

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me

Chapter 1 Take It Off

On an uninhabited island.

Raindrops pelted down like bullets, and the crashing of the waves was like drums.

With a dagger, Arielle Moore was shaving the wooden piece down with difficulty. It was as if she felt nothing as the rain continued to hit her face.

She had lost contact with her family for ten years. Just as she finally found the Southalls—just as she was about to find out the truth about her mother's death and her kidnapping—a group of people who claimed to be the ones to bring her home tried to kill her.

She successfully defeated them, but the ship sunk, and she ended up on this uninhabited island.

It was her seventh day on the island, and she had yet to see any passing ships.

Fortunately, there were many trees and plants on the island, and she had built herself a simple wooden boat.

Right when she moved to work on the oars, it had abruptly rained heavily.

Rising to her feet, Arielle was about to stretch when she spotted something dark by the rocks.

Walking over suspiciously, it startled her to find out it was a man.

The man was handsome, but his face was pale. He had an injury on his waist, and his blood was mixing together with the seawater, forming a sunset in the water.

Arielle placed her finger under the man's nose. When she realized the man was not dead, she began dragging him further into the island and into the cave she had been sleeping in for the past few days.

After starting a fire, she ran back out into the rain. It was only a brief while before she returned with some herbs.

“You're lucky that you've met me,” Arielle said as she reached out to take off the man's clothes.

A quick glance at the man's waist told her that it was a deep knife wound. Did it hit his internal organs?

The moment she reached out for his wrist to take his pulse, a hand grabbed onto hers instead.

“W-Who are you?” The man's voice was almost a whisper, but the grip around her wrist was firm.

Shooting the man a look, Arielle gloomily said, “Who am I? I'm your savior. If you're not going to let go of me anytime soon, I'm going to have to build you a gravestone. In memory of Nameless. Does that sound good?”

The man only furrowed his brows in silence. Then, his eyes drifted toward the crushed herbs in her

hands.

“What's the matter? Take it off! I'll help you.”

With that said, Arielle's hand reached toward him again.

“I'll do it myself.”

With a look of disdain, the man pushed her hands away and took off his shirt himself. The entire time, his dark eyes watched her warily.

Once his shirt was off, Arielle saw the man's eight packs and the V cut abs that ran down his body and into his pants. This man's figure... is a little too great, isn't it?

Unable to help herself, Arielle gulped. Blushing, she then carefully placed the crushed herbs on the man's body.

“What is this?” the man asked. His voice was low, and she could not hear any emotions in them.

“Antiseptic herbs for stopping the bleeding.”

“Where am I?”

In the beginning, Arielle was a little shy to be around him. However, upon hearing his constant stream of questions, she raised her head to look at him impatiently. He's handsome, but he has too many questions. If I know where I am, I wouldn't need to be trapped in this place for seven days, would I?

“If you have questions, you can ask your teacher instead. Why don't you save your strength and lie down to rest instead of speaking?”

Irritated, the man muttered, “This isn't how a doctor should talk to her patient.”

“Excuse me?” Arielle deadpanned, “Is this the way you should be talking to your savior?”

At that, the man furrowed his brows.

“Woman, you're rude.”

“Dude, you're impolite.”

The two then glared at each other as the tension in the atmosphere rose.

In the end, Arielle was the one to give up. She saw no point in settling the score with an injured man, so she stood up and said, “The rain is quite heavy, so it'll be much colder at night. I'm going to start the fire again. Stay right there.”

As Arielle walked toward the corner, the man spoke again. “Hey.”

“What is the matter with you again?” Arielle spun around.

If I don't start this fire now, we're both going to freeze to death tonight.

The man's mouth opened, but he ended up saying, "Nothing."

Rolling her eyes, Arielle returned to her fire-starting.

There was only one way to start a fire on the humid island—drilling the wood. Arielle took over an hour to finally get a tiny flame going.

However, the wind outside blew in and ended its short life.

"Hey," the man said again.

"What?" Arielle shrieked.

The moment she spun around, she heard the sound of something metallic dropping onto the ground. Then, she spotted the lighter by her feet.

Huh?

Oh!

After a three-second silence, Arielle cursed out loud, "Aren't you a despicable man? You b*stard!"

The man slowly closed his eyes and turned away, but there was a small smile growing on his lips.

Night soon arrived.

The two rested on the two sides of the caves. In the middle of the night, Arielle woke from grunting sounds.

Opening her eyes, she realized the man's pale face was completely white. He curled into himself, cold sweat beaded all over his forehead.

"Hey, jerk. Are you okay?"

Arielle walked over to poke his arm, but the man did not even react to it.

Hastily, she reached out to put her hand on his temple, only to find it scorching.

His wound must be infected. That's why he's having a fever.

Two amoxicillin would have done the trick, but where would she find amoxicillin on the uninhabited island?

Left without any options, Arielle resorted to other methods to cool him down—by taking off his clothes.

However, although that lowered the man's temperature, he began shivering and mumbling about how cold it was.

Hence, Arielle moved him closer to the fire, but his condition did not improve.

“Damn it,” Arielle cursed before taking off her clothes. She then lay down and hugged the man to share her body heat with the man.

Who cares if he's a jerk? It's more important to save his life first.

Saving someone is a good deed. Maybe God will let me survive my way back to find out the truth with the Southalls.

If the ones who came to bring me home tried to take my life, it means that there's something wrong with the Southalls.

I'll be merciless if I find out that my father is the one who did this.

Arielle lost herself in her thoughts as she hugged the man. Soon, she fell asleep.

When she woke again, she heard voices and footsteps outside the cave.

There are other people around?

Shocked, she sat up to realize that the man's jacket was on her, but the man himself was gone.

Hurriedly putting on her clothes, she then warily walked out of the cave.

If these are the ones who tried to kill me... How professional of them.

However, when Arielle reached the cave entrance, she realized there was a line of bodyguards clothed in black. A distance away was a helicopter, and the leader of the bodyguards was speaking to the man she saved.

Right then, the man turned around.

It was the first time Arielle had seen the man's face with proper lighting. He was still handsome, and he was quite intimidating just by standing there. Other than his pallor, he looked like any other individual.

He's quick to recover.

“You...”

Just as Arielle started speaking, the man interrupted, “What do you want?”

“What?” His question threw her off.

Expressionless, he explained, “You saved me, so I'll fulfill a wish of yours.”

Arielle was rendered speechless for a moment. “How rude can you be? I saved you, but you don't even have a word of thanks?”

Right as those words left Arielle's lips, the bodyguards all stared at her, aghast. It was as though she had

said something strange.

On the other hand, the man's expression remained neutral. "You'll regret it if you miss this chance."

Arielle was fuming, but she thought, My wooden boat might not last until I reach the land.

Gritting her teeth, she squeezed out, "Bring me home."

Now, it was the man's turn to look astounded.

"That's all?"

"What else?"

She only had one wish, which was to leave the godforsaken uninhabited island.

Glancing at her as if she was an idiot, the man then headed toward the helicopter.

Three hours later, the helicopter was hovering in Jadeborough's skies.

"Is that the place?" the man asked, pointing at the manor below.

"I think so..." Arielle barely had any memories of her childhood, but she had investigated the Southalls before returning to the country.

That place was supposed to be the Moores', but it now belonged to the man who never bothered looking for her during her ten-year disappearance, her father.

"Down," the man ordered. The pilot instantly replied, "Yes, sir."

Chapter 2 I Am Your Father

At the Southall residence.

The entire place was set up for a birthday party.

Shandie Southall, who was wearing the latest season's dress from LV, was surrounded by socialites buttering her up.

"Shandie, your dress is beautiful! It's like a milky way."

"This is the dress from LV's spring edition, isn't it? I couldn't even rent it, but you actually managed to buy it! Your dad is so nice to you!"

"Happy birthday, Shandie. I heard Sam Sleight has offered you a role. You're definitely going to be the most popular actress of the year. Don't forget about us when you become famous."

"Who cares about the entertainment industry? Shannie's just there for fun. Who is she? She's Shandie Moore. It's so easy for her to be famous."

Concealing the glee in her eyes, Shandie uttered, "Thank you very much. Let me go and check when the cake's coming."

When Shandie returned to the mansion, she nearly collided with her mother, who was heading toward the outside.

"Mom." Lowering her voice, she whispered to Cindy Moore. "Has my cousin's men returned yet? It's my twentieth birthday today. I don't want others to find out that our family has a girl who was kidnapped by human traffickers."

Lovingly tidying the edge of Shandie's skirt, Cindy murmured, "No news is good news. Don't worry. She won't be able to come back. Even if she does, the traffickers had sold her to some faraway village. What can a country bumpkin like her do?"

Shandie nodded in agreement. In fact, a part of her hoped that the country bumpkin would be able to return.

That way, she would be able to relish the fact that she was the true daughter of a wealthy family.

"Bad news, Mrs. Southall," the housekeeper cried out as she rushed in. "A Nightshire helicopter landed on the lawn outside."

"The Nightshires?" Shandie's eyes lit up. "Mom, say, do you think Dad invited Vinson Nightshire?"

Cindy was surprised as well.

Although the Southalls were running one of the top businesses in the country, and they were one of the prominent families in Jadeborough, the Nightshires were one of the top families in the world.

Vinson Nightshire was the heir of the Nightshire Group, and the Southalls still did not have the capability of inviting Vinson to their daughter's birthday party.

Maybe Vinson thinks that the business deal with our family is important?

"Let's have a look." Cindy was perplexed, but it was a pleasant surprise for her.

If our family gets to build a relationship with the Nightshires, we won't need to worry about anything anymore.

After the mother and daughter touched up their makeups, they then excitedly rushed toward the lawn.

By then, a group of nouveau riche had already gathered on the lawn.

The moment Shandie walked over, the socialites crowded around her with jealous looks.

"Shannie, you actually invited the Nightshires! You're amazing."

"How could you not have told me something as important as this? I should've hired a professional makeup artist to put on my makeup today."

Shandie smiled, but in her mind, she scoffed.

The Nightshires are here for me. Why would you need to put on any makeup?

I must have caught Vinson's interest in the ceremony held by the Nightshires last month.

I'm going to be Mrs. Nightshire soon!

Right then, the helicopter door slowly opened.

As everyone watched in anticipation, a young woman in ragged clothes jumped down from the vehicle.

She was a slender young woman whose face was coated with dirt and dust. No one could see how she originally looked like. Even her hair was in a tangled mess as if she had not washed her head for an entire month.

“What...”

Everyone then turned to look at Shandie. Those who did not like her began mocking, “Shannie, is this your esteemed guest? A beggar?”

Livid, Shandie stormed over and questioned, “Who are you? Who do you think you are to join my birthday party?”

“Birthday party?” Instantly, Arielle realized who the arrogant girl was.

It was known to others that she was Cindy's adopted daughter, but the detective had told her that Shandie was actually Cindy and Henrick's illegitimate child.

He doesn't even know whether his real daughter is dead or alive, but he's holding a birthday party for his illegitimate daughter?

Ha.

“Who am I?” Arielle stared at the girl. “I am your father.”

“You—”

Right as Shandie was about to lose her temper, Arielle belatedly added, “Your father's real daughter.”

Shandie froze, and the others around them instantly looked interested to watch the scene unfold.

When Shandie came back to her senses, she stammered, “Y-You're Arielle Moore?”

That country bumpkin?

She's... really a country bumpkin, huh?

Fortunately, Cindy was smarter than her daughter, for she hurried forward. “Arielle, is that you? I've been waiting for you for so long. My poor child, you're finally back...”

Arielle's lips curled. "Hello, Aunt Cindy, it's been a while."

Despite the smile on her lips, her tone was sarcastic.

My mother's younger sister married my father? My father married my aunt?

What nonsense is this?

Something must be up.

The guests began whispering to each other. "I heard that Mrs. Southall used to be the previous Mrs. Southall's sister."

"This must be Ms. Moore, who was kidnapped by human traffickers ten years ago."

"The Southalls used to be Moores; Henrick Southall actually married into the Moore family. Once Maureen Moore died, the Moores all took on the family name Southall instead."

"That actually happened? Seriously..."

