

Second chance 931

Chapter 931:

The nurse paused, searching for the right word. "She looks... empty, sir. Like her body is here, but her soul is somewhere else entirely."

Empty.

The word was an ice pick, driving straight into Hilliard's heart.

That wasn't the state of a woman who had just triumphantly declared her love for another man. It wasn't the look of someone starting a new life. It was the look of someone who had just ended one.

He knew. He didn't know what, but he knew. There was a secret in that room. A secret so terrible she would build a wall of lies and cruelty to protect it.

He hung up the phone without a word. The pain and confusion in his eyes slowly receded, replaced by a cold, analytical resolve.

He would not leave this hospital. He would become a ghost in its machine. He would watch, he would listen, and he would not rest until he had torn down her lies and dragged the truth, whatever it was, into the light.

Hilliard sat in the dark tomb of his SUV, the glow of his phone the only light. He had transformed from a heartbroken lover into a shadow commander.

“Jackson,” he said into the phone, his voice a low, cold monotone. “New directive. I don’t just want the Vance family’s financials. I want everything. Every doctor they’ve ever employed, every nurse Cailin has seen in the last 48 hours. I want their school records, their divorce filings, their secret lovers. Find a vulnerability. Any vulnerability.”

He was mapping the battlefield, looking for a crack in the fortress wall. As he hung up, an encrypted call came through. The caller ID was a name he hadn’t seen in years, a ghost from his family’s deeper, darker past: Silas Croft.

Hilliard answered. The voice on the other end was old, raspy, but carried the weight of undisputed authority. “Hilliard. I heard about Cailin. Tell me you didn’t do something foolish, like touch one of the Vance family.”

The question was so specific it sent a chill down Hilliard’s spine. “I did more than touch one, Silas. I took their chief chemist.”

A long, heavy sigh echoed down the line. “I was afraid of that.”

“What do you know, Silas?”

“More than you want to hear,” the old man replied. He began to speak, and the story he told was not one of corporate rivalry, but of blood and betrayal. He spoke of a century-old feud, a secret war between the Crofts and the Van Dorens, the original, more venomous name of the Vance dynasty. He

described a past littered with assassinations, stolen fortunes, and a hatred so deep it was passed down like a genetic trait.

“They aren’t businessmen, Hilliard,” Silas warned, his voice grim. “They are vipers wearing bespoke suits. Their weapons have never been contracts and lawsuits. They’ve always been poison and daggers.”

Poison.

The word hit Hilliard like a lightning strike. It connected everything. Cailin’s sudden collapse. The unidentifiable toxin. The Vance family’s involvement. This wasn’t a business dispute. This was a dynastic cleansing.

Chapter 932:

“The Van Dorens have a signature,” Silas continued, his voice dropping lower. “A family recipe. A neurotoxin passed from one generation’s poisoner to the next. It’s their calling card.”

All the pieces clicked into place. The puzzle was complete, and the picture it formed was monstrous. Hilliard’s breath grew heavy, his knuckles white as he gripped the steering wheel. A murderous rage, cold and pure, began to burn in his chest.

“I’m flying to New York tomorrow,” Silas said. “Before you decide to burn their entire estate to the ground, wait for me. We’ll do it together.”

The line went dead. Hilliard stared into the darkness, the face of his enemy finally clear and focused in his mind. He immediately sent a new set of instructions to Jackson Reynolds, his fingers flying across the

screen. Focus all resources on the Van Doren family's criminal history. I want every skeleton in their closet.

Upstairs, in the quiet of her room, Cailin stirred. She opened her eyes to find Kegan asleep in the chair by her bed, his large frame slumped in an uncomfortable position, his face etched with worry even in sleep.

A pang of guilt shot through her. She was using him, manipulating his genuine affection for her as a tool in her tragic play. He deserved better. They all did.

She reached out her left hand and gently touched his arm. "Kegan."

He jolted awake, his eyes instantly finding hers. "Cailin. You're awake. How do you feel?"

She ignored the question. There was no point in answering it. "Kegan, I need a phone."

He looked at her, confused. "Your phone is right there. Hilliard had it charged for you."

"No," she said, her voice weak but firm. "Not that one. I need a clean one. Untraceable. I need to take care of some... private business. And I don't want it going through any of Hilliard's channels."

