

Chapter 9 No.

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The Gala ended in a thunderstorm. The sky opened up, dumping torrential rain on Sea City.

Guests huddled under the portico, waiting for their valets. The air was cold and damp.

Liam dragged a sobbing Seraphina to his car. The valet brought the Kensington Mercedes around.

Skye approached them. She was shivering slightly in her strapless dress.

Are you coming home, Liam? she asked.

Liam looked at Skye, then at Seraphina's tear-stained face. He blamed Skye for the night's disaster. He wanted to punish her.

She's distraught, Liam said cold-heartedly. "I need to take her to her apartment. She shouldn't be alone."

So you're leaving your wife in the rain? Skye asked. Her voice was flat. She wasn't surprised, just weary.

You have a driver, Liam snapped. "Stop being dramatic. Go home."

He slammed the car door. The Mercedes sped off, tires splashing dirty water onto Skye's gold shoes.

Skye stood alone. She looked around. Her driver, Arthur, wasn't answering. He had probably been dismissed by Liam earlier.

She was stranded.

A sleek black Maybach pulled up to the curb. The window rolled down.

Alistair looked out. The interior light illuminated his sharp features.

Get in, he said.

Skye hesitated. Getting into a car with Alistair Thorne was dangerous. But staying here was pathetic.

She opened the door and slid into the warm leather seat.

Alistair handed her a towel. He didn't say anything. He just signaled the driver.

Kensington Manor, he said.

The car moved silently through the rain-slicked streets.

You did well tonight, Alistair said after a while.

I survived, Skye corrected. She wiped the rain from her arms.

They arrived at the gates of the Manor. The house was dark. Liam wasn't back yet.

Thank you, Skye said, stepping out.

Wait, Alistair said. He looked uneasy. "I'll wait until you're inside."

I'm fine, Skye said. She closed the door.

The Maybach pulled away, disappearing into the rain.

Skye turned to the gate keypad. She punched in the code.

Suddenly, a van pulled out from the bushes nearby. The headlights blinded her.

Skye sensed danger. Her heart stopped. She turned to run back toward the road.

A man tackled her from behind. He was heavy, smelling of sweat and stale cigarettes. A rag soaked in chloroform was pressed against her mouth.

She struggled. She scratched the attacker's arm. Her nails dug deep.

She saw a tattoo on his wrist—a serpent.

She recognized it. Silas. Alistair's ex-head of security. The one who had been fired for stealing.

Nothing personal, Mrs. Kensington, Silas whispered in her ear. "But I'm broke, and your husband is rich."

Skye's vision blurred. The chemical burn in her throat was overpowering. Her PTSD from the hospital triggered—the darkness, the suffocation.

Her knees gave way.

She was thrown into the back of the van like a sack of potatoes. The doors slammed shut.

The van screeched away into the night.

Inside the van, Silas pulled out a burner phone. He dialed Liam's number.

Liam was at Seraphina's apartment, pouring her tea. He was trying to calm her down.

His phone rang. Unknown Number.

He answered, annoyed. "Who is this?"

We have your wife, a distorted voice said. "Fifty million dollars. Cash or crypto. Or she dies in pieces."