Upon hearing their chatters, embarrassment flooded Cindy's mind. She cleared her throat and muttered, "Darling, as long as you're back. I'll bring you to wash up. Look at you. You're so... dirty. You must have had a difficult life in the countryside."

She's still reminding others that I came from the countryside. It seems like she really hates me.

Right as Arielle was about to speak, a low voice sounded out behind her. "Hey."

Everyone immediately turned to the owner of the voice. Once they saw the person coming down from the helicopter, they stiffened.

It was Vinson.

It was Vinson, whose every move dictated the global economy.

"Mr. Nightshire?" Shandie excitedly darted forward to welcome him. "A-Are you here to join my birthday party? Thank you!"

Shandie could not conceal the joy in her eyes, and the blush on her face was for all to see.

At the start, she thought Vinson had only sent someone to send her birthday greetings, but it turned out Vinson himself came.

The time for my spring—the time for my happy life—has come!

If she could, she would have jumped in joy.

Those around her were casting envious looks at her.

Although she was just an adopted daughter, she seemed to have gotten Vinson's attention. She had

nothing but good days ahead of her.

Yet, in the next second...

“Who are you?”

Vinson's brows knitted as if he had just noticed Shandie. The impatience and confusion in his eyes were visible to everyone.

Vinson did not know the woman in front of him.

“Pft—” Some of the guests could not hold back their laughter.

“I thought Mr. Nightshire was here to wish Shandie a happy birthday, but it turns out he doesn't even know who she is.”

“Hahaha! This is hilarious. If I were her, I'd bury my whole body in the sands and never come back out.”

At that moment, Shandie's expression changed from delight to shock, then to embarrassment. In the end, she glared at the two laughing socialites.

At the end of the day, Cindy was the quickest to recover. She stepped forward and said, “Mr. Nightshire, we didn't know you'd be coming today. What an honor for us to have you come. It's my daughter's birthday today, so she thought you were here to wish her a happy birthday. It seems like you're here to discuss the business collaboration with Rick. He's upstairs, so please come in.”

The mocking gazes from the guests instantly disappeared.

It was also an honor to have Vinson go to his business partner's place to discuss a deal.

Yet, once again, in the next second...

“Do I know you?”

Cindy's gesture of invitation froze midair.

Mr. Nightshire... doesn't know me?

Once again, the guests were trying to hold themselves back from laughing.

Is the mother-and-daughter duo here for comedic purposes?

Cindy was internally cringing from the awkwardness.

If Vinson doesn't know me, then who's he here for?

All of a sudden, she recalled that the Arielle Moore that everyone looked down on had come out of Vinson's helicopter.

Arielle's appearance had been too sudden and shocking, as she was in such a disheveled state. For a long

moment, she simply could not think that Vinson and Arielle might be connected.

Does Arielle know Vinson?

Right as that thought emerged in her mind, she saw Vinson walking past her toward Arielle.

Chapter 3 Wait For Her To Make A Fool Of Herself

Vinson pressed his voice and said, "Are you sure that's your wish? I'll give you another chance."

Arielle knitted her brows and looked at him. "You want to grant me another wish? Do you think you're the magical Genie?"

Everyone, including Shandie and Cindy, looked at Vinson and Arielle in disbelief.

What's going on? Does this beggar know Vinson?

Vinson gazed into her eyes. When he was about to respond to her question, Henrick interrupted. "Nice to see you, Mr. Nightshire! Why didn't you tell me you're coming?"

All the guests' jaws dropped when Henrick greeted Vinson.

Cindy instantly closed her eyes as she dared not imagine what would happen next.

What on earth is happening?

Henrick finally noticed something was amiss and started looking around.

A sudden frown warped his face the moment he saw Arielle.

Henrick turned to Shandie and said, "Why did you invite a beggar to our birthday party? Get her out of here!"

Shandie froze for a moment even though deep in her heart she was pleased with his reaction. "Dad, she's..."

"Dad!" Arielle interrupted. "Don't you remember me? I'm Sannie!"

Sannie was Arielle's nickname.

"San..." Henrick raised his brows and widened his eyes in shock. "You're Arielle?"

"Yes, Dad. I'm Arielle," she walked up to him.

Arielle did not remember anything that had happened a decade ago, but she remembered that familiar face.

Upon hearing that, Henrick staggered.

Fear was written all over his face as he was afraid that his secret would be exposed.

Arielle knew what was going through his mind. In a steady voice, she continued, "We have not met for years. I miss you so much!"

Henrick was at a loss for words. He had no choice but to give her a pat on the shoulder. "Welcome back, honey, but... what happened to you and Mr. Nightshire? Why do the both of you look so messy?"

All the guests then started paying attention to Vinson's clothes. They were so drawn to the man himself that they did not notice how wet his clothes were.

Shandie cast a puzzled look at Arielle and Vinson.

Is there something going on between these two?

But she somehow dismissed her suspicion. Vinson falling in love with this country bumpkin? No way! Unless he's blind!

Upon seeing how awkward the atmosphere had become, Cindy stepped in and said, "I think it was Mr. Nightshire who brought Arielle home."

"Really?" Henrick seemed to be a little less disgusted by Arielle after hearing that.

Since she was still young and doesn't remember a thing from her childhood, I guess she doesn't exactly know what happened.

Imagine the benefits we can reap if we could use her to get closer to the Nightshires.

Henrick instantly plastered a smile to his face and looked at Vinson. "So you're Arielle's friend? Thanks for bringing her back to us. If you don't mind, would you like to stay back, clean up a little, and dine with us?"

Cindy added, "Oh, yes. We have extra pairs of clothes for our guests."

Vinson initially wanted to turn down their offer, but he could not stand wearing that sea-soaked clothes anymore.

Since Vinson did not reject his offer, Henrick extended his hand and showed him the direction to the guest room. He then whispered in Cindy's ear, "Clean Arielle up too."

Cindy and Henrick had been married for nearly a decade, so she understood what he wanted her to do.

It was clear that Henrick wanted to use Arielle to get in the Nightshires' good books.

Damn it, why is luck on Arielle's and not my daughter's side?

Maureen had been oppressing Cindy when she was still alive. I'll never allow her daughter to step all over mine!

Cindy nodded and played along. She then pulled Shandie aside and said, "Bring her to the bathroom. She's your older sister now, so be nice to her."

Shandie was able to read between the lines. She turned around and put on a smile. "Hey, Arielle. Let's go to the bathroom, shall we?"

Arielle did not believe that the mother-daughter duo would accept her into the family.

Yet, she hid her suspicion and responded with a grin. "Okay!"

They held hands and walked into the mansion.

Meanwhile, other guests continued to exchange whispers as they tried to figure out what Vinson was doing here.

No matter what the reason was, it was clear that from now on, they would have to show more respect to the Southalls.

At the guest room upstairs, Shandie said, "You can stay here temporarily while we tidy up your room, and you can also find all the toiletries here. I'll bring you a dress."

"All right. Thank you," Arielle responded.

"Oh, before I forget," Shandie turned around and asked, "Do you know how to use the water heater? We've fixed the temperature, so you don't have to adjust it anymore," she reminded kindly but somehow forgot to hide the disdain in her eyes.

Arielle seemingly did not notice her expression. She responded with a gentle smile. "Thanks."

Does she really think I don't know how to use the water heater?

"Great. I'll bring your dress over." Sandie smiled and walked out of the room. After closing the door, the smile on her face disappeared almost instantly.

She took out a handkerchief and cleaned her hands thoroughly before throwing it on the floor.

Her hand stinks, and her body stinks. Everything about her stinks!

Vinson must have brought her here by accident. I'm sure he wouldn't like a filthy woman like Arielle!

Meanwhile, Arielle was taking her own sweet time enjoying a nice warm bath in the bathroom.

Even she felt disgusted by how she looked and smelled after spending a week on the island.

As the warm water streamed down from her head to toes, she wiped off all the dirt on her face, revealing her fair complexion.

Her delicate face with fine features made her look like a dainty little fairy.

About ten minutes later, Shandie knocked on the door. "Arielle, can you please open the door? I want to pass you the dress. I've also placed a pair of heels near the door. You can wear them later."

"All right." Arielle opened the door slightly to retrieve the dress.

Once again, she did not see the disgust and mockery on Shandie's face.

The dress Shandie gave to Arielle was a couture dress by Gucci. It was more costly than the dress she was wearing now.

Though it took her some effort to get her hands on the dress, she could not wear it as it had a specific cut.

Its wearer must be slim and possess a supermodel-like physique. At the same time, the person needed to have a busty, curvaceous figure to be able to fit in the dress. Without an hourglass figure, any ordinary woman would look plump in it.

Since Shandie had broad shoulders but no collarbones, the dress would look unflattering on her. This was why she did not wear it for tonight's party.

Once that hideous woman comes out with that dress, I'm sure all the guests would laugh at her!

Chapter 4 Disgusting

There isn't any exquisite dress she could wear to hide the fact that she was just a foolish country bumpkin!

At the same time, Shandie was not afraid that Henrick would blame her for turning Arielle into a laughingstock. After all, she had given Arielle her most expensive dress. She only has herself to blame for not being able to fit into that dress!

On top of that, the heels Shandie prepared for Arielle were also four inches high.

I bet this country bumpkin had never worn any heels in her life. She might slip and fall in those stilettos when she walks downstairs later. Ha!

Shandie was so proud of her wit that she almost wanted to applaud herself.

She could not wait to see all the guests' reactions when they saw her in that dress.

I want everyone to know that this country bumpkin doesn't deserve to be my sister!

"Hey, Arielle. I'll be downstairs, okay?" Shandie said, "Dinner's about to start. Come down once you're ready!"

"Okay..." Arielle replied from the room.

Upon hearing her response, Shandie turned around and left.

Let's get the party started so that all the guests, especially Vinson, will have a chance to see how hideous she is!

Shandie hummed a cheerful tune as she made her way downstairs. She seemed to have forgotten how Vinson had embarrassed her earlier.

It's okay. People will forget about it soon. The only thing they'll remember is how ridiculous Arielle looks!

Back in the room, Arielle altered the dress a little so that it would fit her nicely.

Knowing that Shandie would embarrass her by giving her an ill-fitting dress, she found a sewing kit in the living hall and brought it into the room.

After putting it on and seeing how she looked in the mirror, she was pleased with the results.

The couture dress looked great on her tall and slender body, and her collarbones became even more apparent after spending a week on the island.

It fit her like a glove as if it was tailor-made.

Since when is Shandie this kind-hearted? Is she not as evil as I thought she was?

Arielle decided to trust her initial gut instinct. She removed the dress and examined it carefully once again.

After a five-minute inspection, she did not find anything fishy about the dress.

Hmm. That's strange.

Arielle put it on, looked into the mirror, and studied the cut of the dress closely.

She soon realized how challenging it was for someone to look great in this dress. The wearer must not only be tall and slender but must also have a nice bust size to accentuate the specific cut of the dress. Any woman with thick arms and large shoulders would not look graceful in it.

But if the wearer fulfilled all the criteria, she would look glorious in that dress.

A corner of Arielle's mouth quirked up.

So that has been Shandie's intention all along, huh? Too bad! I exercise regularly and have an ideal body shape that will look amazing in the dress. I can't wait to see the disappointment on her face later!

Initially, Arielle wanted to lay low as she did not want to become the center of attention of someone else's birthday party.

But what Shandie did made her realize she had no choice but to do something to stir up a hornet's nest in this family.

Once the seemingly peaceful family became chaotic, Arielle believed the truth would eventually surface.

After putting on the silver heels Shandie had prepared for her, she stepped out of the room.

The heels were so high that had she lost focus, she would fall.

Shandie decided to start the party early. She turned on all the lamps in the hall that had been extravagantly decorated.

All the guests held a glass of champagne in their hands while they listened to Shandie's speech.

Vinson, who had done sprucing himself up, stood among the crowd too.

He was neither interested in the birthday party nor the pretentious socialites around him. He only stayed back to bid Arielle, his savior, farewell.

Though he thought the girl he rescued was crude and unsophisticated, it was the right thing to do.

Shandie got up the stage and took a glance at Vinson. Upon realizing he was still around, she believed he had stayed for her.