The reason was a carefully crafted appeal to his pride, a subtle stoking of his rivalry with Hilliard. It worked perfectly. Kegan's expression hardened with determination. He would not let her think that only Hilliard could provide for her, that only Hilliard had resources.

"Of course," he said, already pulling out his own device. "I'll have Rocco bring one over immediately."

Cailin watched as he made the call, his voice low and commanding. A wave of sadness washed over her. She wasn't trying to outmaneuver Hilliard. She was preparing for her own death.

She needed to contact someone outside the gravitational pull of the Holloway and Aguirre empires. Someone she trusted implicitly. Someone who would execute her last wishes without question.

Her best friend. Mia Hayes.

Kegan finished the call. "It's done," he said, a hint of pride in his voice. "A military-grade encrypted satellite phone. It will be here within the hour. No one will ever be able to track it."

Cailin managed a faint, grateful smile. "Thank you, Kegan."

Chapter 933:

The smile, so rare and so genuine, was like a balm on Kegan's bruised heart. For that one moment of warmth, he felt as if all the confusion, all the pain of the last few days, was worth it. He had no idea he was simply helping her build her own coffin.

Kegan returned not just with the promise of a phone, but with a peace offering. He carried a thermal container that, when opened, filled the sterile room with the rich, savory aroma of saffron, tomato, and seafood. It was her favorite dish from their time in Europe, a seafood risotto he'd learned to make himself.

"You need to eat," he said, his voice gentle. He sat by her bed, scooping a small amount onto a spoon, blowing on it carefully as if feeding a child. "Just a little."

She looked at his hopeful, earnest face, and she didn't have the heart to refuse him this small kindness. She opened her mouth.

The risotto was perfectly cooked. The rice was creamy, the shrimp tender, the hint of saffron unmistakable. She could identify all the components on her tongue. But there was no flavor. Nothing. It was like chewing warm, textured wax.

The poison was moving faster than she'd thought. It was devouring her senses, one by one.

A silent, screaming panic seized her. Her world was literally losing its flavor, turning to ash in her mouth. But on her face, she forced a smile. A bright, false thing.

"It's delicious, Kegan," she lied, the words tasting like dust. "Perfect."

His face lit up with a boyish, triumphant grin. He had pleased her. He had succeeded where Hilliard had not. He eagerly scooped another spoonful.

She swallowed it down, then another, each mechanical bite a horrifying reminder of what she was losing. Her body was becoming a stranger to her, a house whose windows were going dark, one by one.

The door swung open.

Hilliard stood there. In his hand, he also held a thermal food container. He stopped dead, his eyes taking in the scene. Kegan, leaning in close, intimately feeding Cailin. And Cailin, on the receiving end, with a “smile” on her face.

The lie she had told him, I’m in love with Kegan, slammed back into his consciousness, and this scene was the living proof. The air left his lungs.

His eyes, which had held a flicker of cautious hope, went dim. He looked broken. He quietly placed his container on a small table by the door, a silent admission of defeat. He turned to leave.

Cailin saw the profound, animal pain in his eyes, and she knew her plan was working too well. She had to sever this, all of it. She couldn’t keep accepting Kegan’s care, letting him fall deeper into a fantasy that would only destroy him when she was gone. She had to be cruel to be kind, a logic that was tearing her apart.

She abruptly pushed Kegan’s hand away. The spoon clattered against the bedsheets, spilling a small amount of the rice.

Kegan froze, his smile vanishing. "Cailin?"

Her expression had transformed. The soft gratitude was gone, replaced by a cold, irritable mask. Her eyes flickered toward Hilliard, who had paused at the door. She had her audience.

Chapter 934:

"I was just using you, Kegan," she said. Her voice wasn't loud, but it was sharp and clear, each word a perfectly polished shard of glass. "It was a game."

She let the words hang in the air, a poison of their own.

"Now that the game is over," she continued, her gaze dismissive, "I don't need you anymore. I don't need anyone. Please, just leave me alone."

Her words were meant for Kegan, but they struck Hilliard with equal force, a blanket dismissal of them both.

Kegan's face went white. He stared at her, his mouth opening and closing, but no sound came out. He looked like a man who had been shot and didn't yet understand that he was bleeding out.

Hilliard, by the door, turned back fully, his own face a mask of stunned confusion. This was another reversal he hadn't anticipated.

