

Secret triplets: The billionaire's second chance

Chapter 7:

Cali moved toward the door, desperate to escape the suffocating proximity of the man she had once loved.

Hilliard sidestepped, blocking her path — not aggressively, but with the casual arrogance of a man accustomed to people stopping for him.

“Wait,” he said. “My fiancée is upset. Apologize.”

He didn't care about Charla's feelings. He just wanted to hear her voice again. There was something in its cadence, its rhythm — it scratched at a door in his mind he had welded shut five years ago.

Cali stiffened. She looked up at him through the eyeholes of the mask, her green eyes — usually so warm — now shards of glass.

“I owe no apologies for the truth,” she said.

Charla gasped behind him. “See? She’s impossible!”

Hilliard ignored Charla completely. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a checkbook. “I need a private broker for my estate,” he said, his eyes boring into Cali’s. “Most people here are sycophants. You have fire.” He drew a gold pen from his pocket, signed a check, and left the amount line blank.

He held it out to her. “Name your price. Exclusively. I want you to manage my collection.”

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Cali looked at the check. It was freedom. It was power. It was a trap.

“I am not for sale, Mr. Holloway,” she said.

She knocked his hand aside and brushed past him. As she pulled away, her left hand came up defensively, and her thumb instinctively rubbed the bare skin of her ring finger — a ghost of a gesture for a ring long gone. A habit he had seen Cailin make a thousand times whenever she was nervous.

Hilliard went very still.

His hand shot out and grabbed her wrist. Pure reflex.

“Who are you?” he whispered. The intensity in his voice was terrifying.

Cali panicked. She lifted her foot, clad in a sharp stiletto, and brought it down hard on the toe of his expensive Italian leather shoe.

“Argh!” Hilliard grunted, pain shooting up his leg. His grip loosened.

Cali yanked her arm free and sprinted out the door, down the corridor, disappearing around the corner.

Hilliard stood there, rubbing his wrist. He looked down at his scuffed shoe.

He smiled.

It was a dark, twisted smile — one that hadn’t touched his face in half a decade.

“She stomped on me,” he muttered. “Interesting.”

“She assaulted you!” Charla shrieked. “Call the police! Have her arrested!”

The smile vanished. Hilliard turned to Charla, his face cold again. “Be quiet, Charla. Go to the car.”

He walked out, leaving her fuming.

He took the elevator down to the garage.

His driver and a cluster of security guards were huddled around the Maybach. Hilliard stopped. He stared at the hood.

DEADBEAT.

The pink letters screamed at him.

“Deadbeat?” he whispered. The word felt like a slap.

“We’re scrubbing the tapes, sir,” the head of security said nervously. “But we found this.” He held out a clear plastic evidence bag.

Inside was a small black velvet hair ribbon.

Hilliard took the bag. He stared at it — tiny, delicate.

“A child?” he asked. “A child did this?”

“Seems so, sir. The vents were compromised.”

Hilliard looked at the graffiti again. A child calling him a deadbeat.

He pocketed the ribbon.

He pulled out his phone. “Gavin. Pull the security tapes for the entire building. I want to know who that broker is. And I want to know who that kid belongs to.”