Someone as esteemed as him must be too embarrassed to admit that he's interested in me. That's why he pretended he didn't know me. Oh well, I guess all powerful men are like that.

She decided to take the initiative to express her interest in Vinson.

She walked up to the mic and tried to make eye contact with Vinson. "Good evening, Mr. Nightshire, welcome to my birthday party. I'm so pleased to see you here."

A crease appeared between Vinson's brows when he heard that.

Who on earth is this ridiculous woman? Why does she act as if I know her very well?

And where is that girl? Why hasn't she come down yet?

A big part of Shandie's speech revolved around Vinson. It was as if she was trying hard to remind her other guests of his presence here.

At this point, a housekeeper walked up to her and whispered, "Ms. Moore is coming down now."

"Great! Turn on all the lights near the stairs!" I want everyone to turn their attention to the clown!

"Yes, Miss!" The housekeeper replied.

The stairs were lit up all of a sudden. Anyone who stood there would have been thrust into the limelight.

Can't wait for the clown to take center stage!

"Ladies and gentlemen, today is indeed a meaningful day for our family as my sister from the same father is finally home!" With enthusiasm, Shandie spoke into the mic once again. "Human traffickers kidnapped her ten years ago, and today, she finally returned from the village! I'm truly glad..."

Before Shandie could finish her sentence, all the guests turned their heads around and when they heard footsteps coming down from the stairs.

Shandie's face looked distorted as she tried to suppress her sarcastic smile. She raised her hand and pointed at the stairs. "Let us put our hands together to welcome my sister!"

All the guests did not know what was going on but played along by clapping their hands reluctantly.

Why should we clap our hands to welcome a girl from the village?

They only did what she told them to because they had to show the Southall family some respect since they were one of the prominent families in Jadeborough.

Otherwise, they would not even bother to look at a disheveled beggar!

Upon hearing how Shandie introduced her, Arielle raised her brows and smirked.

She can't wait for me to make a fool of myself, can she?

Arielle was not someone who took pride in her looks as she knew appearance was just a façade.

But under such circumstances, she wished to take this opportunity to show Shandie how she looked.

Chapter 5 A Stunning Beauty

Arielle lowered her head to hide her emotions, lifted up the dress, and walked down the stairs.

The guests first noticed a pair of slender legs clad in Jimmy Choo.

The light that hit on her further accentuated her dainty toes and silken ankles.

Just the sight of Arielle's legs had fueled the guests' imagination.

Shandie, too, was taken aback by how perfect her legs were.

She took a sidelong glance at some of the male guests and saw that they were all swooning over her.

She also noticed Vinson could not keep his eyes away from her legs.

Shandie began to panic and began to wonder if she had made the wrong move.

But soon, she managed to regain her composure. It's just a pair of legs, anyway. They'll probably throw up right away after seeing her face!

By the time Shandie turned her attention back to the stairs, Arielle was already walking down to the hall.

Go on. Walk faster! I can't wait for you to fall in those crazy heels! It'll definitely be quite a scene!

To Shandie's surprise, Arielle did not wobble at all. Instead, she was able to come down from the stairs in steady steps.

It was impossible for Arielle to fall because every step she made was so steady.

Disappointment was written all over Shandie's face. How did she do manage to walk in those heels?

Shandie did not know Arielle had had the experience of wearing a pair of six-inch heels when she stood in for a friend in a fashion show. To Arielle, these four-inch heels were just a piece of cake.

I remember how some drama series depicted villagers walking on those ridiculous stilts during

celebrations. Is that how Arielle learned to walk in heels?

At this point, Shandie could already see Arielle's slender waist as the latter continued to walk down the stairs.

How is this possible? She didn't look like this when she came down from the helicopter in her dirty and baggy clothes earlier!

Shandie was utterly jealous.

Fine! She might be skinny, but I bet she's an ugly b*tch!

Once again, Shandie convinced herself that Arielle would eventually shock everyone with her unsightly appearance. Come on! Speed up!

Just as she wished, Arielle picked up her pace.

After seeing her slender lower torso, Shandie's eyes were then drawn to her well-defined collarbones and neck.

Shandie's fear continued to grow, and without her realizing it, she was already clenching her fists.

The light finally shone on Arielle's face, revealing her well-defined and delicate features. Never in Shandie's life had she come across such a perfect face.

Her dark and sparkly eyes were exceptionally stunning, and they shone like a pair of exquisite diamonds.

No words could describe Arielle's flawless beauty.

Shandie's jaw dropped, and she could not believe her eyes.

That's... that's Arielle? Is that really her?

Are you kidding me?

The color instantly drained out of Shandie's pale face.

At the same time, a vortex of anger swirled inside her. Did I just give her a dress that flatters and made her shine like a star? Oh my God, what have I done?

Shandie was overwhelmed by all kinds of emotions. She felt she was about to burst from rage.

Her pallid face was now flushed with jealousy and hatred.

She did not even want to take another glance at Arielle as it would only make her feel bad about her looks.

Shandie observed the guests and noticed all of them were spellbound by Arielle's beauty.

Vinson, who had all this while been carrying a deadpan expression on his face, began to look at Arielle

differently.

Is that awestruck in his eyes?

Is an esteemed noble like Vinson Nightshire struck in awe over Arielle Moore's beauty?

Arielle's beauty had also dazed Cindy. She was aware that her sister, Maureen, was a stunning beauty but was still surprised to see how gorgeous her daughter was despite growing up in the countryside.

In fact, Arielle looked even prettier than her mother!

Damn it! She'll steal Shandie's thunder for sure!

Cindy immediately looked at Henrick.

Henrick was just as flabbergasted. Of course, he did not react like how the other gentlemen did. He was Arielle's father, after all.

But it was undeniable that there were sparkles in Henrick's eyes.

This old man must have thought he has found a long-lost gem.

No way. I'll not allow Arielle to enjoy the privileges we have in this family!

I have underestimated this girl. I have to get rid of her. I must get rid of her!

Arielle took a quick look at Shandie and realized this "beloved sister" of hers was so shocked that her face was all crumpled up.

She'll probably come to me and throw a punch at my face if there aren't guests around. That's what jealousy does to girls!

Arielle pretended she did not understand Shandie's expression and walked up to her with a smile. "Happy birthday, Shandie! Why do you look so unhappy? What's wrong?"

Shandie was disgusted by Arielle's silvery voice. To her, Arielle sounded just like the friction between a saw blade and a chalkboard.

Shandie tried her best to hide her emotions and plastered a smile on her face. "I'm fine."

"I'm glad to hear that, Shandie." Arielle grinned. "Oh, take a look at this dress you've lent me! It's a great fit!"

She intentionally emphasized the words "great fit".

Rage throbbed in Shandie like a heartbeat, and she was on the verge of losing her cool.

She's doing this on purpose!

"You..." Shandie opened her mouth but fainted before she could finish her sentence.

“Oh, no! Shandie!” Arielle did not expect Shandie to faint. She tried to grab her arms, but it was too late.

With a thunderous crash, Shandie collapsed to the ground.

Chapter 6 Marry Me

Her hair accessories were all out of place and her hair was disheveled. The woman, who was supposed to be in the spotlight, turned pale and was in a pathetic state.

Shannie!” Cindy exclaimed as she rushed on stage.

Even though she was extremely worried, Cindy did not forget about Arielle and used her shoulder to nudge Arielle aside.

Arielle was wearing heels that were four inches high and was standing on the edge of the makeshift stage.

The force of Cindy's push sent Arielle tumbling sideways as she lost her balance and was about to fall off the stage...

However, she reacted swiftly and protected her head with her hands.

That way, even if she had fallen down, it would lessen her chances of having a concussion.

However, to Arielle's surprise, she did not land on the ground. Instead, she felt a strong hand supporting her back steadily while another hand was wrapped around her waist as she was being carried off stage.

After Arielle stood firmly on the ground, she instinctively turned to look at the person who had saved her.

What greeted her was a cold and perfectly sculpted face. Frowning, the man said, “Why are you wearing such high heels? Are you planning to fall to your death?”

I didn't have a choice!

Arielle wanted to retort but controlled her mouth. After all, that man was just concerned about her safety.

If not for him, she might have already been badly injured from the fall.

Arielle swallowed her words and was about to thank him when Henrick rushed over.

“My darling daughter! Are you hurt? Dad was going to help you just now but Mr. Nightshire was a step ahead of me... Mr. Nightshire seems to treat you really well!” Henrick said meaningfully with a concerned expression.

On the other hand, Henrick did not even look at Shandie, who was being carried upstairs.

That was interesting to Arielle. Regarding her dad... she had almost believed that he was a loving dad

who doted on his daughter.

What Arielle could not understand was, why would her mother, who seemed so perfect on paper, choose to marry a man like Henrick?

Since she was back, she was determined to find out the reason, as she suspected there was more to that than meets the eye.

There had to be a secret that she did not know.

"I'm fine, dad. You should go upstairs and take a look at Shandie. I'm not sure what was going on but she suddenly fainted just now. Hopefully, it isn't anything serious that we should be concerned about."

Arielle's expression was soft and serene as she spoke, without a hint of the disgust she felt towards Henrick. She behaved exactly like a sensible and obedient daughter, which Henrick was extremely satisfied with.

The man could even be convinced that he must have saved the universe in his past life to have such a perfect daughter!

Henrick quickly replied, "You're right. I'll go and take a look at Shandie right away and shan't disturb you and Mr. Nightshire. Mr. Nightshire, please make yourself at home!"

A crease appeared between Vinson's brows when he heard that.

Make myself at home?

Do the Southalls really think that we are on the same level?

The man took a glance at Henrick but decided to spare him the ridicule.

After Henrick left, Vinson said, "I'm not here to attend the function. I only waited until now to make sure that there are really no wishes you want me to fulfill for you. Are there?"

Arielle was feeling somewhat helpless.

The truth was that before she returned to the country, she had only gathered detailed information on the Southalls and knew nothing about the economic situation in the country.

However, the Nighshire family had such a powerful influence in the country that one would have heard of them even without research.

Besides, from the guests and Henrick's reactions, it was apparent that Vinson was definitely a big shot in the country.

However, Arielle had only performed the duties expected of a medical personnel on the island and nothing more.

Except for the fact that... they had slept together.

But the woman would rather believe that nothing of that sort had happened.

In a determined manner, Arielle replied, "Vinson, I appreciate your kind offer, but there's really no need for that."

If there was really something she wanted, she was fully capable of getting it herself.

The woman had never depended on anyone else.

The crease between Vinson's brows deepened when he heard Arielle's words.

"Woman, do you know what you have just turned down?"

Vinson did not believe that there was anyone who would reject such an offer from him—any wish that he would grant. As such, it did not make sense to him that Arielle kept rejecting him.

Vinson wished he could check if there was something wrong with that woman's brain!

Looking at how serious Vinson was with regards to granting her that wish, for some unknown reason, Arielle couldn't help but feel amused by it.

She shrugged and replied, "Maybe you could enlighten me on what I have just turned down? Was it my Mr. Right? Oh, also, my name is not 'Woman'."

"What's your name then?"

"My name is... Sannie."

Sannie was Arielle's nickname given to her by her overseas adopted parents.

"Got it. You still haven't told me what your wish is."

Seeing how insistent the man was, Arielle joked, "If you really want to repay me, why don't you... marry me?"

Vinson was speechless after hearing Arielle's "wish" and had a complicated expression on his face.

Seeing how tensed the atmosphere had become, Arielle cleared her throat and tried to ease the tension. "I was just joking. Anyway, just forget it. There's really nothing I need."

"I can do that," Vinson suddenly spoke.

"What?" Arielle was stunned and asked in disbelief, "What can you do?"

Vinson regained his composure and with his usual cold expression, he replied, "I can grant you your wish, but I have to discuss it with my family first as it does not concern me alone."

"Hold on..." Arielle widened her eyes in shock and was at a loss for words. "You didn't take my words seriously right? I've already said that I was just joking!"

“Well, sometimes people disguise their true thoughts as jokes.”

“But I really meant it as a joke! I'm not interested in you at all!”

Vinson looked lost for a moment before he replied, “Why? Every girl in Jadeborough dreams of marrying me.”

“But that doesn't include me!”

