

Secret triplets: The billionaire's second chance

Chapter 2:

The elevator dinged at 2:00 AM.

The sound was sharp, slicing through the stillness of the penthouse. Cailin hadn't moved from the sofa. She was still in her damp funeral dress, though it had dried stiff and uncomfortable against her skin.

She hadn't turned on a single light.

She heard the heavy tread of Hilliard's footsteps, slow and dragging.

The living room lights flared on, blindingly bright. Cailin blinked, shielding her eyes.

Hilliard stood in the entryway, loosening his bow tie, his jacket slung over one arm. He looked exhausted — his hair slightly mussed, his eyes bloodshot. When he saw her sitting there, he flinched.

“Cailin,” he said, his voice rough. “You’re awake.”

“I am,” she said. Her voice was flat. Dead.

“I tried to call,” he started, walking toward her. “The meeting was a nightmare. The merger with the Asian market is falling apart, and—”

“Don’t,” she said.

Before she could say more, a movement behind him caught her eye.

Charla English stepped out of the elevator.

She was wearing a white dress — a stark, blinding white that felt like a slap in the face on a day of mourning. She looked pale, one hand pressed to her forehead as if she might faint.

“Hill?” Charla’s voice was a soft, trembling murmur. “I feel dizzy again.”

Hilliard turned immediately, his posture shifting from defensive to protective. He dropped his jacket and reached out to steady her. “Easy. I’ve got you.”

Cailin watched them. The way his hand naturally found the small of her back. The way Charla leaned into him, her weight entirely surrendered to his frame.

“What is she doing here?” Cailin asked. She didn’t stand. She didn’t have the energy.

Hilliard glanced at Cailin, exasperation tightening his jaw. “She had a panic attack at the gala. Hyperventilated. She couldn’t be alone tonight — her parents are in Europe.”

“So you brought her here,” Cailin said. “To our home. On the night of my mother’s funeral.”

“It was a medical emergency,” Hilliard snapped. “Don’t start this. Not tonight. I’m exhausted.”

Then the smell hit her.

As they moved closer, the scent of Charla's perfume drifted across the room — heavy, floral, gardenias and musk. It was cloying, filling Cailin's nose and coating the back of her throat, making her gag.

It was the same scent that had been on Hilliard's shirts for months. The scent she had told herself came from social greetings, from crowded boardrooms.

"I'm sorry, Cailin," Charla whispered, looking at her with wide, watery eyes. "It's my fault. I ruined the night. Don't blame Hill."

Charla shifted, the white dress slipping slightly off her shoulder. "I think I left my shawl in the car. I was so cold earlier — Hill gave me his jacket."

Cailin's eyes dropped to Hilliard's white dress shirt.

There, on the collar. A smudge.

Small. Red. The exact shade of lipstick Charla was wearing right now.

The world stopped spinning. The noise in Cailin's head — the grief, the thunder, the excuses — went silent all at once.

It wasn't a suspicion anymore. It was a fact, printed in red wax on high-thread-count cotton.

Cailin stood. Her legs felt surprisingly steady.

She walked past the shattered vase on the floor. She walked past the Tiffany box on the table. She walked right up to Hilliard. He looked down at her, bracing for a fight, expecting tears.

"Do you know what day it was?" she asked. Her voice was so quiet he had to lean in to hear her.

Hilliard frowned. "It was Tuesday. Cailin, look, I know I missed the service, and I'll make it up to you, but—"

"It was the day you buried your marriage," she said.

She stepped around him. She didn't look at Charla. She didn't acknowledge the other woman's existence.

Hilliard reached out and grabbed her arm, his grip firm and familiar. "We need to talk. You're being unreasonable. You're hysterical because of your mother."

Cailin looked down at his hand on her arm. Then she looked up into his eyes.

“Don’t touch me with those hands,” she hissed.

The venom in her voice startled him. He let go as if he’d been burned.

Cailin walked to the guest bedroom down the hall, went inside, and locked the door. The click of the lock was the loudest sound in the universe.

“Cailin!” Hilliard banged on the door once. “Open this door. Stop acting like a child!”

She didn’t answer.

After a moment, she heard him sigh. “Fine. Pout. I’ll sleep in the master.”

“Hill?” Charla’s voice drifted from the living room. “I think I need some water.”

“Coming,” Hilliard said. His footsteps retreated.

Inside the guest room, Cailin slid down the door until she hit the floor. She pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them, trying to stop the shaking.

She touched her belly.

“He doesn’t deserve us,” she whispered. “He doesn’t get to be your father.”

She reached under the bed and pulled out a small duffel bag she had stashed there weeks ago, back when the suspicion had first begun to rot her gut. Inside was a burner phone and a stack of cash she had withdrawn slowly over the last month.

She turned on the phone. Her hands were shaking, but her mind was crystal clear.

She dialed a number she had memorized — a private clinic in New Jersey that specialized in discreet procedures for the wealthy and desperate.

“Horizon Medical,” a voice answered.

“I need an appointment,” Cailin said. “Tomorrow morning. Under the name Jane Doe. For a consultation.”

“We have an opening at 7:00 AM.”

“I’ll take it.”

She hung up and began to pack. Not clothes — she didn’t want anything he had bought her. Just her documents, her mother’s old ring, the cash.

From the living room came the low murmur of voices. Then a soft laugh. Hilliard was laughing.

On the night of her mother’s funeral. With his mistress in their home.

That laughter was the fuel she needed. It burned away the fear. It burned away the hesitation.

She sat at the small desk and pulled out a folder. Inside were the divorce papers she had drafted herself, using templates she’d found online to avoid alerting the family lawyers.

She uncapped a pen.

She didn't cry. Tears were for people who still had hope.

She signed her name. Cailin Morton. Not Holloway. Never again Holloway.

She left the papers on the desk.

Then she lay down on the bed, fully clothed, clutching the bag to her chest. She wouldn't sleep. She would simply wait for the sun to rise so she could disappear into it.

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