Kegan felt the floor drop out from under him. He was a fool. A complete and utter fool. His care, his devotion, the secret he kept for her, it was all just a prop in her twisted game.

He shot to his feet, the chair he was sitting on tipping over backward with a loud, violent crash.

He looked at her, one last, long look. His eyes were filled with a universe of betrayal and a raw, wounded fury.

He didn't say a word. He just turned, his back ramrod straight, and strode out of the room. The door slammed shut behind him with the force of a thunderclap.

The sound made Cailin flinch, a tiny, involuntary tremor.

She had done it. She had successfully driven away the second person who loved her. Her room was finally quiet, her fortress of solitude nearly complete. But inside, she felt a vast, echoing emptiness, a desolate landscape where her heart used to be.

Hilliard stood at the door, watching her pale, still face. He was adrift in a sea of contradictions. She loved Kegan. She was using Kegan. She wanted no one.

Which lie was the truth? Which truth was the lie?

He was more lost than ever.

The heavy slam of the door echoed in the silent room. Hilliard stood motionless for a long moment, his mind a chaotic storm of conflicting information.

Then he moved. Silently, he walked into the room, his steps measured. He bent down and picked up the chair Kegan had knocked over, setting it upright. He then knelt, gathering the spilled risotto and the broken shards of the water glass from the floor with a quiet efficiency. He didn't speak. He just cleaned, his presence a heavy, unspoken pressure in the room.

Cailin felt utterly drained. The emotional gymnastics had exhausted her more than the poison. She closed her eyes, feigning sleep, hoping the silence and stillness would finally make him leave.

It didn't.

She heard the soft scrape of a chair being pulled across the floor. He sat down beside her bed, just as he had the night before. A silent, stubborn sentinel who refused to be dismissed.

Chapter 935:

She could feel his gaze on her face, a tangible weight that prevented any real rest. The minutes stretched into an hour, then two. The air was thick with unspoken words, with pain and confusion.

Finally, a nurse came in for a routine check, forcing Cailin to "wake up."

"You've been in bed for days, Ms. Morton," the nurse said cheerfully. "If you feel up to it, some fresh air in the garden might do you good."

Cailin seized the opportunity like a drowning woman grasping for a raft. A way to escape this room, to escape his suffocating presence.

"Yes," she said, her voice a little too eager. "I'd like that." She looked pointedly at Hilliard. "Alone."

This time, he didn't argue. He simply nodded, his eyes dark and unreadable. "I'll be downstairs," he said. It wasn't a promise to leave, but a statement of fact. He wasn't going anywhere.

A few minutes later, a different nurse helped her into a wheelchair and pushed her down to the hospital's exclusive VIP garden. It was a small, secluded oasis of green in the middle of the concrete city, filled with late-autumn roses and the clean, crisp scent of pine. The fresh air was a temporary balm to her suffocating spirit.

She asked the nurse to wait for her by the entrance, wanting a few moments of solitude. She slowly wheeled herself along a winding stone path, the crunch of the gravel under the tires a lonely sound. She looked at the wilting rose petals, brown and curled at the edges, and saw a reflection of her own fading life.

"Gigi? Is that you?"

The voice came from behind her, masculine and filled with a surprised delight. She stiffened. No one had ever called her that.

She turned her head. A man was standing there, handsome in a severe, sharp-featured way. He was dressed in an impeccably tailored suit that screamed old money, but there was a strange, almost obsessive intensity in his eyes. It was Caspian Van Doren.

As he got a clear look at her face, the surprise in his eyes morphed into confusion, then a flicker of disappointment. "No," he murmured, more to himself than to her. "You're not her. But your eyes... they're exactly the same."

Cailin felt a cold knot of dread form in her stomach. Van Doren. The name itself was a threat. She gave him a curt, dismissive nod and began to turn her wheelchair to leave.

He moved with a startling quickness, stepping in front of her. He then did something incredibly unnerving. He crouched down, bringing his face level with hers, and studied her features with a focused, analytical curiosity. His proximity was an invasion, his stare a violation.

"It's uncanny," he whispered, his gaze locked on her eyes. "Truly uncanny."

Her heart began to pound. This had to be him. The assassin. The one Isadora or Giselle had sent to finish the job. Her palms grew slick with sweat. Her body instinctively recoiled, pressing back into the wheelchair.

The nurse was at the far end of the garden, her back to them, absorbed in a phone call. They were alone.

