

Secret triplets: The billionaire's second chance

Chapter 3:

The morning light hit the penthouse floor-to-ceiling windows with a cruel brilliance. Hilliard woke on the sofa in his study, his neck stiff, a sour taste in his mouth.

He sat up, rubbing his face. The events of the night before came rushing back — the funeral, Charla, the fight.

Guilt, heavy and cold, settled in his stomach. He had messed up. He knew he had messed up. He shouldn't have brought Charla here, but she had been so fragile, threatening to swallow pills if he left her alone.

He stood and walked into the hallway. The apartment was silent.

“Cailin?” he called out.

No answer.

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He walked to the guest bedroom door and knocked. “Cai? Are you up? I ordered breakfast.”

Silence.

He tried the handle. Locked.

“Cailin, stop this. Open the door.”

Nothing.

Panic began to prick at the back of his neck. He went to the master bedroom, grabbed the emergency key from his safe, and returned to the guest room. He shoved the key in and turned it. The lock clicked. He pushed the door open.

The room was empty.

The bed was made — not just made, but pristine, the sheets pulled tight, the pillows fluffed, as though no one had slept in it at all. The closet door hung open. Empty.

“Cailin?”

He pulled out his phone and dialed her number.

Beep-beep-beep. The number you have dialed is disconnected or no longer in service.

Hilliard stared at the phone. Disconnected? Overnight?

He dialed Gavin.

“Find her,” Hilliard barked the moment Gavin answered. “Track her phone. Check the credit cards. Now.”

“Sir? What’s wrong?”

“She’s gone. Just find her!”

He didn't wait. He grabbed his keys and ran to the elevator, sliding into the back of the Maybach and slamming the door. "Go," he snarled at the driver. "Her favorite places — the park, the Met, the library. And get the commissioner on the phone."

As the car tore through the morning traffic of Manhattan, Hilliard mobilized his empire, his voice a low growl as he issued orders to Gavin over the speakerphone.

His phone buzzed. Gavin.

"Sir, we got a hit on a taxi service. Pickup from your building at 5:00 AM. Drop-off was at a clinic in New Jersey — Horizon Women's Health."

Hilliard's blood ran cold. He knew that clinic. It was whispered about in his circles. It was where problems went to disappear.

"Send me the address," he said, his voice barely steady.

The Maybach executed a screeching U-turn, ignoring the blare of horns. Hilliard gripped the leather seat, knuckles white, as they sped toward the Holland Tunnel.

He pulled up to the nondescript brick building an hour later and stormed past the receptionist. "Cailin Holloway. Where is she?"

"Sir, you can't be back here!" A security guard stepped in front of him.

"I am Hilliard Holloway! My wife is in this building!" He shoved his Black Card and his ID into the guard's face. "Get out of my way!"

A nurse in scrubs appeared, looking calm but stern. "Mr. Holloway? Please lower your voice."

"Where is she?" Hilliard demanded, his chest heaving.

"Ms. Morton left about thirty minutes ago," the nurse said quietly.

"Ms. Morton?" The use of her maiden name stung like a brand. "What did she do? Why was she here?"

"I cannot discuss patient details due to privacy laws," the nurse said. "But she left this for you. She said you might come."

She held out a thick manila envelope.

Hilliard took it. His hands were shaking so badly he nearly dropped it. He ripped the seal open right there in the lobby.

Three things fell out.

First, the divorce papers. Signed. Dated yesterday.

Second, a medical file. The header read: Termination of Pregnancy — 28 Weeks. Emergency Procedure.

Third, a sonogram photo. Grainy, black and white — a deliberately blurred image, the kind produced by older machines, just clear enough to show a developing fetus but too indistinct for detailed analysis. The photo was torn in half.

Hilliard felt the air leave the room. His knees buckled, and he collapsed into one of the plastic waiting room chairs.

He read the medical file. The words swam before his eyes. Patient distress... non-viable... termination complete. The paperwork was terrifyingly thorough, impeccably detailed — a masterpiece of forgery he could only appreciate through his horror.

He looked at the torn photo.

“She was pregnant?” The sound that came out of him was strangled.

He hadn’t known. He had been so consumed by the merger, by Charla’s drama, by the gala, that he hadn’t noticed. He hadn’t noticed his own wife was seven months pregnant.

And now...

He looked at the sticky note attached to the file. Cailin’s handwriting.

You were absent. Now we are too.

A roar built in his chest — a sound of pure, animalistic agony. He stood and drove his fist into the wall beside him. The plaster cracked under the blow. Pain shot up his arm, but it was nothing compared to the hole that had just been blasted through his soul.

“Find her!” he screamed at Gavin, who had just run into the lobby, panting. “Shut down the airports! Close the ports! Find her!”

But it was too late.

Days turned into weeks. Private investigators combed the city, the state, the country. They found a trail that led to JFK, to a ticket bought with cash under a false name, to a flight bound for a country with no extradition treaty.

And then the trail went cold.

One month later, Hilliard stood in the nursery he had secretly begun building in the penthouse's east wing. It was empty — just framed walls and sawdust.

He walked to the center of the room and fell to his knees. He clutched the torn sonogram photo to his chest and sobbed. Dry, racking sobs that tore at his throat.

He had done this. His neglect, his arrogance, his blindness. He had driven her to this.

"I will find you," he whispered to the empty room. "If it takes a lifetime, Cailin. I will find you."

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