

Chapter 7 No.

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The Gala moved into the ballroom for the entertainment portion. The lights dimmed, casting a soft, amber glow over the guests.

Liam cornered Skye near the bar. He looked exhausted. Seraphina had gone to the bathroom to fix her makeup, leaving him unguarded.

You made Seraphina look like a fool, Liam accused, though his voice lacked its usual bite. He was shaken by the French incident.

She did it herself, Skye replied, sipping water. "I just provided the translation."

And that land purchase, Liam pressed, changing the subject to something he felt he could control. "Investors are laughing at me, Skye. They think I can't control my wife."

They won't be laughing in a month, Skye said enigmatically.

Suddenly, the host tapped the microphone.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a slight problem. Our scheduled pianist, the renowned Mr. Black, has taken ill.

Upon the balcony, Felix Carter nudged Alistair. "Ill? I thought we just paid him to take a long vacation."

Alistair smirked. "Same thing."

Is there anyone in the audience who could favor us with a performance? the host asked, looking desperate. "Just to fill the silence while we set up the auction?"

Seraphina returned, her eyes red-rimmed but her makeup restored. She grabbed Liam's arm.

Skye took lessons as a kid, she whispered loudly. "Make her do it. She hasn't played in years. She'll embarrass herself, and then people will forget about the vase."

It was a petty, vicious trap. Seraphina wanted to see Skye fail.

Liam, desperate to regain some control over the narrative, nodded. He raised his hand.

My wife plays! Liam announced.

The spotlights swung to Skye.

Skye froze. She hadn't touched a piano in this life for five years. But in her past life... in the dark years before her death, the piano was her only friend. She had played for hours, pouring her grief into the keys.

She looked at Seraphina's smug face. She looked at Liam's expectant, cruel eyes.

She handed her glass to a waiter.

Fine, she said.

She walked up the stairs to the stage. The Steinway grand piano sat there like a black beast. She sat down on the bench. She adjusted the height.

She closed her eyes. She didn't want to play something pretty. She didn't want to play Mozart or Chopin. She wanted violence.

She raised her hands.

She struck the first chords of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp Minor.

BUM. BUM. BUM.

The heavy, dark notes thundered through the room. It was not a song; it was a war cry. It was the sound of doom approaching.

Liam's jaw dropped. He expected "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." He got the apocalypse.

Skye's fingers flew across the keys. Her body swayed with the music, intense and passionate. She poured every ounce of her anger, her betrayal, her death, and her rebirth into the instrument. The music was chaotic, difficult, and overwhelmingly powerful.

The audience was mesmerized. They had never seen a socialite play with such raw, unbridled emotion.

Upon the balcony, Alistair Thorne leaned over the railing. He watched her hands. He watched the way her hair fell over her face. His heart beat in time with the frantic rhythm of the prelude.

God, he whispered. "She is magnificent."

The song ended with a crashing final chord that seemed to shake the chandeliers.

Skye held the final note, her chest heaving.

Silence. For three long seconds, there was absolute silence. 1

Then, thunderous applause. People stood up. Mr. Stephen was shouting "Bravo!"

Skye stood and bowed. She didn't look at the audience. She looked up at the balcony. She looked straight at the shadows where she knew Alistair was.

She walked off the stage, adrenaline pumping through her veins like fire.

She didn't go back to Liam. She turned toward the service corridor, needing air.

As she turned the corner near the kitchens, a hand grabbed her arm. She spun around, ready to fight.

It was Alistair.

He pulled her into the shadows. His eyes were dark, dilated.

You played that for me, he said. It wasn't a question.

I played it for myself, Skye corrected, breathless. 2

He didn't hand her a bulky folder this time. Instead, he reached out and deftly slipped a small, heavy metal card into her clutch. "The transfer confirmation," he murmured. "It's done."

Skye looked at him. Her hands brushed his. His skin was hot.

Pleasure doing business, she said. 3

Alistair leaned in, trapping her against the wall. "Why that song? It's heavy. It's dark."

Because I'm declaring war, Skye whispered. She looked up at him, trusting him with a secret she hadn't told a soul. 4

The West Harbor, she murmured. "It's being zoned as the 'Future Tech Park' next week. The government announcement is sealed, but it's

happening' 4

Alistair went still. He stared at her. She had just handed him a billion-dollar secret. She had trusted him.

A slow smile spread across his face. It was the smile of a wolf who had found his mate.

You really are an Oracle, he whispered 3

As she pulled away, his hand lingered on her clutch for a fraction of a second too long. He had slipped something else in there besides the bank card—a micro-tracker, no larger than a button. Just in case.