Chapter 936:

Cailin's fear spiked. She fumbled with the wheels, trying to back away, to get away.

Caspian stood up, his tall frame blocking the afternoon sun, casting a long, dark shadow over her. He took another step closer, following her retreat.

Her breath caught in her throat. The shadow of death felt literal, physical.

She saw the nurse finally end her call and turn around. Cailin waved her arm, a frantic, desperate gesture. "Nurse!"

The nurse saw the panic on Cailin's face and immediately understood something was wrong. She started running toward them, her hand already reaching for her phone to call security.

"Sir! Step away from her!" the nurse shouted, her voice sharp and authoritative.

Caspian paused, his focus broken by the interruption. He was just about to reach for the wheelchair, to stop her from leaving, when the sound of running footsteps and the nurse's cry made him hesitate. In that split second, two security guards rounded the corner of the path.

He was trapped.

“Sir! Let go of her!”

The nurse’s shout, sharp with alarm, cut through the quiet garden air. In the distance, Cailin could hear the heavy, running footsteps of security personnel.

Caspian’s head snapped up, as if waking from a trance. He looked down at his hand on her wheelchair, then at her terrified face, and a flicker of apology crossed his features. He immediately released his grip.

“My apologies,” he said, his voice a low rumble. “I was... impolite.”

He took a step back, but his intense gaze never left her face. A fragment of a memory, dusty and long-forgotten, surfaced in his mind. A private hunting reserve in the Adirondacks, years ago. A woman, lost and terrified, stumbling into the path of a hunting party. A woman with these exact eyes.

His expression shifted from confusion to dawning recognition. “We’ve met before,” he said, the statement a certainty. “In the mountains. You nearly became prey.”

Cailin’s own memory sparked. She had been fleeing Hilliard’s relentless pursuit, cutting through what she thought was public land. That man, this man, had been the one to call off the hunters, to point her toward the main road with a cold, detached courtesy.

Her immediate, primal fear subsided slightly, but the name, Van Doren, still pulsed like a warning siren in her mind.

Two burly security guards arrived, flanking Caspian, their hands resting on their holstered sidearms. The nurse rushed to Cailin's side, her face a mask of concern.

"It's alright," Cailin said, waving a dismissive hand at the guards. "A misunderstanding."

She looked up at Caspian, her voice laced with an exhaustion that went bone-deep. "I don't know who you're looking for," she said, her words blunt and direct. "But I am not her. And frankly, it no longer matters."

"Why doesn't it matter?" he pressed, his curiosity overriding his manners.

A faint, almost ethereal smile touched Cailin's lips. It held no joy, only a profound, devastating peace. She decided to use the one weapon she had left. The absolute truth.

Chapter 937:

"Because I'm going to die," she said, her voice calm and even.

The words fell into the quiet garden like a stone into a still pond. The nurse gasped. The security guards froze.

Caspian's pupils contracted sharply. Of all the possible responses, this was the one he could never have anticipated. He truly looked at her then, not as a reflection of someone else, but as herself. He saw the translucent pallor of her skin, the subtle tremors in her hand, the vast, empty stillness in her eyes.

A strange and unfamiliar emotion stirred within him. Empathy. The quiet finality in her voice was more shocking than any scream, more powerful than any plea.

Cailin didn't wait for his reaction. "Nurse, please take me back."

The nurse, still stunned, nodded and began to push the wheelchair away. Caspian remained rooted to the spot, her four words echoing in his mind. I'm going to die.

Back in her room, Hilliard was waiting, his posture tense. "What happened? Security said there was an incident."

"A man mistook me for someone else," Cailin said vaguely, omitting the name Van Doren. She didn't have the strength to watch Hilliard launch into a premature war. She needed quiet. She needed to execute her own plan.

She remembered the phone.

When Hilliard stepped out to take a call, she acted. She sent a quick, encrypted text to the number Kegan had given her. Phone?

There was no reply from Kegan, who was likely still nursing his wounded pride. But a minute later, a new message came in from an unknown number. This is Rocco. I'm downstairs. How do I get it to you?

She needed a window of time, a way to get Hilliard out of the hospital.

When he returned, she put on her most convincing “petulant patient” act. “I want a cookie,” she said, her voice weak but demanding. “From that little French bakery on Lexington. The one with the salted caramel.”

