

Chapter 517 Hailee's Rage

Merlin's words hung in the air, rendering both Allan and Manley momentarily silent.

"So what can we do?" Allan finally asked, his voice low.

"Exactly. What can we do?" Manley echoed with a weary sigh. "As much as we want to believe Elliana's still alive, the truth is her car went off the Cadena cliff. No one survives that fall. That place is a graveyard cloaked in mist and myths. Miracles don't happen there."

He hesitated and then added more quietly, "And Cole... We all saw how deeply he once loved her. But now, he doesn't even remember her anymore and is preparing to marry the Campbell heiress like nothing ever happened. Ruben's even issued orders: Elliana's name is not to be spoken in Cole's presence. All we can do is wait and watch."

The weight of those words crashed over Hailee like a tidal wave. Her chest tightened, eyes brimming. She turned away, but the tears still fell. Manley had said no one had ever survived that cliff. Maybe this really was the end. Elliana was gone. And the man who'd once held Elliana so close was smiling now, planning a future with someone else. How could that be fair?

As Hailee's tears began to fall, Merlin turned away, jaw tight, throat heavy. He hated to admit it, but Manley was right. There was nothing left to do. Nothing at all.

Just then, the door to the private room swung open, and just like that, the air shifted. Cole stepped in. Conversation died instantly. Every mention of Elliana vanished mid-thought.

Manley recovered first, plastering on a quick smile. "Cole. You're here."

Cole gave a brief nod, eyes scanning the room until they landed on Hailee. He knew her—Merlin's personal secretary. That much registered. But beneath that certainty was something murkier, a flicker of memory tugging at the edge of his mind, as if her presence scratched at an old

scar he couldn't place.

Allan, Merlin, and Manley exchanged looks, subtle but telling. They saw it too. Cole remembered Hailee. But not Elliana.

That was the strange part. Hailee had been one of Elliana's closest friends. If anything, Hailee should've been a footnote in Cole's memories. Yet, here he was, staring like Hailee held the missing piece to a puzzle he didn't know he'd lost. Of all the things to be forgotten, why Elliana?

Hailee, of course, also caught on to Cole's look. Her rage bloomed quietly beneath her ribs, cold and sharp. "Jerk" was the only word she could think of to describe him.

Hailee's stare turned glacial, her warmth stripped away by the tangled mess of emotions Cole stirred in her. Whatever civility she might have shown someone else, she had no intention of offering it to him. She shot him a withering glare. Then, she looked away, chin dipped low, shutting him out.

Cole, still watching her, tilted his head slightly. There was hostility in her glare, but something personal, too. As if she knew a version of him he couldn't remember. What did he do to piss her off? If she were anyone else, he might've called security to escort her out. But she was Merlin's favorite. That was enough to keep him from making a scene. Without another word, he shrugged off the tension and sank onto the sofa.

Manley, ever the host, poured Cole a drink and smoothly shifted gears. "So, Cole. Just you and Hugh today? Where are Myles and Aron?"

Before Cole could answer, Hugh jumped in, grinning widely. "They've been sent to Sundara for training."

Allan, Merlin, and Manley all turned, surprised.

The three Fletcher men were practically glued to Cole's side. Sending two of them away seemed out of character, especially with Hugh, the least sharp of the three, left behind.

Manley chuckled, trying to keep things light. "Really? And what brought that on?"

Hugh chuckled awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck. "Let's just

say they picked the wrong woman to mess with."

Allan, Merlin, and Manley exchanged confused looks but wisely held their tongues. One sharp glance at Cole's expression was enough to shut down any curiosity. Some stories weren't meant to be dug up tonight.

Seizing the moment, Manley, ever the peacemaker, flashed a smooth smile, topped up everyone's glasses, and steered the chatter back toward lighter ground.

Meanwhile, in the lobby of Nightfall, Elliana stepped through the doors with Adah by her side.

Adah knew how to command a night out. Determined to pull Elliana out of her gloom, she'd dressed to kill in a flowing red chiffon gown that moved like fire with every step. Her long waves framed her face in loose, sultry cascades, her makeup flawless, her eyes glinting with playful mischief. She radiated confidence, charm, and unspoken challenge.

Beside her, Elliana was her perfect contrast. She wore a white chiffon gown that skimmed her frame like moonlight on water. Her long hair, braided into an elegant fishtail, draped loosely over one shoulder.

Elliana wore a pair of delicate, lensless glasses with intricately crafted frames that curled like filigree across her temples. They didn't hide her beauty. They enhanced it, adding a mysterious edge to her already mesmerizing presence.

It was a transformation. Anyone who had seen her true appearance would recognize her in an instant. But to the unknowing crowd, she was an enigma. Too exquisite to be overlooked, too unfamiliar to place.

The moment the two women entered, the energy in the room shifted. Conversations faltered. Heads turned.

"Who the hell are they?" someone whispered.

"Never seen them before."

"From the way they carry themselves and the clothes they wear, they've got to be from rich families—but I don't recall ever seeing them around Ublento."