

Prologue

It was a terrible thing, the old man thought, to be so rich, and to be so bored.

Clement Chambers sat, stretched out on a veranda chair, on the terrace of his mansion in the Seychelles, looking down over the cliffs, across a verdant hillside towards the sea.

His estate had a spectacular view of the azure waters of the Indian Ocean. They lapped against the fine powdery sands of his five-mile-long private beach, a facility he had visited a total of once in the last year. It took up the whole of the rocky inlet viewable from this angle; Clement loathed trespassers on his privacy.

The estate, the Palms, was a fortress. Oh, its walls were concealed, and it was heavily landscaped, but it backed into the sheer rock of the mountain and was surrounded on all sides by discreet and deadly soldiers.

Clement had enemies. You did not get to where he was without them.

He ensured he was safe. Safe from assassins, and kid-nappers. He enjoyed the warm weather, the blue skies,

the splendid isolation of the tropics. When you were worth several billion dollars, anything you needed in life came to you.

His security firms vetted all his staff. And all his lovers. Every one of them understood the sovereign importance of complete secrecy. Money, and fear, had kept it that way. Not a whisper of scandal ever reached the outside world.

He watched the waves lap his beach. And his brilliant mind started to plan.

Clement Chambers had a reputation. He was a gentleman, and that mattered immensely to him. He had a coat of arms. Inherited when . . . well, on his brother's death. Even though he had spent three decades in the tropics, surrounded only by lackeys, he was careful to live his life as an Englishman abroad. Rather like Noël Coward. Clement admired Noël Coward. He wore white linen suits and Panama hats. His apparel was designed in St James's and Savile Row. His wine cellar was unsurpassed, his house was hung with glorious English masterpieces including a Stubbs and a Constable. He donated large sums of money to the right charities, and he was a member of London clubs he never set foot in; White's and the Travellers.

For most of his life he had cared about money, and through money, power. Now that the Chambers Corporation was a gargantuan global firm, his pristine reputation mattered more to Clement than anything

else. The great museums of the world had wings named after him. As did many of the most prestigious hospitals. Sloane-Kettering, in New York, was the latest beneficiary. And if a disgruntled employee, or the loser in some deal, were to complain, or dare to write or broadcast something bad about Clement Chambers, then his overpaid contingent of libel lawyers sprang into action.

He received good press these days.

Nothing but good press.

It was all about protecting that great reputation, Clement thought. But now he was safe, now he was impregnable, he was bored, very bored. It was time to inject a little fun into his life.

Clement Chambers was about to shake things up.

He smiled gently at the prospect. Yes; she would do. She was interesting, so pliant, but so sharp. A tigress.

And he always enjoyed setting the cat amongst the pigeons.

Chapter One

It was *GLITZ* magazine's hottest cover of the year.

A sensational scoop. Never before had they agreed to be photographed together. The women London was obsessed with. The girls every working woman wanted to be.

The fabulous Chambers cousins.

They were living the dream. While the city's career girls stumbled out of bed, snatched breakfast and clambered on to the Tube and buses, ready for another tough day at the office, the Chambers girls were lying in bed, idly preparing themselves for their massages, their shopping sprees, or another celebrity-crammed party. They had the best addresses, the hottest wardrobes, the sharpest haircuts. They were attractive.

And they didn't do one damn thing to earn it.

The public didn't know whether to love them or hate them. But British girls all secretly yearned to *be* them.

The magazine flew off the shelves. On the cover, the Chambers girls posed, styled in long white gowns with gold necklaces and armbands, like the classical goddesses they were named for.

Juno. Tall and statuesque, a gold circlet in her long dark hair, wound into a plait and worn like a crown. Ever insistent on her dignity, a pure cloak of ivory wool fell around her shoulders, to cover her arms. Not as beautiful as the others, but still striking; handsome, perhaps, with cool blue eyes and pale skin. Queen of the gods; queen of London's snobby social circuit. Her soirées were legendary, her contacts book read like a copy of *Debrett's*. Safely married, Juno was a favourite with society mavens from Sloane Square to Eaton Square, from Ascot to Glyndebourne.

Athena, her little sister. Her scruffy, private identity hidden in the photo shoot, brilliant academic Athena Chambers had the mind – and she had the money. Styled for the fantasy of worker bees everywhere, Athena was unrecognisable; her hair tumbling down her back, professionally made up, her feet forced into unfamiliar heels. The looks she couldn't be bothered about were on display for all to see. Toned arms and an athletic body, an oval face, high cheekbones, and the same luminous gaze as her sister.