It was a ridiculous, whimsical request. But for Hilliard, who was desperate to do something, anything for her, it was a mission.

“Of course,” he said immediately. “I’ll go myself.”

He was gone in less than a minute. The fifteen-minute window she had prayed for.

She texted Rocco: Fifteen minutes. Come to my room. Say you’re delivering food from Hilliard Holloway.

Less than ten minutes later, there was a soft knock. A man in a food delivery uniform stood there, holding a sealed takeout box. He handed it to her without a word and was gone.

Cailin’s hands shook as she tore it open. Inside, nestled among foam padding, was a brand-new, military-grade satellite phone.

She quickly hid it under her mattress just as Hilliard returned, holding a small, elegant pastry box.

Later that night, when the hospital was quiet and she was sure she was alone, she retrieved the phone. She took a deep, shuddering breath and dialed the number she knew by heart, the number she had sworn she would never drag into her toxic world.

Chapter 938:

The phone rang twice before it was answered.

“Mia?” Cailin’s voice broke on her friend’s name. “It’s me. Cailin. I need you.”

Hilliard delivered the cookie, which she pretended to nibble at before claiming exhaustion, and he finally, reluctantly, left for the night. He believed she needed rest. He had no idea she needed solitude.

In the deep, silent hours of the night, when the only sounds were the soft hum of machines and the distant wail of a siren, Cailin pulled out the encrypted phone.

She didn’t make a call. Instead, she opened the calendar app. With a thumb that felt strangely heavy and disconnected, she created a new event. A recurring, daily countdown.

Starting today. For fourteen days.

The screen glowed with the stark, cold number: 14.

It looked like a death sentence. A final, inescapable deadline. She stared at it for a long time, the number burning itself into her memory.

She hid the phone and tried to sleep, but her mind was a whirlwind. Fear, raw and primal, clawed at her. An overwhelming wave of love and sorrow for her children washed over her, so intense it was a physical pain. The palliative medicine dulled the ache in her nerves, but it couldn't touch the agony in her soul. Eventually, the drugs won, and she drifted into a troubled, dreamless sleep.

Hours later, the lock on her door clicked open with an almost imperceptible sound.

Hilliard slipped into the room like a wraith. He hadn't gone home. He couldn't. The thought of her alone in this sterile room, so fragile, was a torment he couldn't bear. He had used his override access card, a privilege reserved for the hospital's board of directors, to become her secret guardian.

He didn't turn on a light. He moved a chair to the side of her bed and sat down in the darkness, his presence a silent, desperate vigil.

He watched the slow, even rise and fall of her chest. He saw her brow furrow in her sleep and had to clench his fists to stop himself from reaching out to smooth it, terrified of waking her.

He sat there all night, an emperor reduced to a helpless watchman, a knight guarding a queen he had already failed. He didn't close his eyes once.

The first pale, gray fingers of dawn crept through the window, illuminating the room in soft shades of blue and gray. Cailin's eyelids fluttered open.

The first thing she saw was him.

He was sitting there, a silhouette against the growing light, his face shadowed and haggard. A rough, dark stubble covered his jaw. He looked utterly broken.

She flinched, a sharp, involuntary jerk backward into her pillows. The sight of him, so unexpectedly there, was a shock to her system.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, her voice a harsh, frightened whisper.

Chapter 939:

A flicker of raw hurt crossed his face. He slowly stood up, his body stiff from the long night in the chair. His voice was a low, gravelly rasp. "I was... worried about you being alone."

The simple, honest confession was a sharp pang in her chest. But she couldn't afford to feel it. She had a role to play. Her plan required absolute cruelty.

"I don't need a guard," she said, her voice turning to ice. "I told you. I want you to leave."

Hilliard looked at her cold, unforgiving face. His all-night vigil, his desperate need to be near her, felt like a pathetic, foolish joke. He didn't argue. He didn't plead. He just gave a single, defeated nod, turned, and walked out of the room.

When the door clicked shut, Cailin let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding. A wave of desolate emptiness washed over her. But she pushed it down. It had to be this way.

Later that morning, Dr. Finch and a young nurse came in for the daily check-up.

Dr. Finch played his part perfectly, speaking of "positive indicators" and "stabilizing vitals." Cailin played hers, reporting that she "felt a little stronger," even as she could feel the creeping numbness spreading further up her arm.