“Anyway... I'll be giving you my answer later on. I'll get going first.”

Vinson left after he finished speaking, obviously not trusting that the woman was really just joking.

After Vinson left, his bodyguards, who were waiting at one corner, followed behind him.

“Hey! Stop right there! We haven't finished talking yet!” Arielle shouted behind Vinson as she chased after him. However, she was blocked by the man's bodyguards.

“Sorry, Miss, you can't go there!”

“But I've something important to tell him!”

However, the bodyguards did not allow her to pass. Apparently, without Vinson's permission, no one was allowed to get near him.

That was also the reason no one dared to approach Vinson, including the socialites who admired him and other men who want to make use of him to climb up the social ladder.

As such, Arielle had no choice but could only watch as Vinson left in his helicopter, feeling frustrated that the man seemed to have taken her joking statement seriously.

However, her worries dissipated soon after.

After all, no one in their right minds would take that seriously.

Repay someone by marrying her? Such ridiculous practices are non-existent in the modern era! It's just not possible that anyone would really consider that proposal seriously.

That guy must be just joking with me. I almost fell for it as he looked so serious! I guess that's just his unique style.

Arielle pouted at that thought, quite certain that she had been tricked by Vinson!

As such, she was no longer fretting over how she should explain to the man. Instead, she started wondering about the manor that used to belong to the Moores.

What actually happened that wiped out the Moores who got replaced by the Southalls?

Chapter 7 Unable To Forget Her

While Arielle was deep in thought, a few socialites approached her in a friendly manner.

“Ms. Moore, you look like a really nice person. Shall we be friends?”

“Ms. Moore, you have such a good figure. Do you mind sharing some tips to keep fit?”

“We should exchange contacts. Since you're now back to Jadeborough, we should keep in touch more often.”

Those women appeared to look really friendly and seemed to be truly interested in befriending Arielle. However, Arielle could easily see through their real intentions.

However, she pretended to be ignorant and nodded with an innocent expression. “Sure... I would love to make some friends here.”

While the socialites gathered around Arielle and chatting with her enthusiastically, Shandie, who was upstairs, finally woke up.

She saw Cindy, who was holding her hand tightly, with a worried expression, while Henrick looked distracted as if he was not concerned about her at all.

Shandie's resentment festered at once.

It's all because of that b*tch, Arielle, that my dad doesn't love me anymore!

Feeling aggrieved and frustrated, tears streamed down the woman's face. “Mom... “

“Darling, you've finally woken up! Don't cry, don't cry...” Cindy comforted her daughter and could feel her heart aching.

After seeing that Shandie was fine, Henrick told the two women that he was going to head back downstairs.

“There are still a lot of guests downstairs. I'll go and entertain them first,” the man said.

Before the mother-daughter pair could reply, Henrick had already turned around and left.

After the door was shut, Shandie could no longer contain her frustration and threw a pillow against the door.

“Mom! Just look at dad! I can't stand it anymore! I want Arielle to disappear right away!”

Cindy was also burning with anger. It was supposed to be her darling daughter's birthday party. However, Arielle had stolen all the attention instead.

Cindy took a deep inhale to calm herself down and tried to comfort her daughter instead, “Darling, let's not rush it first. If something bad happens to her right after she returned to the country, your dad would definitely suspect us. As you know, your dad is really chauvinistic and hates it when people don't listen to him. So, you have to be patient and don't act rashly yeah!”

“So what should we do now?” Shandie covered her face with her hands and started bawling her eyes out. “My birthday party is ruined! Everyone will start making fun of me. Those women's favorite activity is gossiping behind other people's backs!”

Just when Cindy was about to reply, Janet knocked and entered the room. Holding an envelope in her hand, the nanny exclaimed in delight, “I have great news! Mrs. Southall, Ms. Shandie, there's another joyous occasion to celebrate!”

Shandie was not interested in knowing what it was at all and looked away.

“There's absolutely nothing to celebrate, everything is so screwed up! Today is the worst day ever in my entire life!”

Not to mention that Arielle was the center of attention throughout the party, and Shandie had even fainted in front of everyone! Who knew what those socialites would gossip about?

Meanwhile, Cindy remained composed and asked Janet, “What's the good news about? What's that in your hands?”

Janet walked towards them excitedly and explained, “I have just received a document for Ms. Shandie. It has the emblem of the Crown Coffee Academy on it.”

“Really?” Cindy immediately took over the envelope from the nanny.

After opening the envelope and looking at its contents, she tugged on Shandie's hand excitedly and exclaimed, “Shannie, it's really good news! You've come in first in the Socialite Coffee Competition!”

The Socialite Coffee Competition was a competition organized by the top baristas around the world. The winner of the competition would become the ambassador of Soir Coffee, which belonged to the Nightshire Group.

To be able to take part in the competition was already not easy. Cindy was over the moon that her daughter had emerged as the winner of the competition! To her, it was indeed a great honor.

Sharing her mother's excitement, Shandie had also looked through the document a few times.

Apart from the usual congratulatory words, it was also stated on the document that she had to attend the awards ceremony held at the International Hotel at Norham the following week.

According to tradition, Vinson would also be at the awards ceremony to personally announce the new ambassador of Soir Coffee, as well as to give out the awards.

Shandie suddenly felt energized at that thought.

Cindy was smiling from ear to ear as she said, “I'm sure you've made an impression on Mr. Nightshire at the birthday party. When you turn up at the awards ceremony, I'm sure he will be surprised and see you in a different light.”

Shandie clenched the paper tightly and replied in excitement, "Exactly! Mr. Nightshire will definitely remember me well. After I officially become the ambassador, those gossiping socialites will naturally have to shut their mouths!"

Not only could she become the center of attention again, but Shandie was also hoping that she would leave an unforgettable impression on Vinson.

"It's a joyous occasion worthy of celebration indeed!"

Cindy removed the jade bangle on her wrist and gave it to Janet while saying, "This is your reward for bringing us such great news."

However, Janet refused the gift instinctively. "Mrs. Southall, I can't take this! All I did was receive the document... This bangle must be worth at least a few hundred thousand?"

Cindy forced the bangle back into the nanny's hands and said, "Well, this is worth way more than a few hundred thousand! Just take it to any random shop and they will quote a price of at least a million. Of course, other than this being your reward, I'll need your help in something else as well."

A hint of greed flashed across Janet's eyes. Tempted by the offer, she kept the bangle and asked, "What is it that I can help with? Just tell me, Mrs. Southall, I'll do my best!"

"Help me keep an eye on Arielle and report to me whenever you notice any unusual activities on her end!"

"Understood! I'll definitely keep a close watch on that hoyden from the countryside!"

There was a trace of sorrow in Cindy's eyes when she heard the nanny's words.

Is Arielle really from the countryside?

Cindy could not help but wonder as there was no news from the men she had sent and they were still not back yet.

Besides, the address provided by Arielle was at South Island, which was certainly not the countryside.

When Arielle stated her address, Cindy did not think much about it. She thought that Arielle might have gone to work at South Island as it had been so many years after all.

However, judging by the current circumstances, Cindy felt that she should investigate in detail what Arielle had been up to and where she had been to during these past ten years.

It did not seem possible for a girl who grew up in the countryside to have such a classy demeanor.

At that thought, Cindy could not help but remind her daughter, "Shannie, mom thinks that Arielle is not as simple as she seems. Before I come up with a plan, don't do anything rash yeah? We should lie low and avoid any complications for the time being."

"I know, I know."

Even though Shandie agreed, she did not think that her mom's concerns were warranted.

Apart from inheriting her mom's good looks, she's probably just a country bumpkin. How threatening can she be?

She can't possibly have also inherited her mom's intelligence?

To Shandie, intelligence and talents were a result of nurture and not nature.

Shandie was good at arts and had a good reputation in the socialite's circle. Besides, her achievements so far were attained after spending huge amounts of money on various classes and training.

As such, the woman found it ridiculous at the notion that she had to be cautious of a country bumpkin.

What happened was just the result of a one-off miscalculation on her part.

"Mom, I have an idea. I want to invite Arielle to attend the awards ceremony with me so that she would realize that we are worlds apart and feel bad about herself."

After giving it some thought, Cindy agreed that it might be a good idea.

"Sure. Let's ask both Arielle and your dad to go. That will make your dad see that you are the more valuable daughter between you and Arielle!"

The mother-daughter pair were getting excited at the thought of Arielle being utterly humiliated at the awards ceremony.

After all, looks alone would not be sufficient for a country bumpkin to gain a foothold in Jadeborough.

Chapter 8 A Venomous Snake

Shandie's mood improved greatly after knowing that she was the winner of the Socialite Coffee Competition. After tidying up her appearance, she went downstairs with Cindy again.

Once they reached downstairs, Shandie started looking all around for Vinson but the man was nowhere to be seen.

Just then, she saw another socialite whom she was on friendly terms with and asked, "Did you see Mr. Nightshire?"

"Mr. Nightshire has left long ago."

"Did he say anything before he left?" Shandie pressed on.

The socialite gave it some thought and replied, "He kept talking to your sister. There were bodyguards around him and I couldn't hear their conversation, but they did not look too happy."

"Did not look happy?" Shandie's face lit up and continued asking, "What do you mean by that?"

"I'm not sure. In the end, Mr. Nightshire just walked away after saying something. Your sister chased

after him, wanting to continue the conversation, but was stopped by his bodyguards.”

“That means she and Mr. Nightshire are not that close after all,” Shandie analyzed.

The socialite nodded and replied, “Well, of course, that's the case. No matter how pretty your sister is, she's still a country bumpkin. Given the status of the Nightshire family, how is it possible for a girl from the countryside to have any connections with them? Shannie, don't be discouraged yeah? You're definitely the only one in the whole of Jadeborough who is good enough for Mr. Nightshire!”

Happy to hear that, Shandie raised her brows and said, “I like you very much! I'll tell my dad to give your family more businesses.”

“That's wonderful! Thanks Shannie...”

While the two women were chatting away, Shandie suddenly heard a few other socialites mocking her from a distance away. “I can't believe Shandie even has the cheek to come downstairs! She even fainted after seeing how gorgeous her sister was... “

“Exactly! If I were her, I would hide at home for at least three years and only come out when everyone forgets about the incident!”

Fuming, Shandie was just about to argue with that group of women before she suddenly stopped in her tracks.

Nope! I shouldn't do that.

She knew that those people were opportunists who would sway towards whichever side would benefit them. They were not worth her energy at all.

If she argued with them, it would only hurt her image as a socialite.

Jadeborough would be holding a judging session for all the socialites in the city soon and every single action of theirs would be taken into account.

Currently, Shandie's priority was to deal with Arielle.

As long as she got Arielle out of her way, there would be absolutely no one else who could steal her limelight.

Those people would also naturally stop gossiping about her.

Just then, a plan began to form in Shandie's mind.

She needed to get rid of Arielle as soon as possible. She should not listen to her mom and wait any longer.

Who knew what Arielle would be up to if she delayed it further?

At night, after all the guests had left, the housekeepers tidied up the hall and went to bed.

Arielle's room had already been prepared for her. Henrick had allocated a room with an attached balcony to her. Such treatment also showed how much Henrick valued her.

Of course, Arielle was well aware that she was not what Henrick valued, but rather, the benefits that she could potentially bring to him.

At the same time, Arielle also noticed that one of the housekeepers had been spying on her since the second half of the function.

As such, even though Arielle had already washed up and was preparing to go to bed, she intended to continue staying alert.

After all, there was a possibility that anyone in the mansion could be plotting something against her.

Meanwhile, Shandie was tossing and turning restlessly while trying to think of a way to deal with Arielle.

Suddenly, an idea stuck her.

"Janet, please come to my room for a while."

Janet reached Shandie's room soon after receiving her call.

"Ms. Shandie, how can I help you?" The nanny asked once she entered the room.

After receiving that bangle from Cindy that was worth a million, Janet had pledged her loyalty to the mother-daughter pair. To her, Shandie was the only heiress of the house she would serve.

"Did you notice any unusual behavior from that b*tch?" Shandie asked.

