

Chapter 3 No.

No.3

The Grand Ballroom was stifling. The scent of lilies and expensive cologne hung heavy in the air. Skye sat alone at Table 8. The other seats were empty; the socialites who were assigned to sit with her had mysteriously drifted to other tables, likely not wanting to be caught in the crossfire between her and Liam.

Liam and Seraphina were at Table 1, the prime spot, surrounded by sycophants laughing too hard at Liam's jokes. Every few minutes, Liam would whisper something to Seraphina, and she would giggle, touching his arm. It was a performance. A clumsy one.

Skye sipped her champagne. It was warm.

Ladies and gentlemen, the auctioneer boomed from the stage. "We now move to Lot 9. The West Harbor Industrial Zone."

A murmur of laughter rippled through the room.

The screen behind the stage lit up, displaying a drone shot of a desolate wasteland. Rusted shipping containers, patches of oil-slicked dirt, and a general aura of decay. It was the armpit of Sea City.

A unique investment opportunity, the auctioneer tried to sell it, though even he sounded skeptical. "Starting bid: 50 million dollars."

Silence. Dead silence.

Someone at a nearby table snorted. "I wouldn't buy that for a dollar. It's a toxic waste dump."

Skye set the glass down. Her fingers brushed the plastic paddle. Number 88.

In her past life, this land sat unsold for another six months. Then, the government announced the "Future Tech Park" initiative. The land values skyrocketed overnight, increasing by two thousand percent. The Sterling family missed out. The Kensingtons missed out. A foreign investor bought it and made billions.

Not this time.

Skye raised her paddle.

100 million, she said. Her voice was clear, cutting through the murmurs.

The room gasped. Heads snapped toward Table 8.

Liam turned around in his chair, his face twisting in disbelief. He stood up and marched over to her table, ignoring the stares.

Put it down, he hissed, leaning over her. "Are you drunk? That land is worthless. You're embarrassing the family."

Skye didn't look at him. She looked at the auctioneer.

100 million to the lady in red, the auctioneer stammered, shocked.

It's my trust fund, Liam, Skye said calmly. "I can burn it if I want to."

You are insane, Liam spat. "I won't let you ruin our finances with this... garbage."

Our finances? Skye raised an eyebrow. "I thought you said my money was 'cute' pocket change."

From the VIP booth above, Felix Carter was laughing so hard he was choking on his drink. "Boss, she's actually bidding on the dump. She's crazy."

Alistair Thorne was not laughing. He was staring at Skye with narrowed eyes. He tapped his finger against his chin. He had heard whispers—rumors from his contacts in the planning commission—that the zoning laws might change. But it was deep intel. How did a socialite know?

Or was she just reckless?

Bid, Alistair said.

Felix stopped laughing. "What?"

Bid against her.

But boss, it's trash!

Do it.

Felix sighed and spoke into the microphone connected to the floor. "300 million."

The announcement boomed over the speakers. "The VIP booth bids 300 million!"

The room erupted into chaos. Alistair Thorne was bidding? If Thorne was interested, maybe it wasn't trash.

Skye's heart skipped a beat. She looked up at the booth. The dark glass hid him, but she knew he was there. Why was he interfering? This was not in the script.

She couldn't lose this. This land was her exit strategy. It was her war chest.

She raised her paddle again. Her hand was steady, but her palms were sweating.

500 million, Skye declared.

Liam looked like he was going to have a stroke. "Skye! Stop! That is half of your inheritance!"

Going once... the auctioneer yelled, sweating.

Skye stared at the black glass of the VIP booth. She willed him to stop. Please. Don't fight me on this.

Alistair watched her. He saw the desperation hidden behind her stoic mask. He saw the way her knuckles were white around the paddle. She wanted this. She needed this.

He smiled. "Let her have it."

Sold! the gavel banged. "To Mrs. Kensington for 500 million dollars!"

The room collapsed into noise. People were shaking their heads, whispering about the "mad Kensington wife."

Liam slammed his hand on her table, rattling the silverware. "You have ruined us. When the board hears about this..."

Skye stood up. She was the same height as him in her heels.

If you're so worried about finances, Liam, she said, her voice dropping to a whisper that only he could hear, "maybe we should separate our assets."

She leaned in closer, smelling the faint trace of Seraphina's perfume on his lapel.

I want a divorce.

The words hung in the air between them, heavier than the 500 million dollars.

Liam froze. He blinked, his mouth opening and closing. He had threatened her with divorce a thousand times. She had always begged him to stay.

You... what?

You heard me, Skye said. She picked up her clutch. "Enjoy the rest of the night with your charity case. I have paperwork to do."

She turned and walked away, leaving the gala, leaving the husband leaving the life she had died in.
