

Secret triplets: The billionaire's second chance

Chapter 6:

Charla scoffed, setting her champagne glass down with a sharp clink. “Rude. I should have you fired.”

“You can try,” Cali said coolly. “But this is my house.”

Charla rolled her eyes. She reached into her purse and pulled out a black velvet box. “Whatever. Just appraise this. I’m insuring it for a million. It needs to be official.” She slid the box across the table.

Cali reached out. Her gloved fingers brushed the velvet. She opened it.

The air left her lungs.

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Inside sat an emerald brooch shaped like a fern, encrusted with tiny diamonds.

It wasn't just any brooch. It was the Morton family heirloom — the piece Cailin's mother had worn on her wedding day. It was supposed to be in the safe in the penthouse, the safe Cailin had left behind when she fled.

Charla gloated, watching Cali stare at the jewelry. "It's gorgeous, isn't it? A gift from my fiancé. Well, technically he hasn't proposed officially yet, but he will. Any day now."

Cali's hands began to tremble. She clenched them into fists to hide it.

She stole it. Hilliard would never have given this away. Not this. Which meant Charla had taken it, looting her home, picking through the bones of Cailin's life like a vulture.

Cali picked up a jeweler's loupe and brought the brooch close to her eye. She knew exactly what to look for — a tiny chip on the emerald's underside, from when her grandmother had dropped it in 1950.

She turned it over.

There it was. The chip.

It was real.

“The setting is dated,” Cali said, her voice ice. “Mid-century. Clunky. Not very fashionable for a woman of your taste.”

Charla bristled. “It’s vintage. It belonged to Hilliard’s late wife. The crazy one.”

Cali gripped the loupe so hard the metal dug into her palm. “Crazy?”

Charla laughed — a light, tinkling sound that made Cali’s stomach turn. “Oh, yes. Mental instability. She killed her own baby, you know. Terminated it at seven months just to spite him. Then ran off and died in a ditch somewhere. Tragic, really.”

The room spun. A red haze of rage clouded Cali’s vision. Killed her baby? Is that what he told people? Is that the lie they spun?

Cali dropped the brooch back into the box.

Clack.

“I cannot appraise this,” Cali said.

Charla stood up. “Excuse me? Do you know who I am?”

“I know exactly who you are,” Cali said. The double meaning hung heavy in the air. “This piece carries bad energy. Stolen energy.”

Charla’s face turned red. “How dare you! I—”

The door to the suite opened.

Hilliard walked in, looking annoyed, checking his watch. “Charla, security says something happened to the car. We need to leave. Now.”

Charla’s face instantly transformed. The anger vanished, replaced by a trembling lip and wide, watery eyes. “Hill!” she cried, rushing to him. “This woman! She insulted me! She said the brooch has bad energy!”

Hilliard didn’t look at Charla. He looked past her, straight at the woman in the mask.

Cali stood frozen.

Hilliard stared. The posture. The way she held her hands. The defiant tilt of her chin.

It hit him again — that sense of déjà vu.

“Have we met?” he asked, stepping closer, ignoring Charla’s hand on his arm.

Cali’s heart hammered against her ribs. She took a step back.

“I appraise art, Mr. Holloway,” she said. “Not people. Good evening.”

She turned and walked out.

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