Janet shook her head and replied, "After the banquet, Ms. Moore and Mr. Southall went into the study for a chat. When she came out, she was holding an ATM card. That should be her allowance given to her by Mr. Southall. She returned to her room to rest right after that. Other than asking for a glass of water, everything else seems normal."

Shandie was overwhelmed with jealousy after hearing the nanny's words.

Her mom was the only one who had been giving her allowance all along. She knew that Henrick was very petty by nature and was shocked that he had given Arielle an ATM card on the first day she returned!

That reinforced Shandie's decision to get rid of Arielle as soon as possible.

"Janet, there's something I need you to get for me. Place it in her room after you get it."

"What is that?"

"A venomous snake!"

Shandie had already thought it all out. Their manor was situated on a hilltop. Even if a snake crawled into Arielle's room in the middle of the night and bit her to death, the incident would most likely be classified

as an accident. There was no way others would find out that it was her who did it!

“V-venomous snake? You want her to die from a snake bite?”

Janet's hands were trembling in fear when she asked that. Even though she had actively participated in some of the mother-daughter pair's evil deeds, she had not caused anyone's death before.

“Is there a problem? Are you not willing to do it?”

“No, no. I will follow your instructions... I'm absolutely loyal to you and Mrs. Southall,” the nanny explained and continued, “However, I remembered that Mrs. Southall had told us to stay low for the time being...”

“Enough! I'm not listening to all those. My mom's a coward. She doesn't know that the longer we delay dealing with her, the more trouble she will bring us. The right way to do it is to strike first! If you're not willing to do it, there are others who would. However, Janet, if I'm not wrong, your youngest son is a gambling addict and in order to cover his losses, you've taken quite a few items from this house, am I right?”

Janet let out an incredulous gasp and looked at Shandie when she heard that.

She could hardly believe that Shandie was even resorting to blackmailing at such a young age!

Janet was well aware that the items which she had taken from the manor were all of high value. If she were caught, she would definitely be sentenced to jail for a long time...

Just then, Shandie spoke again, “But of course, Janet, since you have watched me grow up, I will not be so ruthless. As long as you do according to what I say, I will make sure no one else knows your secret. Besides, if you need money next time, you can just ask from me directly. So, Janet, what is your choice? Are you doing it?”

Janet closed her eyes slowly.

Do I really have a choice?

Arielle fell asleep eventually later into the night. However, she remained cautious so that she could be alerted to possible danger and wake up immediately when necessary.

In the middle of her sleep, she suddenly heard noises coming from the window.

Arielle awoke at once but she remained motionless and continued laying in her bed.

She could hear footsteps on her balcony. However, after a few seconds, the footsteps gradually became distant and eventually could no longer be heard.

She knew that someone had been on her balcony!

However, the trespasser did not enter her room and Arielle was not sure what they had done.

After staying in her bed for a while more and making sure that the trespasser wasn't returning, Arielle switched on the phone given to her by Henrick and used the light from the screen to illuminate her surroundings.

Indeed, the trespasser had already left.

However, she wondered what they could possibly have done for just such a short while. To spy on me?

No, it can't be that simple!

Chapter 9 Want Her Dead

Arielle decided to get up to look around. But instead of turning on the lights, she chose to rely on her phone's illumination as she searched every corner of the room.

Hiss!

All of a sudden, she heard something odd that sounded like someone was breathing rapidly.

It took a while, but Arielle managed to pinpoint the source of the sound. It came from her bed and was only about three feet away from her.

What the hell is it?

Arielle hurriedly increased the brightness on her phone screen and shone it in the direction of the sound.

To her horror, it was a cobra angrily hissing away.

The cobra had long set its sight on Arielle as it reared itself up and stared at her with a pair of piercing green eyes.

If she hadn't gotten up because the noise bothered her, Arielle would have fallen victim to the cobra's venomous bite.

All of a sudden, the cobra launched itself toward Arielle, aiming for her neck.

Thanks to her training, Arielle had lightning-fast reflexes and dodged the cobra's attack in the nick of time.

She then swiftly caught the cobra by its tail and flung it hard against the floor, knocking it out almost immediately.

Eager to cut off the head of the cobra, Arielle whipped out the scissors she had initially kept under her pillow as a precautionary measure.

However, before she could deal the finishing blow, Arielle was hit by a sudden realization. The snake was indeed a cobra, but it would never be found here in the North since its species lived in the South.

This cobra couldn't have accidentally crawled into my room. Someone must have put it here!

Arielle recalled the footsteps she had heard earlier and put two and two together. She finally understood the intention of the person who had stood briefly on her balcony before leaving.

These people want me dead!

The wheels in Arielle's head started turning as she thought about the possible perpetrators who could want to harm her.

Henrick thought very highly of her and was confident he could rely on her to climb the ranks in the Nightshires. He was only too eager to pamper her, so there was no way he could have done it.

The only possibilities left were Cindy and Shandie.

Then again, Cindy was a clever and collected person. It was unlikely that she'd carry out such a plan on the first night of Arielle's return. That meant that Shandie was the most likely perpetrator.

Arielle's eyes narrowed at the thought of that, her gaze turning colder under the illumination of the moon.

Shandie Southall, you've grossly overestimated yourself. If you want me dead, you're going to have to try a lot harder!

The clock had just struck one, and the night was even darker than before. Almost everyone in the villa had fallen into a deep slumber.

All except for Shandie.

Shandie was wide awake and waiting to receive the news of Arielle's death.

However, it had already been a few hours, yet there was still no good news for her.

After waiting around for so long, Shandie could no longer stand it. She dialed Janet's number and ordered her up to her room.

As soon as Janet stepped in, Shandie asked, "Did you not do as per my orders? If that's the case, you can wait for the police to come to you in the morning!"

Janet panicked and immediately explained, "You've misunderstood, Ms. Shandie! I did as you instructed and bought the most venomous snake I could find. I had already set it loose in her room two hours ago."

"Then why haven't I heard anything? If the snake had bitten her, she'd have woken up, screaming in pain. My room is so close to hers, yet I haven't heard any screams," Shandie replied with brows knitted together.

"That... I have no idea."

"Could it be that the snake doesn't bite?"

Janet shook her head. "No, the seller assured me that the snake he picked is very aggressive. He had

even starved the snake for days, so it's guaranteed to attack any living body.”

Shandie was even more puzzled now. “So, what could have happened?”

Janet scratched her head as she pondered. “The seller also said that the snake's venom is very potent. Without treatment, the victim will surely die. Perhaps the snake had already bitten her? But before she could react, the venom had taken effect, which means she's...”

“She's already dead!” Shandie interrupted with a glint in her eye.

“In that case, Ms. Shandie, should I find an excuse to enter her room so I can check?”

“No need,” Shandie replied with a wave of her hands. “We have to keep this on the down-low. You'd only incur suspicion if you were to go to her room. Besides, what if she gets sent to the hospital and they manage to revive her? I say we let the night pass, make sure she's dead, then collect her body the next day.”

Janet nodded in agreement. “You're right, Ms. Shandie. It'd be more prudent to wait till the morning. She'd be long gone by then, and not even the best doctor, or even God himself, would be able to bring her back to life.”

Shandie smiled gleefully, unable to contain the excitement bubbling inside of her. After a while, she removed her necklace and handed it to Janet.

“You've done well, and this necklace is your reward. Feel free to let me know if there's anything else you need in the future.”

“Thank you, Ms. Shandie!” Janet exclaimed. The initial fear she had from having murdered Arielle disappeared as soon as she saw the necklace.

I don't think what I've done counts as murder anyway. After all, it was the snake that killed her. My conscience can remain clear.

“All right then, you can go back now. I can finally have a good night's sleep tonight,” Shandie said as she shoed Janet out of her room.

In her head, Shandie had started to picture how she'd let things play out as soon as she woke up. She would pretend to stumble upon her sister's body, and when it came to the funeral, she'd cry a river of tears for all to see.

If my acting is convincing enough, people might even believe that I have empathy.

Shandie knew the practice would come in handy, especially when she had lofty ambitions to join the entertainment industry. With such stellar acting skills, gaining popularity and fans would be a piece of cake.

The more she thought about it, the happier Shandie got. The night was indeed shaping up to be one of the best nights ever for her.

Her smile never once left her face, even as she turned off the lights and crawled into bed.

Exhausted but happy, Shandie quickly found herself falling into a deep slumber. The cherry on top was the sweet dream that followed.

In her dream, Shandie was at a graduation ceremony where she caught the eye of Vinson. He was so taken in by her talent that he publicly announced he was going to marry her.

From then on, she steadily climbed the social ladder and lived happily ever after.

With a dream so beautiful, Shandie smiled in her sleep, blissfully unaware that someone had, at that moment, snuck onto her balcony.

As the night passed into the pre-dawn hours, there was nothing but peace and silence.

Everyone was still sound asleep when an ear-piercing scream suddenly broke the silence and rocked the villa.

Even the birds in the trees outside were startled by the noise and immediately flew away.

“What's going on?”

“What happened?”

“I don't know either. I only heard a scream, like a scream for help...”

“Hurry! I think it came from Ms. Shandie's room!”

The housekeepers had all been jolted awake and hurriedly made their way to Shandie's room.

Thankfully, Shandie hadn't locked her door, so the housekeepers opened it with ease and ran in.

To their horror, they found Shandie lying by her bed, convulsing wildly and foaming from her mouth. Her face had turned blue, and it didn't seem like she'd be able to hold on much longer.

Everyone was dumbfounded, with one asking the same question they all had, “What on earth is happening?”

A few seconds had passed before one of the housekeepers regained her composure. She was about to rush toward Shandie when another yelled, “Wait! Don't go over yet! There's a snake on the bed!”

Chapter 10 Slap

“What?”

Everyone looked in the direction the housekeeper had pointed at, only to see a snake glaring back and hissing at them.

The snake was unlike any the housekeepers had seen before. It had a big head, and it had flared its neck as if ready to attack.

Everyone was petrified and stumbled backward in a panic.

“Hurry! Run!” the housekeepers screamed as they collectively fled from the room.

Just then, Henrick and Cindy finally came to Shandie's room.

Upon seeing the snake still writhing and hissing away, Henrick too retreated, afraid of getting bitten by it.

Cindy's face had turned green as she shakily asked, “What's going on? Why is there a snake? What's everyone standing around for? Someone go kill it now!”

The housekeepers exchanged looks of apprehension, no one wanting to volunteer to take out the snake.

To let any of them deal with a venomous cobra would be akin to sending them to their deaths. Nobody was going to take that risk.

Janet, who had taken her time to come up, was now paralyzed by fear.

Isn't that the snake I released into Arielle's room? What is it doing here?

Even carrying the box with the cobra earlier was enough to turn Janet's legs into jelly. Now she was even more afraid to go any nearer because she knew how venomous the cobra was.

Janet knew Shandie would be dead if she weren't given the antivenom within the hour. Yet, that was something she had to keep to herself, no matter how much it pained her.

Seeing how no one was keen to take any action, Cindy tugged at Henrick and cried desperately, “Dear! Go kill that snake!”

Henrick, like the others, didn't dare go near the snake.

However, he also had his pride as the man of the house to consider.

If word got out that he couldn't save his daughter from a snake, he'd lose all the respect he had.

Damn these useless, cowardly housekeepers! And Cindy too! If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be in such a dilemma!

Henrick gritted his teeth and bit the bullet. Just as he was about to step forward with a broom in hand, a voice rang out in the hallway. “Dad, it's late at night. What's everyone doing here?”

Henrick turned around, only to see a sleepy-eyed Arielle in her pajamas. From the looks of it, the commotion had just woken her up.

“There's a snake in the room. Your sister fainted after being bitten by it. I have to go save her...” Henrick replied hesitantly.

“No way!” Arielle exclaimed, fully awake now. “Dad, this is too dangerous! You can't go in!”

Cindy's blood boiled after hearing those words. Without a second thought, she raised her hand and went

for Arielle's face.

Given her reflexes, that was a slap Arielle could have easily avoided, except she decided against it at the last second.

Slap! The sound was loud and crisp as the slap landed squarely on Arielle's cheek.

Arielle's fair and tender cheek instantly swelled up with Cindy's handprint imprinted clearly on it.

