

Second chance 92

Chapter 92:

She answered. Kegan filled the screen, sitting on a vineyard terrace in France, wearing sunglasses and a linen shirt, entirely at ease with the chaos he had orchestrated.

"The bill for the fireworks," Kegan said, holding a piece of paper up to the camera.

"I'm not paying for your prank," Cailin said, glaring at the screen.

"It wasn't a prank. It was a statement. And the kids loved it." Kegan laughed. "Elia said the X was for 'X-Husband.'"

"They are banned from electronics," Cailin said, pressing her fingers to her temples.

"Aron already hacked the child lock on the tablets. Give up, Cali," Kegan advised, taking a leisurely sip of red wine.

"Hilliard thinks I have a lover. A rich one," Cailin sighed. "He thinks the fireworks were a romantic gesture from a rival."

"Good. Let him be jealous. It weakens him," Kegan said.

"It makes him aggressive." Cailin touched her lip. It still felt tender. "He kissed me."

Kegan stopped smiling. He set down the wine glass. Even behind the sunglasses, his eyes went cold.

"Did you want him to?" Kegan asked. His voice dropped to something quieter and far more dangerous.

"No," Cailin lied.

"If he touches you again, I will fly there. And it won't be fireworks I bring," Kegan said. "I will dismantle his empire brick by brick."

He hung up. The screen went black.

Cailin sat with the silence for a moment. Kegan was a dangerous ally.

Chloe knocked on the doorframe. "Client in the showroom. Wants an appraisal. Urgent."

"Who is it?" Cailin asked, sliding on her glasses — her Cali mask.

“Someone from the Holloway family. But not Hilliard,” Chloe said, looking distinctly uncomfortable.

Cailin frowned and pulled up the security monitor on her desk.

It was Jeraldine Holloway. Hilliard’s mother. The woman who had pressed a swab to Elia’s mouth. She stood in the showroom holding a large blue and white vase, surveying the gallery with an expression of barely concealed distaste.

Cailin opened her desk drawer and shoved the photograph of the triplets beneath a stack of invoices.

“Let her in,” Cailin said, rising to her feet. “Let’s see what the Queen Mother wants.”

Jeraldine placed the vase on the glass counter with a heavy thud.

“I was told you were the new expert,” Jeraldine said, her voice thick with disdain. She did not recognize Cailin behind the professional mask and altered hair, though the name on the door had caught her attention. “Cali. An absurd name. Evaluate this.”

Cailin kept her gloved hands carefully neutral. She recognized the vase immediately — it had sat in the foyer of the Holloway Estate for years. She had dusted it herself as an eager young wife trying to earn her mother-in-law’s approval.

She examined the glaze. She tapped the rim.

"It's a fake," Cailin said.

"Excuse me?" Jeraldine bristled. "This has been in my family for fifty years. My husband bought it at Christie's."

"Then your husband was deceived. It's a high-quality nineteenth-century replica of a Ming Dynasty piece." Cailin pointed to the base. "The crackle pattern is too uniform. It's machine-induced heat stress, not natural aging."