Athena was one of her generation's brightest historical scholars. Her pamphlets and essays received wide acclaim. She lived in Oxford in a glorious townhouse, and had no doubt she would become a tenured professor. But not for her the honourable poverty of the brilliant teacher. Her cleverness was buttressed with cash. Athena ate caviar, drank champagne, and had a collection of

antiques that could grace a museum.

Across from these two were their cousins. Diana Chambers, her slender arms posing, holding up a golden goblet of wine. Caramel hair, cut into a sharp flame, flowed over her shoulders, complementing her snowy dress. A little more curvy than Athena, Diana was London's latest greatest 'It Girl'; she had no more intention of working than her cousin Juno, but stuffy high society bored her to death. Diana Chambers meant *style*. She attended every hot play, every great film premiere. She was seen at impossible-to-get-into exhibitions by London's hottest artists. If she was photographed wearing a new designer, sales would soar. And her parties were stuffed with the funkiest novelists, musicians, photographers, and models. Diana Chambers had made partying an art form. She was the Victoria Beckham of the cognoscenti – if she touched something, it was in style. First-year film students, the backstage crowd at London Fashion Week, the journalists on the glossy magazines – they all wanted to be like Diana. She was the new Chloë Sevigny. And everybody knew that Diana Chambers, someday soon, would simply select a billionaire of her own and marry him. It was just a matter of time.

And right in the front – of course – Venus. Staring brazenly into the camera, her thousand-watt smile seducing millions of readers. A shimmering, pearlescent robe did little to conceal her golden skin and curvy breasts. Wasp-waisted, Venus had expensively dyed

flaxen-blond hair. The Chambers diamonds, a family heirloom, glittered brilliantly around her throat and on her lobes. She was eight and a half stone of gorgeous, and she absolutely adored the camera.

Venus Chambers was a little slice of Hollywood in Notting Hill. As toned, tanned and blonde as any airhead model on the Sunset Strip, she was perfectly groomed and perfectly gorgeous. She was an actress, and didn't you know it. Even if Venus was far more famous for being one of the Chambers girls than for any acting she'd ever done. You took one look at the confident, flirty butterfly on the cover of *GLITZ* and you felt it couldn't be long. Venus's big break as a film star would be along any minute. Because that was how life worked when you were a Chambers girl.

You lived in paradise. Where nothing ever went wrong.

Inside the glossy covers, there were more pictures of the girls, their jewels, their fast cars, their stylish homes. Less of Athena, who didn't present herself well. But the other three posed in depth, and the mag got a stylish silhouette shot of Athena, her wild hair blowing around her on a blustery Oxford day, walking into the Bodleian Library. There was a long puff piece about their likes and dislikes, and their close cousinly relationship. But the magazine really sold on its daring. *GLITZ* actually published photos of the Seychelles. The crystal-blue waters, the white sands and palm trees, and the lush

forests on the hills. That generic shit was as close as they would get to the source of all the girls' wealth . . .

Clement Chambers. Their uncle. Multi-billionaire. Reclusive genius. Head of the Chambers Corporation, a multinational with interests from diamond mines to oil wells, mobile phones to construction. Clement Chambers, respected across the world as a man of substance. Somebody not to be messed with. Unmarried, childless and elderly, he guarded his privacy as fiercely as armed soldiers guarded his vast estate on the tropical island. The Chambers girls were his nieces.

And they were well looked after.

Their glamorous lifestyles were funded entirely by him. Half a million a year, every year, to burn through as they wished. The magic of their uncle's name. And the prospect that between them, these four women would one day inherit his colossal fortune. A sum that made their trust fund look like peanuts.

It was a fairytale. Four upper-class girls with little money to their name. Venus and Diana were orphans, Juno and Athena the children of impoverished professors. And one day, when they were in their teens, their rich, reclusive uncle appears and announces he will take care of his nieces' finances.

Every January, the money poured into the four bank accounts. Every December, it was exhausted. But why worry? the article pointed out gaily. Plenty more where that came from!

The fabulous Chambers girls were the only people allowed into their uncle's compound, other than his staff. The private Mr Chambers, the journalist wrote breathlessly, summoned them every 15 December. They stayed for Christmas, and left after Boxing Day. That was the only contact they had with their uncle, all year round.

Right now they were rich.

One day they'd be tycoons.

And all for doing nothing.

Thousands of secretaries, teachers, florists, nurses and bankers picked up their copies of *GLITZ*, flipped the pages, and sighed with longing.

Trust-fund princess. Nice work if you could get it.