"You b*tch! You want to see your sister die, don't you? Get out of my sight, you vicious wench! Alfred! Throw her out now!" Cindy bellowed.

Cindy's request placed Alfred in a sticky situation. Whether he did as she instructed or not, he'd risk angering either Cindy or Henrick. Unsure of how to proceed, he turned to Henrick to observe his reaction.

Tears had started to stream down Arielle's face. Before Henrick could say anything, she cried out, "Dad, I'm only concerned about your safety. After all, you're the head of the family. What would we do if something happened to you? I've only just found you, Dad. I can't lose you!"

Arielle's words, so honest and sincere, cut Henrick to the heart.

She's right. As head of the family, everyone's survival depends on me! If something were to happen to me, they wouldn't have it easy either.

Of course, only my precious daughter knows me best and can empathize with me. To hell with everyone else!

With that thought, Henrick furrowed his brows and glared at Cindy.

"Why the hell did you hit her? She's only worried about my safety!" he scolded.

"But she clearly wants Shannie to..."

"Aunt Cindy!" Arielle suddenly interrupted. "If you want to think of me that way, I'll just have to prove with actions that I do not wish for any harm to come to my sister!"

Arielle then grabbed the broom from Henrick and walked toward the snake. There was hardly any fear or hesitation on her part.

Concerned, the housekeepers shouted, "Be careful, Ms. Arielle! That snake is venomous!"

Henrick's face scrunched up in worry. Compared to Shandie, Arielle was more precious to him, and he couldn't risk losing her.

"Arielle, don't go!" Henrick pleaded as he tried to stop her. However, Arielle brushed him off and continued walking toward the snake.

Seeing Arielle coming closer, the cobra got even more provoked and launched itself toward her.

Arielle pretended to struggle with dodging the snake's attack before swiftly turning around to hit the snake's tail with her broom.

It wasn't difficult to tell that the cobra had gotten even angrier, especially when its hiss had also become louder and more menacing.

Everyone else was so petrified by now that they could only stand and watch from a distance, leaving Arielle alone in the room to fight with the cobra.

In their eyes, Arielle was undoubtedly the bravest warrior of all warriors.

After a long and arduous fight, Arielle finally caught the snake, all while keeping up the pretense that she had done so with much difficulty.

"Get me a pair of scissors or a knife!"

"I have a knife here!" one of the bolder housekeepers shouted as she walked toward Arielle and handed over a paring knife.

Arielle held the knife against the snake's head and shut her eyes. Despite looking squeamish and terrified, she eventually got the deed done.

With its head cut off, the cobra finally stopped writhing.

"Darling, are you okay?" Henrick anxiously asked as he ran up to her.

Arielle was on the verge of tears, her nerves yet to settle. When she saw Henrick, she immediately leaped into his embrace.

"Dad! I'm so scared..."

"There, there. It's okay, darling. The snake's dead now!"

"As long as Dad is here, I won't be afraid. But, Dad, don't worry about me now. You have to send Shandie to the hospital first!" Arielle said with determination.

Henrick's heart melted upon those words.

Not only is my daughter brave, but she's also considerate! She truly is my greatest gift!

When he noticed the handprint still on Arielle's cheek, Henrick's face contorted in rage as he glowered at Cindy. "Look what you've done! She risked her life to protect Shandie! And you still accused her of wanting to harm Shandie?"

"I-I..." Cindy stuttered.

"If you can't even tell right from wrong, I don't think you're qualified to handle any household affairs. From now on, I'll handle all the finances myself!"

Cindy's face instantly drained of all color. "Dear, please, I only..."

Before she could explain herself, Henrick interrupted her, "Shut up! I don't want to hear anything else from you! I want you to stay in your room to reflect. And don't come out until you've understood what you've done wrong!"

Just then, one of the housekeepers ran in and reported, "Mr. Southall, the ambulance has arrived."

Chapter 11 Find The Killer

It was only then that Henrick remembered Shandie was still on the floor, twitching non-stop.

He ordered the housekeepers to carry Shandie downstairs while he prepared to take Arielle along to the hospital.

"Dear! Please take me with you!" Cindy pleaded, tears flowing uncontrollably. "Shannie is my... She's one that I watched growing up. I can't possibly stay at home!"

Despite how pitiful and terrified Cindy looked, Henrick steeled his heart against her. "No! I want you to reflect on yourself! Can someone take Mrs. Southall back to her room? No one is to let her out without my orders!"

One of the housekeepers immediately nodded and dragged a crying Cindy away while Arielle accompanied Henrick into the ambulance.

"Dad, why don't we let Aunt Cindy come along? I can see how close she is to Shandie. Leaving her at home will only worry her sick," Arielle softly pleaded.

Alas, Henrick refused to yield.

He turned his gaze toward Arielle and sighed deeply. "You silly child. Life overseas must have been tough, hasn't it?"

"Not at all. Life was good," Arielle replied and meant every word of it.

She had had a wonderful life abroad, and it couldn't have been any better.

However, Henrick thought his daughter was merely putting on a brave front and sighed again. "You're too naive. How will you survive here in Jadeborough? I'll have to slowly teach you the ways so you won't feel out of place."

"Thank you, Dad!"

"We're family. You don't have to thank me..."

Before long, the ambulance had arrived at the hospital.

Shandie was immediately wheeled into the emergency room because her heart had stopped beating.

Worried and anxious, Henrick and Arielle paced outside the emergency room as they waited.

Of course, Henrick was the more worried of the two. Both Arielle and Shandie were his biological daughters and were crucial to the future of his career. Now that something had happened to Shandie, Henrick was naturally scared to death.

After what felt like an eternity, the emergency room doors finally opened.

As soon as the doctor walked out, Henrick hurriedly went up to him. "Doctor, how's my daughter?"

"The patient may be out of danger but will still need to be monitored for a few more days. This snake venom is especially deadly. If you hadn't sent her here in time, no one would have been able to save her! But, I have to ask, how did she get bitten? This snake shouldn't have appeared in Jadeborough."

Henrick frowned in confusion as he asked, "What do you mean by that? We live in a manor on top of the hill. It's common for snakes to crawl in, isn't it?"

The doctor shook his head gravely. "This snake species belongs in the South, so you won't be able to find any in the wild here. It had to have come from there. I think this is something you might want to look into."

Henrick's face fell, finally understanding what the doctor meant. "Are you saying that this could have been an intentional hit?"

"That's very possible."

Henrick clenched his fists so hard that his fingernails bit into his palms. "Who? Who the hell wants to harm my daughter?"

His gaze instinctively fell on Arielle as a glint of suspicion flashed across his face.

Arielle didn't seem to have noticed her father's doubts and fumed with anger. "How dare they! Whoever brought the snake into our manor is pure evil! Dad, you have to get to the bottom of this. We can't let them get away with murder!"

Hearing those words from Arielle cleared whatever suspicion Henrick had of her.

He was sure that a girl who had only just arrived in Jadeborough couldn't have carried out such a plan. Besides, if Arielle had ulterior motives, she wouldn't have risked her life to fight the snake. I shouldn't have suspected her!

"Let's go home first, Arielle. I have to investigate this properly and find out who the culprit is!"

"You're right, Dad, we have to investigate it thoroughly! The snake bit Shandie today, but what if it bit you tomorrow? Please get it checked out as soon as possible and bring the perpetrator to justice!" Arielle said with a stern voice.

Henrick couldn't agree more. Once I find out who brought the snake in, I'm not going to let them off

easy!

After ordering a couple of housekeepers to stay and look after Shandie, Henrick and Arielle left the hospital for the manor, ready to get to the bottom of the matter.

Back at the manor, Cindy was busy checking her phone while being confined to her room. As soon as she got the message that Shandie was safe and sound, she heaved a sigh of relief.

However, that relief didn't last long. After being told that the release of the snake had been an attempt on Shandie's life, Cindy seethed with rage.

Just then, one of the housekeepers whispered outside the room, "Mrs. Southall, Mr. Southall is home!"

Cindy had had enough of being confined to her room. She desperately wanted to get out, but Henrick had locked the door and kept the key.

After pacing about in the room, she decided to throw caution to the wind and broke the door lock with an ornamental stone.

Henrick and Arielle had only just stepped into the house when they saw Cindy running down the stairs.

"Dear! It must be Arielle! That b*tch wants to get rid of Shannie, so she brought a snake back from the South! She's the only one who had come from there. It has to be her! We have to seek justice for Shannie!"

Arielle backed away with a pained expression on her face. "Aunt Cindy, because of your suspicions toward me, I had to risk my life to prove my innocence. I did all that to save Shandie, and yet, you still accuse me? Now you're even claiming that I brought the snake back?"

Cindy pointed angrily at Arielle and continued shouting, "It has to be you! I know it is! Stop pretending to be pitiful! Henrick, please, lock her up and begin the interrogation!"

"Enough!" Henrick bellowed. "You've already accused her once, can't you stop? I will get to the bottom of this and give you an answer! Now, get the hell back into your room and stay there! Can someone take her back to her room? And this time, make sure she doesn't escape again!"

Once again, the housekeepers nodded and forcefully led Cindy away.

"Dear, you have to trust me! You have to investigate thoroughly..."

As Arielle watched Cindy get dragged away, kicking and screaming, she was even more sure that Cindy had nothing to do with the cobra incident.

After all, if Cindy had a part in this nefarious plan, she wouldn't have implored Henrick to investigate thoroughly.

Perfect. Shandie's going to have to pay for her stupidity and viciousness!

Arielle turned to Henrick and said solemnly, "Dad, I noticed there are many surveillance cameras here, so

you should check out the footage. You should also send people to places where snakes can be bought and ask if any seller has sold any recently.”

Henrick listened intently and nodded in agreement. “Alfred, I want you to get started on it immediately. Also, I need you to check all the rooms in the manor, make sure there aren't any more snakes.”

Even though it was in the wee hours of the night, Henrick was raring to go. After the cobra scare, his priority was to make sure there wouldn't be any other surprises.

After a while, the housekeeper in charge of the surveillance cameras came running back with his report. “Mr. Southall, we've checked the footage. Last night at around eleven, the only person who had left the manor was Ms. Shandie's nanny, Janet.”

“Janet?” Henrick's eyes narrowed quizzically. “Bring her here immediately to be questioned!”

Chapter 12 You Reap What You Sow

Soon, Janet had been brought over to Henrick forcefully.

As soon as she saw Henrick, Janet started shouting in panic, “Mr. Southall, I'm innocent! I went out only because my useless son got into trouble again! I have nothing to do with the cobra incident! Please, I've always been loyal to the Southalls!”

Janet's pleas fell on deaf ears as Henrick ordered for her to be tied up.

Without any hesitation, the housekeepers did as instructed.

Still ignoring Janet's cries, Henrick walked around the hall and found a leather belt left behind by a guest.

“Whip her!” he ordered as he handed the belt to the housekeeper.

Despite his initial hesitation, the housekeeper eventually carried out Henrick's orders.

Snap! With just one whip, Janet's skin instantly split open. The pain was so unbearable she started screaming and writhing on the floor.

Arielle watched silently by the side, her gaze cold and unfeeling.

It looks like the person who had snuck onto my balcony to release the snake is this old hag.

Arielle was furious and felt no pity toward Janet. It's only fair that she pays the price for this.

After ten lashings, Janet was drenched in a cold sweat, unable to make a sound anymore.

Despite the pain she was in, she still refused to tell the truth. She'd be charged with murder if she did, and she couldn't let that happen.

The housekeeper who had been whipping Janet couldn't tolerate any more and spoke up. “Mr. Southall, we can't hit her anymore. At her age, if we keep this up, she's not going to be able to take it.”

Henrick understood the concern, and likewise, he didn't want any mishaps before he got to the bottom of the matter.

Before he could give the order to stop hitting Janet, another housekeeper returned from his investigation.

"Mr. Southall, I've asked around the markets in the southern district. One of the sellers said he sold someone a venomous snake at midnight."

Janet froze when she heard that, and the subtle change in her demeanor didn't go unnoticed by the eagle-eyed Arielle. "Was it Janet who bought the snake?" Arielle asked.

The housekeeper shook his head. "I didn't ask, but I did bring the seller here. He'd also be able to confirm if the snake did come from him."

