

## Chapter 5 No.

No.5

The week leading up to the International Trade Gala was a blur of activity. Skye moved through Kensington Manor like a ghost, avoiding Liam, who was sleeping in the guest wing. He hadn't signed the divorce papers yet. He thought she was bluffing.

On the afternoon of the Gala, Skye was in the library, reviewing the architectural plans for the wasteland. She had already hired a discreet team of surveyors.

The door banged open. Secretary Lee walked in.

Lee was Liam's personal assistant, a man who had sneered at Skye for five years. He carried a garment bag with the tip of his fingers, as if it were infected.

Mr. Kensington sent this, Lee announced, not bothering with a greeting. "He expects you to be ready at 7. And he said no red."

Lee dropped the bag onto the velvet sofa. It slid off and hit the floor.

He didn't move to pick it up.

Skye looked at the bag, then at Lee. "Pick it up."

Lee scoffed. He adjusted his glasses. "I'm a devastatingly busyman, Mrs. Kensington. I don't do housekeeping. Call a maid."

Skye stood up slowly. She placed her hands on the desk.

You are Liam's secretary, she said. "Paid by the Kensington Family Trust."

So?

So, I control 40% of that trust, Skye said.

Lee rolled his eyes. "Just put the dress on. It's grey. Seraphina picked it out. She thought it suited your... maturity."

Grey. A color for old women. A color for shadows. Seraphina was trying to make her disappear again.

Skye picked up her phone. She dialed a number.

Who are you calling? Liam? Lee mocked. "He won't take your call."

Security, Skye said into the phone, her voice dripping with cold authority. "This is Skye Sterling-Kensington. Revoke Secretary Lee's clearance codes immediately. I've flagged his expense accounts for a forensic audit regarding the unauthorized 'consulting fees' to the Miller accounts. Unless he wants a fraud investigation, I suggest he escort himself out. He has five minutes."

She hung up.

Lee froze. His face went pale, the blood draining from his cheeks. He knew about the "consulting fees"—money he had been funneling to Seraphina on Liam's orders, but buried in the books. How did she know? If she audited him, he would go to prison.

You... you wouldn't, Lee stammered.

Try me, Skye said, returning to her paperwork. "Get out."

Lee fled.

Skye walked over to the garment bag. She unzipped it. The dress was hideous—a shapeless, frumpy grey sack with high lace collars. It looked like something a Victorian widow would wear to a funeral.

Burn it, she told Mrs. Higgins the housekeeper who had entered upon hearing the commotion.

And bring me the Gold Collection from the vault.

7:00 PM.

Liam stood in the foyer, checking his Rolex. He was pacing. Seraphina had texted him ten times asking if Skye was wearing the grey dress.

Where is she? And where the hell is Lee? He isn't answering his phone, Liam grumbled.

The sound of heels clicking on the marble staircase echoed through the hall. Click. Click. Click.

Liam looked up. His breath caught in his throat.

Skye was descending the stairs. She was not wearing grey.

She was wearing gold.

The gown was made of a liquid metallic fabric that shimmered with every movement. It was strapless, hugging her breasts and cinching her waist before cascading down in a pool of molten light. It was a dress that screamed wealth. It screamed power. It screamed, Look at me.

Her hair was down in loose, glamorous waves. She wore vintage diamond earrings that caught the light of the chandelier.

Liam was speechless. He had forgotten she could look like this. He had forgotten she was a Sterling.

You're late, he managed to say, his voice hoarse. He tried to summon his usual annoyance, but it fell flat.

Skye reached the bottom of the stairs. She didn't stop for him. She walked past him toward the door, leaving a trail of jasmine scent in her wake.

Perfection takes time, she said.

Where is Lee? Liam asked, following her like a puppy. "He was supposed to drive us."

Skye paused at the door. The chauffeur was holding it open.

Fired, she said simply. "He had bad taste."

She got into the car.

Liam stood on the driveway, stunned. She fired his secretary? Since when did she have the spine to fire anyone?

He got into the car beside her. The ride was silent. But for the first time in years, Liam wasn't looking at his phone. He was looking at her.

---