

Second chance 99

Chapter 99:

“But she is Cailin’s,” he said, opening his eyes. The confusion hardened into something darker. “I felt it. So if she isn’t mine... then who is the father?”

Jealousy — hot and corrosive — replaced the grief he should have been feeling.

“Who touched her?” Hilliard snarled.

He pulled out his phone and dialed Gavin.

“Find out who Cailin Morton was with five years ago in Europe,” Hilliard ordered.

“Everyone, sir?” Gavin asked, hesitant.

“Everyone. I want names. I want photographs. I want to know who fathered a child with my wife.” He hung up and walked out into the night, his heart burning with a rage that had no target.

Forty minutes later, Cailin arrived at the safe house.

She unlocked the door and stepped inside. The warmth of the apartment enveloped her immediately — the smell of pancakes and crayons.

“Mommy!”

Elia came running down the hall in her pajamas, her hair a messy halo of dark curls. She crashed into Cailin’s legs.

Cailin dropped to her knees and pulled her daughter into her arms, squeezing her so tightly that Elia let out a small squeak of protest.

“I’ve got you,” Cailin whispered into her hair. “I’ve got you.”

Elia pulled back slightly. She sniffed Cailin’s dress, her small nose wrinkling.

“Mommy?” Elia asked. “You smell like the Bad Man.”

Cailin went still. Hilliard’s cologne — sandalwood and rain — was clinging to her clothes from the kiss, from the car ride, from every moment she had spent too close to him.

“That’s the smell of a close call, baby,” Cailin said, her voice unsteady. “Just a very close call.”

She rose to her feet, her expression hardening. She had survived the DNA test. Now she had to survive the auction. She would destroy Chloe, secure her position, and build a fortress of money so high that Hilliard Holloway could never climb it.

Three days later, the backstage area of the Obsidian Auction House was a hive of controlled chaos. Assistants in black scurried past with clipboards, security guards checked their earpieces, and the low hum of a billion dollars in assets waiting to be sold seemed to vibrate in the very air.

Cailin stood by the curtain, reviewing the catalog on her tablet. Her green diamond — the Ocean's Tear — was Lot 50. The finale.

Chloe swept past, flanked by two junior assistants who looked genuinely frightened of her. She was wearing a dress that was too tight and too bright.

"Enjoying your last night as Chief?" Chloe taunted, pausing to smirk.

Cailin didn't look up from her screen. "Make sure your gavel doesn't slip, Chloe. Sweat makes things slippery."

"I've had my father's best people run a background check on you," Chloe hissed, leaning in close enough that only Cailin could hear. "Nothing. Not a single credit card, no social security number, no past address. You appeared out of thin air. You think you're clever, hiding behind a mask and a fake name — but cleverness isn't talent."

Chloe's perfume was cloying at that range. "I swapped the running order. You're up first with the Mystery Item. Management approved it."