

Chapter 6 No.

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The International Trade Gala was held at the City Museum, an avenue filled with priceless artifacts and equally priceless egos.

When Skye and Liam entered, the cameras flashed, but the dynamic had shifted. Liam usually led, with Skye trailing behind. Tonight, Skye walked a half-step ahead, the gold dress acting as a beacon.

They separated immediately. Liam went to network with potential investors for his stalled projects. Skye went to the bar.

She ordered a sparkling water. She needed a clear head.

Ten minutes later, the side door opened. Seraphina Miller slipped in. She wasn't invited, but she was wearing a "Volunteer Staff" badge. It was a clever move—it made her look humble and hardworking.

She spotted Liam across the room and started moving toward him, a look of practiced distress on her face.

Between Seraphina and Liam stood a display of Ming Dynasty vases. An elderly gardener was carefully watering a large fern placed dangerously close to the pedestals.

Seraphina, eyes fixed on Liam, didn't look where she was going. She walked briskly, her hip checking the gardener.

The old man stumbled. His elbow hit the pedestal.

CRASH.

The sound was deafening. The blue and white porcelain shattered into a million jagged pieces on the marble floor.

The string quartet stopped playing. The chatter died instantly.

Seraphina shrieked. She jumped back, pointing a finger at the gardener.

Watch where you're going you old fool! she screamed. Her voice was shrill, cutting through the silence.

The gardener, a man in his sixties, was trembling. "I... I'm so sorry, Miss. You bumped into me..."

I did not! Seraphina yelled, her face red. "You attacked me! Look at this mess! That vase is worth millions! You've ruined everything!"

She was making a scene. She was trying to deflect blame, hoping her "victim" narrative would save her.

Liam rushed over, looking mortified. "Seraphina? What happened?"

He pushed me! Seraphina sobbed, clinging to Liam. "He broke the vase!"

Guests were whispering "Who is that screaming woman?" "Isn't that the Kensington girl?"

Skye set her glass down. She walked into the center of the circle.

Lower your voice, Miss Miller, Skye said. Her tone was icy, commanding.

He tried to hurt me! Seraphina lied, doubling down.

Skye ignored her. She knelt down gracefully, the gold dress pooling around her. She picked up a large shard of the pottery. She ran her thumb over the broken edge. The clay was white, but too porous. The glaze was too shiny.

She stood up.

It's a replica, Skye announced.

The crowd murmured.

A 19th-century reproduction, Skye clarified, her voice projecting effortlessly. "Does anyone really think the museum would leave a genuine Ming vase next to the coat check during a cocktail party? The brush strokes on the dragon are too heavy for the Ming era. And the clay composition is modern kaolin."

The Museum Curator, a frantic little man with glasses, rushed forward. "Mrs. Kensington is correct! Absolutely correct! The real Ming vase is in the vault. We display replicas for safety during large events."

A collective sigh of relief went through the room. Then, a ripple of laughter.

Seraphina had been screaming over a fake. It made her look uneducated, hysterical, and distinctly out of place.

Oh, Seraphina squeaked. "I... I didn't know."

Clearly, Skye said. She looked at the gardener. "Are you alright?"

The gardener nodded, teary-eyed.

Suddenly, a tall man with silver hair approached. It was Mr. Stephen, a French tycoon and the guest of honor. He looked furious at the treatment of the staff.

C'est inacceptable! Mr. Stephen barked in rapid French. "Cette femme est hystérique. Elle devrait être renvoyée." (This is unacceptable! This woman is hysterical. She should be removed.)

Liam looked panicked. He didn't speak French. He looked at his translator, but the translator was stuck in the crowd.

I... uh... yes, good, Liam stammered, smiling nervously.

Mr. Stephen narrowed his eyes, insulted by Liam's ignorance.

Skye stepped forward. She looked Mr. Stephen in the eye.

Monsieur Stephen, veuillez pardonner cette interruption, Skye said. Her French was flawless, her accent perfectly Parisian. "C'était un accident malheureux causé par la maladresse de l'invitée. Le jardinier n'est pas en faute." (Mr. Stephen, please forgive the interruption. It was an unfortunate accident caused by the guest's clumsiness. The gardener is not at fault.)

Mr. Stephen's expression softened instantly. He looked at Skye with delight.

Vous parlez français, Madame?

J'ai vécu à Paris pendant un an, Skye lied smoothly. "Votre collection d'art est magnifique." (I lived in Paris for a year. Your art collection is magnificent.)

Mr. Stephen took Skye's hand and kissed it. He ignored Liam completely. He ignored Seraphina, looking at her as if she were a rude child.

Liam stared at his wife. His mouth was slightly open.

Since when do you speak French? he whispered, grabbing her arm as Mr. Stephen walked away.

Skye pulled her arm free. She dusted off the spot where he had touched

her. 

Since I stopped waiting for you to come home for dinner, darling, she said.
"A woman needs hobbies to fill the empty hours." 

She walked away, leaving him standing next to a sobbing Seraphina and
a pile of broken pottery.



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