

The heavy mahogany doors of the ballroom slammed shut, abruptly cutting off Charla's fading, hysterical screams as the FBI hauled her out to the transport vehicles. Hilliard raised his hand in a sharp, commanding gesture, signaling Gavin Thorne, who was stationed up in the control booth, to cut the ballroom's ambient lighting.

The giant LED screens above the stage flickered back to life, casting a harsh, unforgiving white glow over the stunned faces of the Holloway patriarch and matriarch. Hilliard stared coldly at the Sinclair heir. He stated clearly that they would address the Sinclair matter only after the remaining trash was fully taken out.

Gregg attempted to interrupt. He marched forward, demanding that the FBI agents still stationed in the room shut down the broadcast. Two federal agents immediately stepped into his path. Their stern faces and hands resting near their holsters forced Gregg to stop and slowly back away.

Gavin projected a massive, highly classified offshore bank statement onto the screen. The red highlighted numbers reflected in Jeraldine's terrified, wide eyes.

Hilliard pointed to the screen, his tone dripping with lethal precision, and explained line by line how Charla had embezzled twenty million dollars from the Holloway charity trust over the past three years.

Jeraldine gasped loudly. Her hand flew to her throat. She recognized the specific charity fund on the screen. It was the exact account she had personally entrusted to Charla just three months ago.

“This is impossible!” Gregg bellowed, shaking his head in stubborn denial. “These documents are forged by Cailin’s hacker friends to frame her! Charla would never—”

Gavin seamlessly switched the slide, cutting Gregg off mid-sentence. A high-definition security video played. It showed Charla physically entering a private Swiss bank, her face clearly visible under the security cameras as she signed the transfer documents.

The murmurs in the ballroom escalated into a deafening roar of judgment. Wall Street executives pointed at the screens, realizing the absolute depth of the English family’s financial rot.

Richard English, who had slumped back to his knees in shock during Silas’s explosive announcement, tried to crawl away from the glaring spotlight. His cowardice exposed his complicity to the entire room.

An FBI agent roughly grabbed Richard by the collar, hauled the ruined billionaire back to his feet, and tightened the steel handcuffs around his wrists until they clicked sharply.

Hilliard guided his wheelchair closer to the VIP table, suppressing a wince, with Julian remaining a silent, imposing guardian behind him. His presence, despite his obvious physical agony, fell over his parents, forcing them to confront the monster they had tried to bring into their family.

He presented a series of encrypted text messages on the screen. The timestamps detailed Charla's negotiations with a known underground arsonist from five years ago.

The messages explicitly ordered the burning of Cailin's old apartment. A chilling follow-up text flashed on the screen, demanding that no survivors be left behind in the ashes.

Cailin watched the screen. Her grip tightened around the ruby necklace in her hand. The physical reminder of her past trauma fueled her icy resolve. Her breathing remained perfectly steady.

Chapter 770:

Silas leaned down and whispered a sarcastic remark into Cailin's ear about the Holloway family's terrible taste in women. Cailin gave him a sharp, warning glare, refusing to engage in his games.

Jeraldine stared up at the screen, her aristocratic composure completely shattered. She trembled, horrified by the undeniable proof that the woman she had championed had truly ordered a hit on Cailin Morton.

To deliver the final blow, Gavin played a recovered, deeply classified voice memo from Charla's hacked cloud drive. Her frantic, hysterical voice echoed through the massive speaker system. "I had to do it!" the recording screamed, her tone manic. "I only did it to protect the Holloway bloodline from Cailin's filthy taint!"

This recorded confession acted as a verbal nail in the coffin. Even Gregg turned pale with horror, finally realizing the woman he had fiercely championed was a cold-blooded killer.

Hilliard looked at his father. His eyes were devoid of any filial respect. He asked coldly if this was the flawless dynasty matriarch Gregg wanted to lead their empire.

Gregg gripped the edge of the table, his knuckles turning white, completely unable to formulate a defense against the overwhelming digital evidence and the damning audio confession.

The lead FBI agent nodded to Hilliard, silently acknowledging that the newly presented evidence and the audio confession were more than enough for a federal indictment without bail for the already detained Charla.

With Charla already dragged away to federal lockup, the brutal reality of the situation finally crashed down on the Holloways. Jeraldine collapsed back into her seat, covering her face as her carefully curated world crumbled, while Gregg stood paralyzed, entirely humiliated by the absolute ruin of their high-society reputation.

Gavin Thorne stood in the elevated control booth. His fingers flew across the glowing keyboard as he bypassed the final encryption on the audio file. The cooling fans of the servers hummed loudly in the enclosed space.

Hilliard shifted his weight painfully in his chair, gripping the armrests for support. His predatory gaze locked onto Patricia English. The older woman shrank back in her chair, her hands trembling around her designer clutch.

The massive LED screens faded to black. The financial documents vanished. A stark, paused frame of grainy security footage appeared in the center of the display.

Hilliard announced to the dead-silent room that embezzlement was merely a corporate sin. What came next, he said, was a crime against the Holloway bloodline itself.

Gregg's head snapped up. His eyes narrowed in sudden apprehension. He sensed the terrifying gravity of Hilliard's words settling over the room.

Gavin hit play. A newly decrypted, alternative angle of the hospital roof garden security footage filled the screen, showing Charla standing over Amerigo Holloway's fallen body late at night.

The silent footage captured her looking over her shoulder before deliberately raising the heavy river rock high above her head a second time, her manicured hands actively smashing it into the back of Amerigo's skull to ensure his death.