

He Thought I Was A Doormat, Until I Ruined Him

Chapter 1 No.

No.1

The sound was not a bang, but a steady, high-pitched whine. It was the sound of a heart monitor flatlining.

Skye Sterling could feel the cold seeping into her marrow, starting from her fingertips and clawing its way up toward her chest. The operating theater was blindingly white, a sterile purgatory where she was currently bleeding out. Her uterus had been removed, a desperate attempt to stop the hemorrhaging caused by stress-induced organ failure, but the blood wouldn't clot. It just kept flowing, warm and sticky, pooling beneath her on the steel table.

She couldn't move her head, but her eyes, heavy with the weight of death, drifted to the phone held by the trembling nurse. The nurse had put it on speaker.

Mr. Kensington, the nurse's voice cracked, thick with panic. "Please, your wife... the surgery... she's critical. We need you to come."

There was a pause on the other end. A silence that stretched longer than Skye's remaining lifespan. Then, a giggle. It was a light, airy sound, like wind chimes in a summer breeze. Seraphina Miller.

Liam is in the shower, Seraphina's voice came through, sweet and poisonous. "Stop calling, Skye. It's pathetic. Faking a medical emergency on our anniversary? Even for you, that's low."

Skye wanted to scream, but her throat was full of fluid. She wanted to say she wasn't faking, that she was dying, that the stress of five years of neglect and three years of watching her husband parade his mistress around had finally broken her body.

Then, a deeper voice mumbled in the background. Liam.

Who is it? he asked, sounding bored.

Just the hospital again, Seraphina laughed. "She's probably having a panic attack because you didn't buy her a gift."

Hang up, Liam said. His voice was cold. Detached. "If she dies, call the funeral home. I have a meeting in the morning."

Click.

The line went dead. And a second later, so did Skye.

The darkness was absolute. It was not peaceful; it was heavy, suffocating, a black ocean crushing her lungs. She screamed into the void, a silent, agonizing wail of regret. Regret for loving a man who saw her as a nuisance. Regret for letting the Sterling family name rot while she played the role of the submissive housewife. Regret for dying without ever having lived.

Then, the air rushed back in.

It hit her lungs like a sledgehammer. Skye gasped, her body convulsing violently on the mattress. Her eyes flew open, wide and terrified, staring blindly into the darkness. She clutched her chest, her fingers digging into the silk of her pajamas, expecting to feel the thick bandages, the surgical staples, the wetness of blood.

But there was nothing. Just smooth, unbroken skin.

Her heart was hammering against her ribs, a frantic bird trapped in a cage. Thump-thump-thump. Alive. She was alive.

Skye sat up, disoriented. The room smelled of lavender and expensive polish. The moonlight filtered through the heavy velvet curtains, illuminating the familiar contours of the master bedroom at Kensington Manor. But it was wrong. The furniture was arranged differently. The vase on the nightstand was the one she had broken in a fit of rage three years ago.

Her trembling hand reached out and grabbed the smartphone on the bedside table. She tapped the screen. The light blinded her for a second.

May 12th.

She blinked. The year... the year was five years ago.

The phone slipped from her fingers and landed on the duvet with a soft thud. The realization didn't come as a wave; it came as a physical blow to the stomach. She wasn't dead. She was back. She was back to the day of her first wedding anniversary. The day the humiliation truly began.

The door to the bedroom opened without a knock.

Skye stiffened. Her instincts, honed by years of walking on eggshells, screamed at her to lay back down, to be small, to be invisible.

A maid bustled in, carrying a garment bag. It was Mary, a woman who had been fired two years into Skye's marriage for stealing jewelry, but right now, she looked smug and employed.

You're awake, Mary said, not bothering to hide the disdain in her voice. She walked over to the bed and threw the garment bag down. "Mr. Kensington called. He said you are to be ready by seven. He sent this."

Skye stared at the bag. She remembered this day. She remembered the contents of that bag.

He said, Mary continued, checking her nails, "that he wants you to look modest. No flash. He doesn't want you drawing attention away from the charity work."

