

Second chance 98

Chapter 98:

“Cailin, wait,” Hilliard said — but he didn’t move. He was staring at the zero percent as though it were a death sentence. He looked broken.

“Stay away from me,” Cailin hissed.

She turned and ran. She burst through the double doors and out into the cool night air, leaving him alone with his data and his ghosts.

Cailin fumbled for her keys, her hands shaking so violently she dropped them twice on the asphalt. She snatched them up, unlocked the car, and threw herself into the driver’s seat.

She locked all the doors.

She drew a jagged breath, the smell of leather and old coffee anchoring her to the present.

She pulled out her phone and dialed Kegan.

It rang once.

“Did it work?” Kegan’s voice was calm and steady.

“Zero percent,” Cailin sobbed. She pressed the phone to her forehead. “How? How did you do it?”

“I intercepted the lab’s request to your client database ten minutes ago and swapped the DNA profile associated with Hilliard’s name,” Kegan said. “The system compared the child’s hair sample to the profile of a random janitor from their employee records — not to Hilliard’s actual sample.”

Cailin laughed. It was a hysterical, wet sound. “He was devastated. He looked... he looked like he had lost everything.”

“Good,” Kegan said coldly. “Keep him broken. It’s safer for the kids. If he believes they aren’t his, he won’t fight for custody.”

“I have to go,” Cailin said, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. “I have an auction to win. I have to destroy Chloe.”

“Go. Be the shark,” Kegan said.

She hung up and looked in the rearview mirror.

Hilliard was standing at the clinic entrance. Under the harsh fluorescent lights of the awning, he looked pale and utterly still — watching her car, not moving, like a statue of a man who had forgotten how to walk.

Cailin revved the engine and sped away, tires screeching against the pavement.

Back inside the clinic, Hilliard turned slowly and hurled the tablet against the wall.

Crash.

The screen shattered, sending shards of glass skittering across the floor.

“Sir?” The doctor flinched and stepped back.

“Run it again,” Hilliard said. His voice was quiet — terrifyingly so. “Use the raw data. Not the processed report.”

“We did, sir,” the doctor stammered. “The raw data confirms it. The hair sample shows no paternal match to the reference on file for you. It’s conclusive.”

Hilliard pressed his fingers to his temples. The pain was a vice tightening around his skull.

“Am I going crazy?”

He closed his eyes. He saw the child in the hospital. Elia. He saw her eyes — his eyes. He saw the way she set her chin when she was being stubborn. That was his chin. That was his jaw.

Biology didn't lie. But the data said otherwise.

“Maybe the test is right,” Hilliard muttered to himself. “Maybe she isn't mine.” The thought landed like a physical blow.