Chapter 8 No.

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Skye returned to the main hall, the metal card hidden securely in her clutch. Her heart was still racing from the proximity to Alistair. He was dangerous, yes, but he treated her like an equal. Liam treated her like a prop.

She found Liam near the exit, signaling the valet for his car. We had arrived as a front, but he was clearly preparing to leave as a traitor. Seraphina was crying—again—surrounded by a group of elderly matrons.

She bullied me, Seraphina sobbed into a handkerchief. "She played that loud music just to scare me."

It was ridiculous, but the matrons were clucking sympathetically. Liam was patting her back, looking like the protective hero.

It's okay, Liam soothed. "Skye is just... unstable lately."

Suddenly, the heavy double oak doors of the museum swung open with a groan.

The room went silent instantly. The air pressure seemed to drop.

An old man walked in. He leaned heavily on a bony cane topped with a silver wolf's head. He was surrounded by four large bodyguards.

It was Elias Thorne. The Patriarch. The Godfather of Sea City.

In this city, the head of the Thorne family never needed an invitation; they were the absolute pass to any door. He was a legend. He hadn't been seen in public for three years.

Liam straightened up immediately, pushing Seraphina slightly behind him. This was his chance. If he could impress Elias Thorne, the Kensington stock would double.

Mr. Thorne! Liam called out, stepping forward with his most charming smile. "What an honor! I am Liam Kensington, we met at—"

Elias didn't even look at him. He walked straight past Liam as if he were a piece of furniture.

He stopped in front of the grand staircase. Alistair was descending looking bored.

You're late for Sunday dinner, boy, Elias grunted. His voice sounded like gravel grindingtogether.

The crowd gasped. Sunday dinner? The rumor was that Alistair had been disowned.

I was busy making money, Grandfather, Alistair replied smoothly, stoppingon the last step.

Elias laughed. It was a terrifying bark of a sound. He clapped Alistair on the shoulder. It was a public validation. The Kinghad acknowledged the Prince.

Seraphina, seeing the attention shift, stepped forward. She was not a smart woman. She thought she could use the old man's presence to garner more sympathy.

Mr. Thorne, she squeaked. "Your grandson's friend... she bullied me." She pointed a trembling finger at Skye, who was standing near a pillar.

Elias turned hishead slowly. His hawk-like eyes landed on Seraphina. He looked at her cheap white dress, her tear-stained face, her desperate posture.

And who are you? Elias asked. His voice drippedwith disdain.

I... I'm Seraphina. Liam's... she trailed off, looking at Liam for help.

Liam opened his mouth, but Elias cut him off.

The mistress, Elias finished. The word cracked like a whip.

Seraphina turned pale.

In my day, Elias continued, addressing the room at large, "mistresses knew to stay in the shadows. They didn't crash galas and whineto their betters."

The insult was fatal. Coming from Elias Thorne, it was a social death sentence.

Liam stepped forward, his face red. "Sir, she is my guest."

Then you have poor taste, Kensington, Elias barked. "And poor judgment."

Elias turned his gaze to Skye. He looked her up and down. He saw the gold dress. He saw the defiant chin.

You played well, girl, Elias grunted. "Rachmaninoff takes guts. Most people play garbage."

He nodded at Skye. An nod of respect.

Come, Alistair, Elias said. "This place smells of cheap perfume."

Elias and Alistair walked out together. Alistair cast one last look at Skye —a smirk—before disappearing into the night.

Liam was left standing in the center of the room, humiliated. His social standing had just taken a massive hit.

He turned on Seraphina. The anger he felt toward Elias, toward Skye, toward himself, he focused entirely on her.

We're leaving, he snarled. "Now."

Skye watched them go. She took a sip of her champagne.

Checkmate, she whispered.