

Triplets Under the Tree (Billionaires and Babies)

By Kat Cantrell

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This Christmas, he'll meet his three babies for the first time…and desire their mother in a whole new way!

After a plane crash robs him of his memory, billionaire fighter Antonio Cavallari comes home for the holidays to find triplets—and their "mother"—waiting. Antonio doesn't remember surrogate Caitlyn Hopewell, but he has triplets depending upon him. Who else can he turn to except the woman raising his children…and making him burn with desire?

Caitlyn has longed for Antonio secretly for years. Now she's living in his home, loving his babies…living the life with him she's always wanted. But then Antonio's memory returns. And the secrets he's forgotten will change everything…

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Editorial Review

Review
"The soap opera-style storyline is easy to read, and the characters are easy to care for. ...The MMA aspects were a real highlight and gave Antonio's personality and actions a sense of authenticity" (RT Book Reviews).

About the Author

KAT CANTRELL read her first Harlequin novel in third grade and has been scribbling in notebooks since she learned to spell. She majored in literature, officially with the intent to teach, but ended up in middle management, until she became a stay-at-home-mom and full-time writer. She was the 2011 Harlequin So You Think You Can Write winner and a 2012 RWA Golden Heart finalist for best unpublished series contemporary manuscript. Kat, her husband and their two boys live in north Texas.

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Los Angeles, California

At precisely 4:47 a.m., Caitlyn bolted awake, as she did every morning. The babies had started sleeping through the night, thank the good Lord, but despite that, their feeding time had ingrained itself into her body in some kind of whacked-out mommy alarm clock.

No one had warned her of that. Just as no one had warned her that triplets weren't three times the effort and nail-biting worry of one baby, but more like a zillion times.

But they also came with a zillion times the awe and adoration.

Caitlyn picked up the video monitor from her night-stand and watched her darlings sleep in their individual cribs. Antonio Junior sighed and flopped a fist back and forth as if he knew his mother was watching, but Leon and Annabelle slept like rocks. It was a genetic trait they shared with Vanessa, their biological mother, along with her red hair. Antonio had hair the color of a starless night, like his father.

And if he grew up to be half as hypnotically gorgeous as his father, she'd be beating the women off her son with a Louisville Slugger.

No matter how hard she tried, Caitlyn couldn't go back to sleep. Exhaustion was a condition she'd learned to live with and, maddeningly, it had nothing to do with how much sleep she got. Having fatherless eight-month-old triplets wreaked havoc on her sanity, and in the hours before dawn, all the questions and doubts and fears crowded into her mind.

Should she be doing more to meet an eligible man? Like what? Hang out in bars wearing a vomit-stained shirt, where she could chat up a few victims. "Hey, baby, have you ever fantasized about going all night long with triplets? Because I've got a proposition for you!"

No, the eligible men of Los Angeles were pretty safe from Caitlyn Hopewell, that was for sure. Even without the ready-made family, her relationship rules scared away most men: you didn't sleep with a man unless you

were in love and there was a ring on your finger. Period. It was an absolute that had carried her through college and into adulthood, especially as she'd witnessed what passed for her sister Vanessa's criteria for getting naked with someone—he'd bought her jewelry or could get her further in her career. Caitlyn didn't want that for herself. And that pretty much guaranteed she'd stay single.

But how could she ever be enough for three children when, no matter how much she loved them, she wasn't supposed to be their mother? When she'd agreed to be Vanessa's surrogate, Caitlyn had planned on a nine-month commitment, not a lifetime. But fate had had different plans.

Caitlyn rolled from the king-size bed she still hadn't grown used to despite sleeping in it for over a year. Might as well get started on the day at—she squinted at her phone—6:05 a.m. Threading her dark mess of curls through a po-nytail holder, she threw on some yoga pants and a top, determined to get in at least twenty minutes of Pilates before Leon awoke.

She spread out her mat on the hardwood floor close to the glass wall overlooking the Malibu coastline, her favorite spot for tranquility. There was a full gym on the first floor of Antonio and Vanessa's mansion, but she couldn't bear to use it. Not yet. It had too much of Antonio stamped all over it, what with the mixed martial arts memorabilia hanging from the walls and the regulation ring in the center.

One day she'd clean it out, but as much as she hated the reminders of Antonio, she couldn't lose the priceless link to him. She hadn't removed any of Vanessa's things from the house, either, but had put a good bit away, where she couldn't see it every day.

Fifteen minutes later, her firstborn yowled through the monitor and Caitlyn dashed to the nursery across the hall from her bedroom before he woke up his brother and sister.

"There's my precious," she crooned and scooped up the gorgeous little bundle from his crib.

Like clockwork, he was always the first of the three to demand breakfast, and Caitlyn tried to spend alone time with each of her kids while feeding them. Brigitte, the babies' au pair, thought she was certifiable for breast-feeding triplets, but Caitlyn didn't mind. She loved bonding with the babies, and nobody ever saw her naked anyway; it was worth the potential hit to her figure to give the babies a leg up in the nutrition department.

