

Second chance 96

Chapter 96:

Cailin paused. The Grand Auction was the biggest event of the year — millions of dollars on the line.

“And the stakes?” Cailin asked.

“Loser resigns as Chief Auctioneer. Permanently,” Chloe said. “And leaves New York.”

Hilliard leaned against the doorframe, watching the exchange with mild amusement. “High stakes.”

Cailin looked at her cousin — at the woman who had tormented her throughout her childhood.

“Accepted,” Cailin said without hesitation.

Chloe blinked. She hadn’t expected such a swift answer. “Fine. Prepare to pack your bags, Cali.” She turned on her heel and clicked angrily down the corridor toward her office.

Cailin released a breath she hadn’t known she was holding.

A hand clamped around her elbow. Hard.

"You are confident," Hilliard said, turning her to face him.

"I am competent. There is a difference." Cailin tried to pull her arm free, but his grip was iron.

He didn't release her. Instead he pulled her closer, lowering his head until his lips were near her ear. "Speaking of competence," he murmured, "my team reviewed the security footage from the gala. After your admirer's little show, they found something interesting in the glitter debris from the drone."

Cailin went still. Her blood turned to ice.

"What?" she whispered.

"A hair," Hilliard said. His voice was smooth and silky with danger. "A single, dark, curly hair. A child's hair."

Cailin's eyes widened behind the veil. Elia. Her curls. It was possible — entirely possible.

"So?" Cailin managed, though her heart was hammering so hard it hurt.

“So,” Hilliard said, his eyes boring into hers, searching for the truth, “I want to know who that child belongs to. My team collected a DNA sample from the glass you drank from just now. We are going to find out if you’re the mother.”

He was connecting the dots. He was bluffing, stretching the truth — but he was getting far too close.

“Come with me,” Hilliard said, pulling her toward the elevator.

“Where?” Cailin dug her heels into the carpet.

“The clinic,” Hilliard said. “And while we’re there, I’ll provide a sample of my own. We are going to get a definitive answer about paternity.”

“You can’t do this! I have rights!” Cailin struggled, panic clawing up her throat.

Hilliard jammed the elevator button. The doors slid open.

“I have a private jet and a legal team that eats rights for breakfast,” he said, pushing her into the elevator and hitting the button for the lobby.

The doors slid shut, sealing them in.

Hilliard looked down at her, his expression grim and absolute. “If that child is mine, Cailin... you will never run again.”

The waiting room of the Horizon Medical clinic was silent — the kind of expensive silence that money bought to muffle bad news. White leather chairs, abstract art on the walls, the faint hum of a high-end HVAC system.

Hilliard sat opposite Cailin. He hadn’t released her hand since they left the elevator. His thumb traced slow circles into her palm — a gesture that might have seemed comforting if it weren’t a form of handcuffs.