Skye slowly swung her legs over the edge of the bed. As her feet touched the cold, hard wood floor, her knees buckled beneath her. A wave of phantom weakness washed over her—a terrifying, visceral memory of the atrophy that had claimed her muscles in the final months of her previous life. She gripped the edge of the mattress, knuckles white, waiting for the trembling to pass. Her brain expected frailty; it expected pain. Slowly, she tested her weight again. The strength was there, hidden beneath the shock. It was solid. It was real.

She stood up, fully this time, inhaling the air that didn't smell of antiseptic. She walked over to the bag and unzipped it.

Inside hung a white dress. It was high-necked, long-sleeved, and shapeless. It was a dress meant for a ghost. A dress meant to make her fade into the background, to make her look washed out and sickly next to Seraphina's vibrant youth. In her past life, she had worn it. She had worn it and sat quietly while Liam ignored her, while the press speculated that the Kensington marriage was a sham.

She reached out and touched the fabric. It felt like a shroud.

Well? Mary snapped impatiently. "Start getting ready. I don't have all day to babysit you."

Skye turned her head slowly to look at the maid. Her eyes, usually soft and pleading, were hard. They were dark pools of ancient ice.

Get out, Skye said. Her voice was raspy from the phantom tube that had been down her throat moments ago, but it was steady.

Mary blinked, taken aback. "Excuse me?"

I said, get out, Skye repeated, louder this time.

She grabbed the white dress by the collar. With a sudden, violent motion, she ripped it. The sound of the expensive fabric tearing was loud in the quiet room—riiiiip. It was the sound of a contract breaking.

Mary gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. "Have you gone mad? Mr. Kensington chose that himself!"

Mr. Kensington has terrible taste, Skye said, tossing the ruined rags onto the floor at Mary's feet. "And you're fired."

You... you can't fire me, Mary stammered, her face flushing red. "I report to the House Manager, not to-"

Skye took a step forward, looming over the smaller woman. "I am the mistress of this house. My name is on the deed, alongside his. Get out of my sight before I have security throw you out."

The sheer force of Skye's presence was something Mary had never encountered. The mouse had grown fangs. Terrified, the maid turned and fled the room, leaving the door wide open.

Skye stood alone in the silence. She looked down at her hands. They were shaking, not from fear, but from adrenaline. From rage.

She walked to the massive walk-in closet. She ignored the front section, filled with the pastels and neutrals Liam preferred. She went to the very back, where she kept the clothes from her life before Liam-the life where she was Skye Sterling, the heiress, the wild child, the girl who danced on tables and spoke four languages.

She pushed aside a grey wool coat and found it. A garment bag covered in a thin layer of dust.

She unzipped it.

Crimson. Deep, blood-red silk. Backless. A dress she had bought in Paris on a whim, thinking she would wear it to her engagement party, only to have Liam tell her red was "too aggressive."

She carried it to the vanity. She sat down and looked at herself in the mirror. The face staring back was young, unlined by grief, but the eyes were old. They had seen death.

She picked up a cotton pad and aggressively wiped off the "natural" beige foundation she had applied earlier out of habit. She reached for the eyeliner. Sharp. Winged. Dangerous. She grabbed the lipstick-Ruby Woo.

She applied it like war paint.

Her phone buzzed on the vanity. A text message.

Liam: Don't embarrass me tonight. Stay in the background. Seraphina is coming as a guest of the foundation, be polite.

Skye read the words. In her past life, this text had made her cry. It had made her anxious, desperate to please, desperate to shrink herself so small that he wouldn't be embarrassed.

She laughed. It was a dry, hollow sound.

The funeral is over, Liam, she whispered to her reflection.

She typed a reply. I'll see you there.

She deleted the message before sending it. He didn't deserve a warning.

She stood up and slipped into the red dress. It fit like a second skin, hugging her curves, exposing the porcelain expanse of her back. She stepped into black stilettos, the kind that could double as a weapon.

Skye Sterling was dead. The woman in the mirror was someone else entirely.