

Second chance 81

Chapter 81:

Kegan, sitting in his office in Geneva, burst out laughing. "For what?"

"Operation: Firework Fail," Aron explained the plan.

Kegan loved it. "I'll send a team. And some special pyrotechnics. Just tell me where to drop the payload."

Back at the office, Cailin's phone rang. It was the courier.

"Ms. Morton?" The courier sounded genuinely terrified. "Mr. Holloway... he wouldn't sign. He took the envelope, walked over to the fireplace, and threw it into the flames."

"He what?" Cailin asked, blinking.

"He just watched it burn. Then he told me to give you a message. He said, 'Tell her there will be no divorce. She is a Holloway. That is not a title one simply resigns from.'"

Cailin pressed her fingers to her temples. "He is a child."

Hilliard walked into the Auction House moments later. He ignored the security guards. He ignored Chloe. He walked straight to Cailin's desk.

"I'm not signing," he said.

"Why? You hate me," Cailin replied, without looking up.

"I don't hate you. I want you at the Gala," Hilliard said.

"To watch you propose?" Cailin laughed, the sound hollow and bitter.

"No." Hilliard leaned down until his face was inches from hers. "To see the truth."

The discreet black-glass entrance to the Athenaeum — a private tutoring collective for the global elite — was nearly invisible on its quiet Upper East Side street. Inside, the air smelled of old books and filtered silence. Cailin straightened Aron's tie.

"Be good. No hacking the network," she warned.

"Yes, Mom," Aron said, rolling his eyes.

The Director, a woman with a severe haircut and a genuinely warm smile, came forward to greet her. "The Morton children are a wonderful addition, Ms. Morton. Their placement exams from the Lyceum Alpinum in Switzerland were extraordinary."

Cailin smiled tightly. Kegan's forgeries were worth every penny.

As she walked back to her car, a familiar black limousine idled at the curb. Charla stepped out looking like a movie star — oversized sunglasses, a Fendi bag hooked over her arm.

"Cailin? What are you doing here?" Charla lowered her glasses, her eyes widening in what appeared to be genuine surprise.

Cailin's mind raced. "I have a client. One of the parents here."

"A client? At the Athenaeum?" Charla laughed, sharp and condescending. "Don't be ridiculous. The members here don't need auction house appraisals. I'm here finalizing the donation for the new astrophysics wing — Hilliard's money, of course. It's so important to have my name on the donor wall before we are officially married."

Cailin wanted to hit her. "Enjoy it while it lasts."

Charla leaned in close, her voice dropping to a venomous whisper. "Oh, I will. Tonight, I become Mrs. Holloway. Don't be late to the show."

Cailin drove away with her heart hammering. Charla was too close. This sanctuary was compromised. She called Ashely immediately.

“We need to move the kids after their session. It’s not safe — Charla was there.”

“They’re already gone, Cailin,” Ashely said, her voice tight with panic.

“What?” Cailin nearly swerved into oncoming traffic.