

Second chance 95

Chapter 95:

Silence returned to the showroom. Heavy and thick.

Hilliard didn't release her immediately. He held her for another long moment, his chest rising and falling against hers.

Then, slowly, his grip loosened.

Cailin pulled back, stumbling slightly. She raised a hand to check her veil. It was askew, but still in place.

Hilliard looked down at her, his eyes dark, the pupils blown wide and swallowing the blue. He reached out and brushed his thumb slowly across her lower lip, which felt swollen and bruised.

"That was effective," he whispered, his voice still rough. "But don't think for a second that I've forgotten my question."

Cailin pushed his hand away as though his skin were branded with fire. She stepped back, putting the heavy oak desk between them. Her hands were shaking. She clasped them together to hide the tremor.

"I need to check the inventory," she said. Her voice was thin and brittle.

She grabbed a stack of papers from the desk without looking at what they were — she simply needed a prop, something to anchor her to reality before the adrenaline of that kiss carried her away entirely.

Hilliard hadn't moved. He leaned against the edge of the display table with his arms crossed, watching her with the patience of a predator who had just tasted blood and found he liked it.

"You kiss like a woman running for her life," Hilliard observed. His tone was analytical, almost cold — a sharp contrast to the heat still radiating from his body.

Cailin adjusted her veil, ensuring it covered her jawline completely. "I kiss like a woman who gets what she wants, Mr. Holloway."

"And what do you want?" Hilliard asked. "Besides hiding from your own staff?"

"Privacy," Cailin snapped. She crossed to the door, needing to escape the suffocating intimacy of the room.

She pulled it open.

Chloe was waiting in the hallway. She hadn't left. She stood against the opposite wall, arms crossed, foot tapping with impatient fury. Her eyes narrowed as Cailin emerged, Hilliard following behind her.

Hilliard buttoned his suit jacket, his face a mask of complete indifference.

“So,” Chloe said, pushing off the wall with a sneer. “This is how you get the top listings? Sleeping with the buyers?”

Cailin squared her shoulders and channeled every ounce of Cali she possessed. “I get listings because I don’t sell fakes, Chloe. Unlike some people.”

Chloe flushed, the color crawling up her neck. “That Ming vase was a tricky one. Anyone could have missed it.”

“I didn’t,” Cailin said coolly.

“You think you’re the queen of this auction house because you slept your way into a job?” Chloe stepped closer, her voice dropping to a venomous hiss. “Let’s see how good you really are.”

Cailin raised an eyebrow beneath her veil. “Is that a challenge?”

“A wager,” Chloe said. A cruel smile played on her lips. “The Grand Auction next week. Highest total sales volume wins.”