

Second chance 85

Chapter 85:

“So, Cailin,” Charla said, recovering her venom. She crossed her arms. “Tell us about your work. Still selling junk from dead people’s attics?”

Cailin took a slow sip of champagne. It was cold and dry. “I deal in provenance, Charla. History. Authenticity.” She lowered the glass, her eyes settling pointedly on Charla’s heavy diamond necklace. “Something you lack.”

A few nearby guests chuckled. One woman covered her mouth with a gloved hand.

Hilliard watched Cailin. He had never seen this version of her. The Cailin he remembered had been soft, yielding, easily bruised. This woman was sharp edges and steel. It was terrifying. It was exhilarating.

“She’s feisty,” a man in a velvet blazer remarked to Hilliard, eyeing Cailin with open appreciation. “I like it.”

Hilliard turned a stare on the man that dropped the temperature to absolute zero. “Eyes off.”

The man blinked and retreated into the crowd.

A low buzzing sound cut through the ambient chatter — something between a swarm of bees and a mechanical whirl. Cailin looked up. Hovering twenty feet above the crowd was a small black drone, a blue LED blinking on its underbelly.

Davy.

Panic surged in her throat. Don't land, she prayed silently. Don't get caught.

The drone zipped over the heads of the guests with erratic, jerky precision and came to a hovering stop directly above Charla. Charla looked up, shielding her eyes. "What is that? Is it part of the show?"

The drone's payload bay opened.

It wasn't a bomb. It wasn't water.

It was glitter. Pounds of it.

A cloud of fine, industrial-grade silver and neon pink glitter exploded downward, coating Charla in an instant. It clung to her hair, her eyelashes, her exposed shoulders, her expensive gown.

Charla shrieked. "My hair! My eyes!"

She flailed, trying to brush it away, but the glitter only smeared, turning her into a shimmering, chaotic spectacle.

The drone buzzed triumphantly, executed a small barrel roll, and zipped away into the night sky, vanishing over the edge of the building.

Cailin bit the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing. That was definitely Davy's piloting — aggressive and theatrical.

"Security! Shoot that thing down!" Charla screamed, spitting glitter from her mouth. "I'm blinded!"

Hilliard looked at the sky, then at the glitter dusting the floor around Charla's feet. He did not look concerned. He looked almost amused.

"It's just a prank, Charla," he said, taking a measured sip of his drink. "Calm down."

"It's an attack!" Charla wailed, her mascara running in gray streaks through the silver dust. "Someone is targeting me!"

"Perhaps," Hilliard said, glancing at Cailin. "Or perhaps the universe simply thinks you need to shine a little brighter."

Charla stormed off toward the restrooms, a trail of assistants following in her wake like a flock of nervous birds, dabbing at her dress with napkins.

Hilliard turned to Cailin. The amusement vanished from his face, replaced by focused intensity. "Finally," he said. "Alone."

Cailin glanced at the crowded rooftop. "Not alone enough."

Gavin materialized at Hilliard's elbow, looking harried, a tablet flashing red in his hands.