"Very good," Henrick replied. "Bring the man in!"

Soon, the snake seller walked in cautiously and greeted Henrick.

After getting someone to bring the severed snake over, Henrick asked, "Is this the snake you sold?"

It only took one glance before the seller nodded. "Yes, sir, this is the one. Some of the scales on its tail had come off during the transaction. That's why I recognized it immediately."

Henrick scoffed and walked over to Janet, who hadn't dared to look up since the mention of the snake seller. He brought her to the seller and once again asked, "Did this old lady buy the snake from you?"

The snake seller had no idea what was going on, only that he shouldn't lie to a man like Henrick. He took one good look at Janet and nodded. "Yes, that's her. She said she wanted to try making some exotic snake wine, so I recommended her the most venomous snake I have."

With a witness and evidence, the truth was finally out.

Henrick pushed Janet away angrily and asked coldly, "So? What do you have to say for yourself now?"

Janet sat on the floor shaking like a leaf. And yet, she remained silent.

"Janet, look what this has come to," Arielle chimed in. "It's time to come clean about everything. Before the police get here, tell us why you want to harm Shandie! You watched her grow up, and yet you want to see her dead? Don't you think that's too cruel of you?"

"No, I didn't. Why would I want to harm Ms. Shandie? She's like a daughter to me!"

"Then who exactly did you want to harm? Is it my father?" Arielle continued. "Did someone else put you up to this to frame me? Or are you going to say I was the one who got you to buy the snake?"

Janet was taken aback by that last sentence.

She had wanted to insist that Arielle was the mastermind behind all this. However, now that Arielle had

brought it up herself, it'd be foolish to accuse her.

Just as Janet was hesitating about telling the truth, Arielle turned to her father and said, "Dad, call the police. Someone as vicious as her deserves to spend the rest of her life behind bars!"

Janet immediately looked up at Arielle and pleaded, "No! Please don't! Both my sons still need me."

"Then tell us the truth. If you do, Dad might still let you off on account of your long service."

Janet had given up completely. She knew what she had to do.

If she told the truth, there was still a possibility that she could get away with it. If she didn't, she'd be serving jail time for Shandie.

No matter what Cindy and Shandie had done for her, Janet wasn't going to sacrifice that much for them.

"I'll tell you everything..." Janet cried out. "It was Ms. Shandie who instructed me to do it! She ordered me to buy the snake and release it into Ms. Arielle's room. But I don't know how the snake ended up being in Ms. Shandie's room..."

Arielle immediately piped up, "My room is very near Shannie's, so the snake could have crawled over from the balcony. I just never expected Shannie to hate me this much. I thought she had always treated me well..."

Arielle's voice trailed off as she stared into the distance in shock and disbelief.

"You old scumbag! And that little b*tch! You reap what you sow!" Henrick hollered.

He let out a deep sigh and took a few deep breaths to calm himself down. "Bring Cindy down. Let her see for herself how her good daughter had turned out!"

Henrick had spent so much money and effort on Shandie, only to have her turn out to be so cold and vicious. What have I done to deserve this?

"Dad, don't get too mad," Arielle comforted. "I showed up so suddenly that Shandie probably couldn't accept it. But I believe she will accept me in time..."

"You're still speaking up for her even after all this? Your kindness is going to be your downfall! If things had gone her way, you'd have been the one bitten by the snake!"

Arielle shook her head sadly. "Everyone makes mistakes. Shandie is still young. There's much for her to learn..."

Before Arielle could go on, Cindy had been brought down from her room.

After Janet recounted the entire incident again, Cindy's face instantly paled.

How could I have given birth to such a foolish daughter?

Cindy had reminded Shandie over and over again how the time wasn't right to strike at Arielle. Not only did her words fall on deaf ears, but Shandie had even gone to extremes behind her back.

"I'm sorry, dear. I've failed to teach our daughter. When she comes back, I'll give her a good lecture! Arielle, I'm so sorry. I've let you down and even accused you. But, please, forgive your sister. I'll get her to be a good sister to you."

Seeing how Cindy had taken the initiative to apologize to Arielle, Henrick calmed down a little.

"Fine. I don't want to air our dirty laundry in public, so this matter ends here," Henrick said before looking at Janet. "As for this old hag, she has to go. Get someone to send her to the farm, and make sure she doesn't come into contact with anyone!"

With that, Janet was taken away, never to step into the Southall residence again.

Before long, Henrick received a call from the hospital.

"Mr. Southall, Ms. Shandie has woken up, but she doesn't want to stay in the hospital. She wants to come home as soon as possible."

"She can do whatever she wants!" Henrick replied harshly.

I still can't believe Shandie can be so vicious. If she has the gall to harm Arielle now, she might do the same to me in the future! How did my daughter turn out to be such a monster?

Shandie had signed the discharge papers at the hospital and couldn't wait to return to the Southalls.

Even though her initial plan had gone awry, she was going to use it to her advantage by telling Henrick the snake had been placed in her room by Arielle.

She was going to tell everyone that Arielle wanted her dead!

Chapter 13 To Be A Decent Human Being

This little b*tch is so evil. Dad's definitely going to get rid of her. I'll be the one and only Ms. Southall.

"Drive faster! I want to get home immediately!" Shandie urged the driver.

Soon, they arrived at the Southall residence.

The moment she stepped out of the car, she noticed that the lights in the mansion were turned on. It was as though no one was asleep.

Everyone must be worried about me. That's why everyone's still awake.

I'm still the precious princess of the Southalls.

With those thoughts in mind, Shandie gleefully headed toward the door.

She could imagine the way Henrick and Cindy would ask about her wellbeing once she stepped into the

house.

When that happened, she would then point out to them that Arielle was most likely the one to get the snake to hurt her. That way, Arielle would have to pack her things and leave immediately.

Wait. Arielle didn't even bring anything with her. She can just leave immediately!

The more she thought about it, the more excited she became, and the quicker she walked.

Just the mere thought of Arielle getting chased away made her giddy. At that moment, she had almost forgotten about the aches and discomfort she felt after getting poisoned and injured.

“Mom!”

Finally, Shandie entered the living room.

The lights in the living room were all turned on, and the housekeepers were all silently standing in there. The atmosphere of the room was tense as if something bad had happened.

That was not the scene she had imagined.

“Mom, what happened?” Shandie asked Cindy, who was silent like the others.

Cindy then walked toward her, anger burning bright in her eyes.

However, she could not find it in herself to berate Shandie after seeing her daughter's deathlike pallor. Instead, she asked, “What happened? Why are you in such a rush to leave the hospital?”

Right then, Shandie recalled what she had wanted to tell them. Ignoring the odd tension, she uttered, “Mom, I'm fine. I'm back because I have something important to tell Dad.”

A foreboding sense crept into Cindy's heart, and she swiftly stopped her. “Let's talk the next morning. It's been an eventful day. We'll talk when you recover.”

“No, Mom, I have to tell him now!”

Who knows if I'll get another opportunity to get rid of Arielle like this next time?

I can't wait anymore!

Shandie felt that her mother was too hesitant. At a time like this, she should be decisive.

Thus, she pushed away Cindy and headed toward Henrick.

“Dad, I have something to tell you.”

As she spoke, she glanced at Arielle with arrogant, gloating eyes.

Spotting the look in Shandie's eyes, Arielle cocked her head, her interest piqued.

“What is it?” Henrick questioned with a glacial expression.

If Shandie admits to her mistake, I might forgive her this time.

Yet...

Shandie said, “Dad, Arielle was the one to let that venomous snake into my room! She doesn't like me, so she's trying to kill me. She's a wicked woman. Dad, you mustn't keep her around!

Henrick froze. He had not expected Shandie to blame Arielle for it despite being the culprit.

How did I raise such a vicious and stupid daughter?

Hearing his silence, Shandie thought it was because he was reluctant to get rid of Arielle. Thus, she added, “Dad, you can't give in now. She failed to kill me this time, so she'll definitely try it again. If she has the guts to hurt me, she'll have the courage to hurt you too!”

At that, Henrick narrowed his eyes.

Then, unable to hold himself back anymore, he raised his hand and slapped Shandie.

Slap!

The loud sound reverberated in the living room.

It was much harder than the one Cindy had dealt with Shandie. Almost immediately, Shandie spat a mouthful of blood out.

Along with her blood was a white tooth.

Henrick's slap had made her lose a tooth.

At that moment, Shandie was dumbfounded.

What... is going on?

Shouldn't Dad be slapping Arielle? Why is he hitting me?

Shandie covered her cheek in disbelief.

Just as she was about to ask why Henrick had hit her, Cindy ran over and grabbed Shandie. “Don't say anything. Let's go up first.”

“No! Why do I have to go upstairs?”

Shandie was frustrated.

Breaking free from Cindy's grasp, she spun around and questioned, “Dad, why are you hitting me? The one who's in the wrong is clearly Arielle. Why are you standing on her side and hit me, the victim?”

“Victim? Is that who you think you are?” Rage boiling, the rest of Henrick's words died in his throat; he could only pant in anger.

“Am I not? I was hospitalized. The doctor even said that if I were to be there a few minutes later, I wouldn't be breathing right now!” Recalling it now still sent shudders down her spine.

Arielle's lips curled, but the smile soon dropped. Taking a step forward, she muttered, “Shandie, why are you still refusing to speak the truth even at a time like this? Must you anger our father and give him a heart attack?”

Shandie furrowed her brows in disdain. “When did you have the right to speak in this house?”

At that, Arielle lifted a brow. “Shandie, it seems like you have no idea everyone knows how depraved you are.”

A tinge of guilt seeping into her heart, Shandie clenched her fists and stammered, “W-What do you mean?”

Arielle smiled. “You really don't know anything, do you? Janet has told us everything. You've asked her to buy a venomous snake to murder me, but the snake slithered into your room from the balcony. Shandie, it's time to lay on the bed you make.”

Upon hearing that, Shandie's eyes widened almost comically.

Janet... betrayed me?

Abruptly, she recalled the odd tension in the air and the way Cindy kept trying to stop her from talking when she entered the house.

So they all know the truth now?

No wonder. No wonder there was a taunting look in Arielle's eyes.

No wonder Dad slapped me.

Shandie panicked. She tugged Cindy's sleeve and mumbled, “Mom...”

At the end of the day, Shandie was still Cindy's daughter, and she could not help but feel upset about the situation. Pulling the younger woman into her arms, she whispered, “Stay quiet and follow me upstairs.”

Shandie finally heeded her words. She no longer made a sound as she followed her mother up the stairs.

“Stand right there!” Henrick demanded. “From now on, you're grounded. You're not allowed to leave your room for a month. I'll be hiring a teacher from an etiquette school to teach you how to be a decent human being.”

Shandie took a step back in shock.

Henrick Southall was the one to decide everything in the family. Without his love and trust, Shandie

might be the one to be kicked out of the family.

With that thought in mind, the colors drained from Shandie's already pale face.

It was then she regretted doing what she did, but there was no point crying over spilled milk.

Chapter 14 Billion

Arielle watched Cindy bring Shandie upstairs with unsympathetic eyes. In fact, there was a solemn look in them.

It seems like the slap from Cindy is worth it.

However, this will be the last time Cindy will be allowed to hit me.

Once Shandie was gone, Henrick walked toward Arielle and said, "Sannie. I remember you used to be called Sannie, right?"

Arielle nodded. Her nickname had sounded like Shandie's name, so she did not like it much anymore.

"What about this, Sannie?"

Henrick sighed before pursing his lips. Then, he said, "I've spoiled Shandie. It's partially my fault that she has done such a horrible thing. We should've called the cops, but she's still your younger sister, and we're a family. Moreover, you're fine, and she has reaped what she sowed. Let's forget about this, all right? However, I'll still punish her and compensate you. Is that okay?"

Arielle balled her hands into fists under the sleeves of her pajamas.

What do you mean by "you're fine?"

If I was really bitten by the snake, Shandie would have made sure no one knows about it.

By the time the sun rises, my body would have gone cold. Yet, you're asking me to pretend as if nothing has happened? You're only grounding her for a month?

At that very moment, Arielle knew what kind of person Henrick was.

As long as it was nothing threatening to him, he would not easily abandon Shandie.