The morning passed in a blur of babies and baths, and just as Caitlyn was about to return a phone call to her lawyer that she'd missed somewhere along the way, someone pounded on the front door.

Delivery guy, she hoped. She'd had to order a new car seat and it could not get here fast enough. Annabelle had christened hers in such a way that no bleach in existence could make it usable again and, honestly, Caitlyn had given up trying. There had to be some benefits to having custodial control of her children's billion-dollar inheritance.

"Brigitte? Can you get that?" Caitlyn called, but the girl didn't respond. Probably dealing with one of the kids, which was what she got paid well to do.

With a shrug, Caitlyn pocketed her phone and padded to the door, swinging it wide in full anticipation of a brown uniform-clad man.

It wasn't UPS. The unshaven man on her doorstep loomed over her, his dark gaze searching and familiar.

There was something about the way he tilted his head—

"Antonio!" The strangled word barely made it past her throat as it seized up.

No! It couldn't be. Antonio had died in the same plane crash as Vanessa, over a year ago. Her brain fuzzed with disappointment, even as her heart latched on to the idea of her children's father standing before her in the flesh. Lack of sleep was catching up with her.

"Antonio," the man repeated and his eyes widened. "Do I know you?"

His raspy voice washed over her, turning inside her chest warmly, and tears pricked her eyelids. He even sounded like Antonio. She'd always loved his voice. "No, I don't think so. For a moment, I thought you were—"

A ghost. She choked it back.

His blank stare shouldn't have tripped her senses, but all at once, even with a full beard and weighing twenty pounds less, he looked so much like Antonio she couldn't stop greedily drinking him in.

"This is my house," he insisted firmly with a hint of wonderment as he glanced around the foyer beyond the open door. "I recognize it. But the Christmas tree is in the wrong place."

Automatically, she glanced behind her to note the location of the twelve-foot-high blue spruce she'd painstakingly arranged in the living room near the floor-to-ceiling glass wall facing the ocean.

"No, it's not," Caitlyn retorted.

Vanessa had always put the tree in the foyer so people could see it when they came in, but Caitlyn liked it by the sea. Then, every time you looked at the tree, you saw the water, too. Seemed logical to her, and this was her house now.

"I don't remember you." He cocked his head as if puzzled. "Did I sell you this house?"

She shook her head. "I…uh, live here with the owners."

The Malibu mansion was actually part of the babies' estate. She hadn't wanted to move them from their parents' house and, according to the terms of Vanessa's and Antonio's wills, Caitlyn got to make all the decisions for the children.

"I remember a red-haired woman. Beautiful." His expression turned hard and slightly desperate. "Who is she?"

"Vanessa," Caitlyn responded without thinking. She shouldn't be so free with information. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he said between clenched teeth. "I remember flashes, incomplete pictures, and none of it makes sense. Tell me who I am."

Oh, my God. "You don't know who you are?" People didn't really get amnesia the way they did in movies.

Did they?

Hand to her mouth, she evaluated this dirty, disheveled man wearing simple cotton pants rolled at the ankles and a torn cotton shirt. It couldn't be true. Antonio was dead.

If Antonio *wasn't* dead, where had he been since the plane crash? If he'd really lost his memory, it could explain why he'd been missing all this time.

But not why he'd suddenly shown up over a year later. Maybe he was one of those con men who preyed on grieving family members, and loss of memory was a convenient out to avoid incriminatory questions that would prove his identity, yet he couldn't answer.

But he'd known the Christmas tree was in the wrong place. What if he was telling the truth?

Her heart latched on to the idea and wouldn't let go.

Because— Oh, goodness. She'd always been half in love with her sister's husband and it all came rushing back. The guilt. The despondency at being passed over for the lush, gorgeous older Hopewell sister, the one who always got everything her heart desired. The covert sidelong glances at Antonio's profile during family dinners. Fantasies about what it would be like if he'd married her instead of Vanessa. The secret thrill at carrying Antonio's babies because Vanessa couldn't, and harboring secret dreams of Antonio falling at her feet, begging Caitlyn to be the mother of his children instead.

Okay, and she'd had a few secret dreams that involved some…carnal scenarios, like how Antonio's skin would feel against hers. What it would be like to kiss him. And love him in every sense of the word.

For the past six years, Caitlyn had lived with an almost biblical sense of shame, in a "thou shalt not covet thy sister's husband" kind of way. But she couldn't help it—Antonio had a wickedly sexy warrior's body and an enigmatic, watchful gaze that sliced through her when he turned it in her direction. Oh, she had it bad, and she'd never fully reconciled because it was intertwined with guilt—maybe she'd wished her sister ill and that was why the plane had crashed.

The guilt crushed down on her anew.