As the doctor was making notes, the young nurse, unable to contain herself, spoke up.

"Ms. Morton," she said softly, her voice full of a sincerity Cailin couldn't ignore. "You shouldn't be so hard on Mr. Holloway."

Cailin's eyes snapped to the nurse's face, her gaze sharp and questioning.

The nurse flinched but pressed on. "He's here every day. All day. He barely sleeps. The staff... we've never seen anything like it. He just sits in that temporary office, staring at the wall, or he stands outside your door for hours."

Dr. Finch, overhearing, added his own piece to the narrative. “He’s had files from every top neurologist in the world flown in. The stacks of paper are a fire hazard. The man is going half-mad with worry for you.”

Each word was a small, sharp hammer, tapping against the fortress wall she had so carefully constructed around her heart. She knew it was true. She could picture it all, Hilliard, the master of the universe, reduced to a helpless, frantic man, poring over documents he couldn’t understand, willing a miracle into existence.

The knowledge was an unbearable weight.

She didn’t answer them. She couldn’t. She just turned her face toward the window, toward the cold, indifferent city, so they wouldn’t see the tears that were now freely, silently, streaming down her face.

Hilliard sat in the sterile, temporary office that had become his command center, his prison. He hadn’t slept in what felt like days, his eyes burning, his system running on pure caffeine and raw nerve. Stacks of medical journals and expert reports formed precarious towers on the desk, a monument to his futility.

A sharp knock on the door broke his concentration. Jackson Reynolds entered, his face grim. He placed a thin file on the desk.

“Sir,” Jackson began, “we found Tiffany Reed.”

Hilliard's head snapped up. His exhaustion vanished, replaced by a sharp, predatory focus. "And?"

Chapter 940:

"She wasn't eliminated," Jackson reported. "She's being held at a private wellness center upstate. High-end, discreet. Looks more like a five-star hotel than a prison."

Hilliard gave a cold, humorless smile. Isadora was keeping her pawn in play. "Whose facility?"

"It's a Van Doren asset, sir. Security is tight. And it's being personally overseen by Giselle Vance."

"She has a death wish," Hilliard murmured. He considered the information for a moment, his mind calculating. "Leave her. I don't want her spooked. Just watch her. I want to know every move Giselle makes, every person she talks to. Put a bug on her."

Miles away, in that gilded cage, Tiffany Reed was pacing her luxurious suite like a trapped animal. The plush carpets and silk wallpaper only served to mock her imprisonment.

The door opened, and Giselle Vance swept in, a vision of effortless elegance in a Chanel suit, holding two flutes of champagne. Her smile was as bright and beautiful as a summer's day, but her eyes were filled with a chilling, contemptuous amusement.

She offered a glass to Tiffany, who stared at it as if it were poison.

“What’s wrong, Tiffany?” Giselle cooed, her voice dripping with false sympathy. “Don’t you like your new accommodations? I had them redecorated just for you.”

“Why are you keeping me here?” Tiffany demanded, her voice shaking with rage. “You said you would help me!”

Giselle took a delicate sip of her champagne. “Oh, I am helping you,” she said with a light laugh. “I’m helping you stay out of a federal prison. But your plan, my dear, was an absolute mess. Your assassin, your timing... sloppy.”

She strolled to the window, looking out at the manicured lawns. “Did you know,” she said, her tone conversational, “that Cailin Morton is still alive?”

Tiffany’s eyes widened in disbelief. The news hit her like a physical blow.

Giselle turned, savoring the shock on Tiffany’s face. “Oh, yes. Very much alive. So alive, in fact, that Hilliard Holloway and Kegan Aguirre nearly started a war with my family over her.” She walked closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “And you, my poor, pathetic Tiffany... have you wondered what happened to your dear father?”

A cold, heavy dread settled in Tiffany’s stomach.

Giselle's smile turned cruel, predatory. "Oh, I forgot to tell you. Your little escapade left quite a trail. To appease the Holloways, to show that our families had no part in your... personal vendetta... your father had to be dealt with. He was... removed. Permanently."

The world went silent. Tiffany's mind went blank. She stumbled backward, her legs giving out, and slid down the wall to the floor. Her father. Gone.

Giselle crouched down, enjoying the sight of Tiffany's complete and utter breakdown. "So you see, you have nothing now. No family. No money. No future. Nothing... except me."