

Second chance 94

Chapter 94:

Desperation overrode logic. It wasn't a choice — it was a reflex, survival instinct kicking in with the subtlety of a car crash. She grabbed the lapels of Hilliard's suit jacket, the fine wool cool against her sweating palms, and yanked him down.

She smashed her lips against his.

It wasn't a romantic kiss. It was a collision.

Hilliard went rigid. His entire body stiffened like stone, his hands hovering in the air, caught between pushing her away and pulling her closer.

Cailin angled her head sharply and buried her face against his jaw, using the width of his broad shoulders to create a blind spot from the door. She pressed herself against him, eliminating every inch of space between them, turning herself into a shadow in his arms.

The door handle turned. The latch clicked.

The door swung open.

“Cali, seriously, the list is—” Chloe stopped dead.

Cailin squeezed her eyes shut. She could feel Hilliard’s heartbeat against her chest — rapid now, accelerating. Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

For a suspended moment, Hilliard did nothing. He stood there, a statue of shock.

Then a low groan rumbled in his throat — the sound of defeat, or perhaps surrender.

His hands stopped hovering. They descended. One arm wrapped around her waist and clamped her against him like a steel band. The other rose to the back of her head, fingers tangling in her hair, holding her exactly where she was. He didn’t push her away.

He devoured her.

His mouth opened, hot and demanding, and he took control of the kiss entirely, turning her desperate distraction into something carnal. His tongue swept into her mouth, tasting her, claiming her — mint, and the lingering, smoky bitterness of expensive scotch.

It was familiar. It was terrifyingly familiar.

Cailin's knees went weak. For one traitorous second she forgot about Chloe. She forgot about the veil. She forgot about the three children hidden in Brooklyn. She only felt him — the way his body heat seeped into hers, the way he made her feel simultaneously small and protected and consumed.

"Excuse me!"

Chloe's voice was a shrill blade cutting through the haze.

Hilliard broke the kiss, but he didn't let go. He kept Cailin's face pressed firmly into the crook of his neck, his hand shielding the back of her head, and turned to glare over his shoulder at the intruder.

Cailin trembled against him, gasping for air, her forehead resting against his collarbone. She kept her eyes clamped shut.

"Get out," Hilliard growled. His voice was rough, scraping like gravel — the voice of a man interrupted in a deeply private moment.

Chloe stood in the doorway, mouth agape, gaze moving from the disheveled auctioneer to the man holding her. Her eyes widened as recognition dawned.

"Mr. Holloway?" Chloe stammered, her face flushing a deep, unbecoming red. "I... I didn't realize... I thought—"

“Leave. Now,” Hilliard said. He didn’t raise his voice. He didn’t need to.

Chloe’s eyes darted toward Cailin — jealousy flickering across her face. She couldn’t see anything; Cailin’s face was hidden completely against Hilliard’s chest.

“I’ll come back,” Chloe muttered. She backed out of the room and pulled the door shut with a soft click.