After all, the more daughters he had, the more chances for him to cling to a wealthier family.

Henrick was a man who would do anything to get what he wanted.

Arielle could not wrap her head around why her mother had fallen in love with someone like him.

Arielle was thoroughly disappointed. It did not matter to her that Henrick was her biological father anymore.

However, she showed none of that on her face. Instead, she plastered a sweet smile on her face and

nodded. "I can't decide, so, Dad, I'll just heed your words. Shandie's still young, so I won't blame her for anything. I'll pretend nothing happened, and I'll still be a good sister to her. I just hope Shandie won't mind too."

"Don't worry. I'll ask her to forget about this as well. No one will mention this anymore. I'm sure the two of you will be able to get along fine."

"Of course." Arielle smiled, her dimples emerging on both sides of her face.

Anyone who looked at her would assume that she was innocent and sensible.

Henrick sighed in relief, feeling glad about the situation.

Not only was this daughter of his pretty and forgiving, but she was also obedient.

She's much more obedient than I thought she would be. That's good. She'll be easy to control.

"It's getting late. I'm sure you must have been shocked today too. Rest earlier. Tell me what you need, and I'll do my best to fulfill your requests." Henrick was in a good mood. For once, the miser was not stingy, for he handed Arielle another card.

"There's one million in this. In total, you'll have two million, including the other million I've given to you earlier. You can spend it on anything you like. Once you've spent it all, you can come and ask for more. You shouldn't live as you used to in the village. You've got to act like the daughter of the Southalls. I'll ask Alfred to bring you to shop for clothes tomorrow."

"Thank you, Dad! You're the best!"

Ego stroked, the upset from Shandie's incident dissipated from Henrick's mind. He then hummed a tune as he went upstairs.

The moment Arielle returned to her room, the sweet smile on her face disappeared.

Even if Shandie's stupid, she has Cindy watching out for her. On the other hand, I have no one.

I only have myself.

Balling her fists, Arielle slumped onto the bed, staring at the ceiling with lifeless eyes.

Maybe there's nothing bad with being alone.

Moreover, it's not that I'm alone. Dad and Mom overseas are very nice to me. And my brother, too. He's dependent on me.

He must miss me a lot while I'm gone.

To make sure they were not involved in the mess, Arielle had to temporarily cut ties with them.

Yet, when she thought about her brother, the corners of her lips curled upward.

Right then, her phone rang.

When she picked up the call, she realized it was from a friend from Moranta.

“Sannie, how are you?” the other person on the line had an accent.

“I’m quite fine, Vance. To be honest, I’m back at my old family home in the country. Although I’ve encountered some minor matters, it’s been resolved now. Why are you calling, by the way?”

Arielle was speaking in fluent Ustranasian, as if she was born and raised overseas.

Sounding a little embarrassed, the other person continued, “You know I’ve been working on an island project, but the ending part of the project costs a lot, and I’m having issues with the funds. I was wondering if you could lend me some money, or perhaps invest into my project.”

Arielle answered, “I’m quite interested in your island project. What about this? How much do you need? I’d be happy to join you.”

“That’s great. We’d be even better with you joining us. I’ll be needing a billion. Are you all right with that?”

“No problem,” came Arielle’s swift response.

Upon ending the call, Arielle contacted her overseas personal financial advisor.

She then used her computer to transfer a billion into Vance’s account before asking her lawyer to sign the contract for the investment.

When she was done, she then glanced at the two cards Henrick had given to her and barked out a laugh. The next thing she did was delete the history of the transactions on the computer.

On the other end.

After Cindy brought Shandie back to her room, she finally cursed at her out loud.

“You idiot! How many times have I told you not to do anything rash before figuring out Arielle completely? Why won’t you ever listen to me?”

As tears streamed down Shandie’s face, she sobbed out, “I-I didn’t think things would turn out this way. But, Mom, you have to believe in me. Arielle must have been the one to let the snake bite me! I’ve clearly asked Janet to let the snake into her room.”

“I know!” Cindy gritted out.

At the harsh tone, Shandie froze. Then, she muttered, confused, “Why aren’t you helping me explain the situation if you know the truth? Arielle’s a wicked person.”

Cindy sighed. “I’ve taught you so many things, but until now, you haven’t been able to read the room. Your father clearly trusts her now. Moreover, you were the one to put the snake into her room first. How

are you going to explain that? Nothing you say will help you; you'll only make your father even angrier.”

“Then what do I do? I can't be slandered in this way! Have you seen how the housekeepers look at me? Everyone in the manor thinks I deserved this.”

At that, Cindy was silent for a moment. “It seems like Arielle is much more complex and difficult to figure out than I thought. I'll try my best to find out her history. Before that, you'll have to get along with her. Even if it's tough, you have to do it well. Pretend to admit to your mistakes and live in harmony with her for now. That way, your father will be happy. You know he hates family conflicts and disobedient people.”

“But... I've been grounded. I can't go out.”

“Silly girl, have you forgotten about how you're going to get your certificate in a week's time? Be patient for a week. Once you become a star at the ceremony, everyone will forget about this matter.”

“All right. I'll work hard with practicing this week. I'll definitely stun everyone at the ceremony.”

“I'm glad you can think this way.”

In a blink of an eye, five days went by.

Chapter 15 Star Of The Award Ceremony

Neither Shandie nor Cindy did anything. Likewise, Cindy no longer begged Henrick to shorten Shandie's punishment. Cindy even took increasingly good care of Arielle, which Henrick approved.

That incident with the venomous snake was explicitly banned. No one was allowed to utter a single word about it. Hence, the manor's inhabitants resumed their following days as if nothing happened.

Likewise, Henrick returned to his and Cindy's bedroom after five days of sleeping in the study.

By the sixth day, Henrick headed out with a bounce in his step; even Cindy had a glowing and cheery expression. It wasn't hard to guess what happened the night before.

Things became so amiable that Cindy offered an entire drumstick to Arielle during dinnertime.

At this, a delighted smile crept onto Arielle's face. She responded in a sweet tone, “Thank you, Aunt Cindy.”

“Call me Mom from now on.” Cindy beamed back as she continued, “I'll look after you as my own child. Just like Shannie. She's not my biological daughter, but I've always cared for her like she is. So, don't hesitate to ask me if you ever need anything.”

Arielle scoffed inwardly. Not your biological daughter? I don't believe it one bit.

Shandie is only a couple of months younger than me, which means that Henrick had an affair with Cindy during my mother's pregnancy.

Henrick obviously won't allow this scandal to leak.

Cindy must be up to something. Why else would she suddenly suggest that I call her "Mom"?

Still, she's got some nerve asking me to call her that.

I only have two mothers: my biological mom and my adoptive mother. No one else is worthy of that title.

Skeptical, Arielle looked at Henrick for help. "Dad. I-it's too soon. I'm not used to calling her that..."

She flashed a pair of puppy-dog eyes at him. Her eyes rounded and became slightly moist as she put on a pitiful act.

If this were an award show, Arielle believed that she would have won the title of Most Convincing Actress.

True enough, Henrick's features softened after glancing over at her.

No man could resist Arielle's puppy dog eyes, not even her own dad.

Henrick cleared his throat and consoled, "That's quite alright. Take it slow and go at your own pace. There's no need to rush into calling her Mom."

"Thanks, Dad." Arielle then cast an apologetic look whilst saying, "And I'm really sorry, Aunt Cindy. I'm sure I'll eventually ease into your new title."

Anger welled in Cindy's chest. This wretched brat! How dare she refuse to call me Mom!

Even so, Cindy was better at tamping down her emotions compared to Shandie, so she feigned a kind smile. "I understand that this must be difficult for you. Please don't apologize. I should be sorry for pressuring you. Don't worry, dear, take all the time you need to adjust. After all, we've got the rest of our lives as a family for you to do so."

"Thanks, Aunt Cindy."

"It's nothing, child."

The two played out a harmonious pretense as if they were happily getting along at the dining table.

Henrick's spirits instantly improved; the exhaustion he felt from work faded away at the sight of this merry atmosphere.

As the saying goes, a family in harmony will prosper in everything; I'm content as long as they don't pull any more stunts against one another.

Just as Henrick thought so, Cindy parted her lips to speak. "There's something I have to tell you, dear. It's about Shannie."

The mention of Shandie's name ruined Henrick's mood. He slammed his spoon onto the table and

thundered, "Let me guess, you're trying to put in a good word for that brat? Considering how grave her actions were, I've been more than merciful by grounding her for only a month. So forget it! Don't bother defending her."

Arielle threw a suspicious glance at the woman. How uncharacteristic of her to blurt out. She's normally good at gauging situations before speaking. Surely she knows that this isn't the best time to defend Shandie?

What exactly is Cindy playing at?

At that moment, Cindy's face scrunched up in distress. "I'm not pleading on behalf of her, dear. It's about something else. I'm just not sure if I should tell you..."

Henrick's frown lifted slightly at this. Regardless, he still growled at a dangerously low pitch, "What's the matter?"

Cindy sighed dramatically, then pulled out a sheet of paper from her pocket. She stated, "I just received a notice letter today. Remember the Crown Coffee Academy's competition? Well, Shannie won it. She's the champion."

"What!" Henrick exclaimed.

He obviously knew about the competition. Its winner would obtain a brand ambassadorship contract with Soir Coffee—the internationally renowned coffee franchise.

Henrick was overjoyed. He snatched the letter from Cindy and went through its contents thoroughly. When he noticed that Vinson would be an honorary guest, greed flitted across his eyes.

He clutched the letter with trembling hands whilst his voice quaked with excitement. "That's great news. Well, why didn't you tell me earlier? The award ceremony is tomorrow afternoon!"

At once, Cindy's shoulders slumped exaggeratedly in dejection. She explained, "It's because of that rash mistake that Shannie made. When I told her about the ceremony earlier today, she wasn't keen on attending. She wanted to stay home and reflect on her actions."

"That's absurd!" Henrick protested.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to mingle with influential figures! How can she not go?

Has she lost her mind?

When he finally broke out of his thoughts, he happened to meet Arielle's innocent gaze. It was as though she saw right through to his calculative schemes.

Flustered, he cleared his throat and said, "Shandie seems like she's realized her mistakes and is taking responsibility for her actions now. So I don't think we have to ground her any longer. What do you think, Sannie?"

Arielle sneered internally. That's my biological dad for you. Truly a loving dad, isn't he?

Nevertheless, Arielle wasn't one to reveal her true feelings. She flashed a gentle smile and spoke in a considerate manner, "Dad, I meant to tell you a while ago; it will do no good to ground her for as long as a month. We should let her off early. Besides, she's not a kid anymore. She'll know how to discern right from wrong after making a mistake once. Plus, you can always enforce stricter punishments if she regresses to the making the same mistakes."

Cindy, who sat opposite them, gnawed so hard on her lips that she almost drew blood.

Arielle, that brat! When she puts it that way, it means Henrick will never let Shandie off the hook if she messes up again!

It was just as Cindy predicted. Henrick's brows knitted taut as he declared, "That's right, there won't be a next time. Cindy! Pass the message to her: she'll be disowned from this manor if she pulls another stunt again!"

Anger sizzled in Cindy's chest, yet she had to play along. "I'll relay it to her, don't worry. She knows that she's done wrong. Sannie, thank you so much for forgiving her."

Arielle looked at her with a smug smile. "We're all family, after all. And compromise is a crucial part of being a family, even if Shandie wanted to kill me."

Cindy's smile tensed. She couldn't handle Arielle's not-so-subtle jabs any longer. Shooting onto her feet, she then announced, "I'll go pack my things for the journey to Norham tomorrow."

With that, she paced over to the stairs but quickly stopped halfway. Then she extended a friendly offer, "Tomorrow's a weekend, dear. You won't be going to the office. Why don't you and Sannie come along?"

Henrick immediately nodded as he thought about Arielle and Vinson's relationship. "Absolutely! Could you pack Sannie's things as well? And get her some new clothes for the trip to Norham, if you can."

"Yes, dear." Cindy finally let out a victorious smile.

Hmph! Just wait and see, Arielle. My daughter will become the star of the award ceremony. Then, you'll be left standing in her shadow.

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