

Secret triplets: The billionaire's second chance

Chapter 4:

The air inside The Vault smelled of old money, expensive champagne, and secrets.

Located three stories beneath a nondescript warehouse in Chelsea, this was where the world's elite came to buy things that weren't supposed to be sold — stolen masterpieces, conflict diamonds, ancient artifacts. Cailin Morton, now known simply as “Cali,” stood on the balcony overlooking the auction floor. She wore a floor-length gown of midnight blue silk and a filigree Venetian mask that covered the upper half of her face.

She didn't look like the broken woman who had fled New York five years ago. She stood with a spine of steel, radiating a cold, terrifying authority.

“Madame Cali,” Monsieur Laurent, the floor manager, said with a slight bow as he approached. “The collection is ready. The bidders are seated.”

“Good,” Cali said. Her voice was modulated, slightly deeper than her natural tone — a trick she had perfected. “Make sure the security protocols are active. No cameras.”

“Of course.”

Cali turned and walked back into the shadows, heading toward the secure VIP area backstage. She swiped a keycard, and the heavy steel door hissed open.

Inside was a room that looked less like a criminal mastermind’s lair and more like a high-end kindergarten.

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Three children, nearly five years old, were scattered across the plush carpet.

Aron, the oldest by two minutes, sat cross-legged with a laptop balanced on his knees, his small fingers flying across the keyboard, a pair of tiny noise-canceling headphones clamped over his ears.

Davy, the middle child, was using a tablet to run diagnostics on a disassembled drone, its schematics glowing on his screen. “I can make it faster,” he muttered to himself. “Needs more torque.”

And then there was Elia.

Elia stood by the one-way glass that looked out onto the arrival hall, eating a pink macaron and getting crumbs on her velvet dress.

“Mommy is working,” Aron said without looking up. “Don’t cause trouble, Elia.”

“I’m not,” Elia said around a mouthful of cookie. “I’m watching the bad guys.”

“They’re customers, not bad guys,” Davy corrected, glancing up from his screen. “Mostly.”

Elia ignored him and pressed her nose against the glass.

Outside in the arrival tunnel, a fleet of black SUVs pulled up. The doors opened in unison.

A man stepped out of the lead vehicle.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, wearing a custom Italian suit that fit him like armor. His hair had gone slightly greyer at the temples since five years ago, his face harder, the lines around his mouth etched with a permanent grimace of dissatisfaction.

Hilliard Holloway.

Elia froze. She tilted her head.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out a crumpled photograph — one she had stolen from her mother’s lockbox a year ago. It was a picture of Cailin and Hilliard on their wedding day, before Cailin had cut him out of the frame. Elia had taped it back together.

She held the photo up to the glass.

“It’s him,” she whispered.

Aron paused his typing and slid one headphone off. “Target identified?”

Davy dropped his tablet, eyes going wide. “The Bad Daddy?”

“He’s here,” Elia said solemnly. “He made Mommy cry.”

The atmosphere in the room shifted instantly. The playfulness vanished, replaced by a eerie, synchronized focus that only triplets shared.

“Countermeasures?” Davy asked, grinning.

“Authorized,” Aron said. “I’ll loop the security feeds.”

Back on the balcony, Cali felt a sudden, inexplicable chill. She wrapped her arms around herself and looked down at the entrance.

Hilliard Holloway was walking through the metal detectors.

Her heart stopped. Then it restarted, hammering against her ribs like a trapped bird.

What is he doing here? This was the underground. Hilliard was legitimate corporate royalty — he had no business being here. Unless he was looking for something specific.

“Laurent,” she hissed into her earpiece. “Block the backstage access. Now. And keep that man away from me.”

Hilliard scanned the room. He looked bored. He looked dangerous. His eyes swept over the crowd and landed on the balcony.

He saw her.

For a moment their gazes locked. Even through the mask, even across the distance, Cali felt the full weight of his stare. He paused and tilted his head, as if trying to place a memory.

Cali turned her back abruptly, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps.

Back in the playroom, the ventilation grate in the corner had been quietly removed.

“I need spray paint,” Davy whispered, already crawling into the duct.

“I’ll guide you,” Aron said, tapping his screen. “Left at the junction.”

“I’ll be the lookout,” Elia said, slipping into the dark tunnel behind him.

Cali pulled out her phone to check the nanny cam in the playroom.

No signal.

“Kids?” she whispered.

Silence.

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