Tersely, he shook his head and that was when she noticed the scar bisecting his temple, which forked up into his dark, shaggy hair. On second thought, this man looked nothing like Antonio. With hard lines around his mouth, he was sharper, more angular, with shadows in his dark eyes that spoke of nightmares better left unexplained.

"I can't remem—you called me Antonio." Something vulnerable welled up in his gaze and then he winced. "Antonio Cavallari. Tell me. Is that my name?"

She hadn't mentioned Antonio's last name.

He could have learned the name of her children's father from anywhere. Los Angeles County tax records. From the millions of internet stories about the death of the former UFC champion and subsequent founder of the billion-dollar enterprise called Falco Fight Club after his career ended. Vanessa had had her own share of fame as an actress, playing the home-wrecking vixen everyone loved to hate on a popular nighttime drama. Her red hair had been part of her trademark look, and when she'd died, the internet had exploded with the

news. Her sister's picture popped up now and again even a year later, so knowing about the color of Vanessa's hair wasn't terribly conclusive, either.

He could have pumped the next-door neighbor for information, for that matter.

Caitlyn refused to put her children in danger under any circumstances.

Sweeping him with a glance, she took as much of his measure as she could. But there was no calculation. No suggestion of shrewdness. Just confusion and a hint of the man who'd married her sister six years ago.

"Yes. Antonio Cavallari." Her eyelids fluttered closed for a beat. What if she was wrong? What if she just wanted him to be Antonio for all the wrong reasons and became the victim of an elaborate fraud? Or worse—the victim of assault?

All at once, he sagged against the door frame, babbling in a foreign language. Stricken, she stared at him. She'd never heard Antonio speak anything other than English.

Her stomach clenched. Blood tests. Dental records. Doctors' exams. There had to be a thousand ways to prove someone's identity. But what was she supposed to do? Tell him to come back with proof?

Then his face went white and he pitched to his knees with a feeble curse, landing heavily on the woven welcome mat.

It was a fitting condemnation. Welcoming, she was not.

Throat tight with concern, she blurted out, "Are you okay? What's wrong?"

"Tired. Hungry," he stated simply, eyes closed and head lolling to one side. "I walked from the docks."

"The docks?" Her eyes went wide. "The ones near *Long Beach?* That's, like, fifty miles!"

"No identification," he said hoarsely. "No money."

The man couldn't even stand and, good grief, Caitlyn had certainly spent enough time in the company of actors to spot one—his weakened state was real.

"Come inside," she told him before she thought better of it. "Rest. And drink some water. Then we can sort this out."

It wasn't as if she was alone. Brigitte and Rosa, the housekeeper, were both upstairs. He might be Antonio, but that didn't make him automatically harmless, and who knew what his mental state was? But if he couldn't stand, he couldn't threaten anyone, let alone three women armed with cell phones and easy access to Francesco's top-dollar chef's knives.

He didn't even seem to register that she'd spoken, let alone acknowledge what he'd surely been after the whole time—an invitation inside. For a man who could be trying to scam her, he certainly wasn't chomping at the bit to gain entrance to her home.

Hesitating, she wondered if she should help him to his feet, but the thought of touching him had her

hyperventilating. Either he was a strange man, or he was a most familiar one, and neither one gave her an ounce of comfort. Heat feathered across her cheeks as her chaste sensibilities warred with the practicality of helping someone in need.

He swayed and nearly toppled over, forcing her decision.

No way around it. She knelt and grabbed his arm, then slung it across her shoulders. The weight was strange and, oddly, a little exhilarating. The touch of a man was alien, though, no doubt—she hadn't gone on a date in over two years. Her mind went blank as he slumped against her.

Looping her own arm around his waist, she pushed up with her legs, grateful for the core strength she'd developed through rigorous Pilates, both before and after the babies were born.

Gracious. He smelled like three-day-old fish and other pungencies she hesitated to identify—and she'd have sworn babies produced the worst stench in the world.

The man hobbled along with her across the threshold, thankfully revived enough to do so under his own power. When she paused in front of the pristine eggshell-colored suede sofa in the formal living area, he immediately dropped vertically onto the cushions without hesitation. Groaning, he covered his eyes with his arm.

"Water," he murmured and lay still as death.

And now for the second dilemma. Leave him unattended while she fetched a glassful from the wet bar across the foyer in Antonio's study? It wasn't that far, and she was being silly worrying about a near comatose man posing some sort of threat. She dashed across the marble at breakneck pace, filled the glass at the small stainless-steel sink and dashed back without spilling it, thankfully.

"Here it is," she said to alert him she'd returned.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eric Hough:

Book is to be different for every grade. Book for children till adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important for people. The book Triplets Under the Tree (Billionaires and Babies) ended up being making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The book Triplets Under the Tree (Billionaires and Babies) is not only giving you far more new information but also to get your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your current spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship using the book Triplets Under the Tree (Billionaires and Babies). You never experience lose out for everything in the event you read some books.

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