

Chapter 4 No.

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The night air outside the hotel was cool, but Skye was burning up.

She sat in the back of the Sterling Bentley, her phone glowing in the dark. She had won the bid. But she had a problem. A 500-million-dollar problem. 

She checked her bank accounts. Her personal trust fund had 420 million liquid. She was short 80 million. The payment was due in 48 hours.

Usually, she could move money from the joint Kensington accounts to cover the gap, but as she tried to access the app, a red notification popped up.

ACCESS DENIED. ACCOUNT FROZEN BY L. KENSINGTON.

Bastard, Skye cursed softly. He moved fast. He was trying to strangle her financially to force her to apologize and cancel the bid.

She couldn't go to traditional banks. They would call Liam for approval as her "spouse." She needed private equity. She needed a loan shark. She needed the devil.

Driver, Skye said. "Take me to The Obsidian Club."

The driver, an old family retainer named Alfred, hesitated. "Miss Skye... that place... it's not for people like you."

Just drive, Alfred.

The Obsidian Club was a fortress of black stone in the downtown district. It was where the city's real deals were made—the illegal ones, the dangerous ones. It was Alistair Thorne's territory.

The car stopped. Skye stepped out. The bouncer, a man the size of a vending machine, crossed his arms.

Members only, Mrs. Kensington. Go back to your tea party, he sneered. He recognized her from the tabloids.

Skye didn't flinch. She pulled a pen from her clutch and wrote on a

cocktail napkin she had taken from the gala.

North Sea Port. Container 404. It's not textiles.

She folded the napkin and handed it to the bouncer. "Give this to Mr. Thorne. Tell him... a friend from the other side sent it."

The bouncer looked at the napkin then at her. The confidence in her eyes unnerved him. He grunted and went inside.

Five minutes later, the doors opened. Felix Carter stood there, looking amused.

The boss is curious, Felix said. "Follow me."

Skye followed him through the club. The bass from the music thumped in her chest. The air smelled of expensive smoke and danger. They took a private elevator to the top floor.

The office was silent. Soundproofed. It was dark, lit only by the city lights filtering through floor-to-ceiling windows.

Alistair Thorne sat behind a massive mahogany desk. He wasn't wearing a suit jacket. His white shirt was unbuttoned at the top, sleeves rolled up to reveal forearms corded with muscle. He held the napkin in his hand.

Container 404, Alistair said, his voice deep and smooth. "My rival's shipment. Contraband weapons hidden in silk. If customs finds this, he goes to jail for twenty years."

He looked up, his grey eyes piercing her. "How does a socialite know about underground smuggling routes?"

Skye sat in the chair opposite him, crossing her legs. She didn't wait to be invited.

I have eyes, she lied. In her past life, this scandal broke five years later. It was big news. "I need 80 million. Tonight."

Alistair laughed. It was a dark, rumbling sound that made Skye's toes curl.

You want me to fund the land I bid on? The land you stole from me?

I didn't steal it. I outbid you, Skye corrected. "And I'll pay you back double in three months."

Alistair stood up. He walked around the desk slowly. He moved like a

panther stalking a deer. He stopped right in front of her, placing his hands on the armrests of her chair, trapping her.

He leaned down. His face was inches from hers. She could smell him—sandalwood, tobacco, and raw masculinity.

I don't need money, Mrs. Kensington, he whispered. His breath ghosted over her lips. "I have more money than God. I need... amusement."

Skye held her breath. Her heart was hammering so hard she thought he must hear it. This man was dangerous. He could kill her and no one would find the body.

What do you want? she asked, her voice steady despite the fear.

Alistair studied her face. He saw the fire in her eyes. She wasn't flinching.

Liam is hosting the International Trade Gala next week, Alistair said. "He invited the entire city. Except me."

You want an invitation?

No, Alistair smirked. "I want you to burn it down. Metaphorically."

He pushed a lock of hair behind her ear, his fingers rough against her soft skin.

Ensure Seraphina Miller is humiliated. Thoroughly. Publicly. Make Liam regret the day he was born.

Skye blinked. She smiled, and this time, it was genuine. It was a sharp, wicked thing.

That's not a price, Mr. Thorne, she purred. "That's a pleasure."

Alistair straightened up. He walked back to his desk and picked up a secure landline phone. He dialed a number from memory.

This is Thorne, he said, his eyes never leaving Skye. "Authorize a transfer. Eighty million. Account holder: Skye Sterling. Immediate execution."

He hung up the phone.

Don't disappoint me, little Oracle, he said, the nickname rolling off his tongue with a mix of mockery and intrigue.

Skye's breath hitched, her hand freezing on the armrest. How did he know my dark web handle? The name 'Oracle' was a closely guarded secret,

buried under layers of encryption. Yet Alistair Thorne had just casually dropped it like a calling card. He wasn't just dangerous; he was omniscient.

Skye stood up. She walked to the door. Before she left, she turned back, masking her internal shock with a cold smile. 

My name is Skye.

Alistair took a sip of his whiskey, watching her leave. "We'll see."