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Once Cindy left, Henrick's gaze darted over to Arielle. "Sannie. Tell me the truth, how did you meet Vinson? Are you two close?"

Henrick wanted to ask this long ago. However, he worried that Arielle would think he was using her as a stepping stone. Hence, he refrained from asking up till now.

At this rate, it seems like she's too naive to question my motives.

I may as well cut to the chase and ask whatever I want to know. This silly girl will tell me anyway.

As expected, Arielle answered him without a sliver of hesitation. "I don't actually know him that well. I encountered him by chance when my ship sank at sea. He was injured at the time, so I treated his wounds with whatever herbs I could find. It was later when his subordinates came for him that I got rescued and brought back here."

What he didn't know was that Arielle had summarized the story. She omitted the details where they undressed and huddled up for warmth, as well as the truth that she saved Vinson's life.

Hearing her story, Henrick felt both disappointed yet pleased.

He was disappointed because he had hoped for some emotional entanglement between Arielle

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and Vinson, but there were none.

At the same time, he was buzzing with joy that Arielle had aided *the* Vinson Nightshire. Because it meant Vinson owed Arielle's family a favor for her kindness.

Imagine that. A favor from the Nightshires! That experience alone is worth its weight in gold!

"Wonderful! That's great, Sannie! As expected of my daughter!" Henrick chortled.

He stared endearingly at her as if he was looking at the world's rarest gem.

Arielle put on an innocent and unknowing expression. She flashed a quick appreciative smile at this compliment, then resumed with her dinner.

The next day had arrived at the speed of light. All four of them departed Jadeborough and headed towards Norham.

For the journey, Arielle and Shandie sat beside one another in the backseat.

Shandie wore the Crown Coffee Academy's yellow team uniform. A soft and glamorous makeup was applied on her face, befitting her aristocratic status.

In comparison, Cindy had prepared minimalistic clothing for Arielle. She also hadn't hired

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anyone to do Arielle's makeup. Thus, Arielle was completely bare-faced and had her hair up in a simple bun; she looked like an ordinary high school student.

Even without any form of embellishment, Arielle was irresistible to the eye. Her presence glowed with angelic purity, almost like a blooming orchid whose beauty was so rare that people could only appreciate from afar.

She was the definition of true beauty. Not the kind that was sought after by many men, but a true beauty that made men reflect on whether they were worthy of being by her side.

Shandie initially felt like the brightest star in the sky, knowing that her makeup was worth six figures. Yet, that confidence plummeted after seeing Arielle's simplistic beauty. Shandie now felt like a miserable side character while Arielle was the lead of the show.

Outshined, Shandie clenched her fists so hard that her claw-like nails nearly cut into her palms.

Ahem! Cindy cleared her throat from the front passenger seat.

At this, Shandie broke from her daze and refocused on the present.

So what if Arielle is pretty? She's nothing but a pretty face that men keep around like toys. I'm

the real deal with both the body and looks; the kind of woman that men want to make their wives.

Shandie suppressed her anger. She cracked a stiff smile and said, "Arielle, I haven't had the chance to apologize. So now that we're both here, I just wanted to say I'm sorry. I shouldn't have thrown that childish tantrum and put you in jeopardy. Please forgive me."

Arielle knew that Cindy must have scripted this whole apology, and Shandie was merely acting accordingly.

Childish tantrum?

Humph. What kind of child harbors murderous intentions during a tantrum?

Regardless, Arielle cast a gentle gaze as she held Shandie's hand. Then she soothed in a honeyed voice, "It's alright, Shandie. There's no need to dwell on the past or apologize anymore. We're family, after all."

Caught in Arielle's tight grip, Shandie bit down her repulse. She desperately wanted to fling Arielle's vermin-like hand away but couldn't.

Hence, she resisted and continued to smile stiffly.

Meanwhile, Henrick smiled contentedly at his daughters' reconciliation from the driver's seat.

They went on their merry way to the airport. When they arrived, Henrick led his family through the check-in process and to the departure halls. Arielle trailed behind them throughout this.

According to the regulations, first-class passengers were given priority to board the plane before others.

So the Southalls had to wait in line as Henrick had bought economy-class tickets for the flight from Jadeborough to Norham.

When it was finally their turn to board the flight, Henrick suddenly halted and looked in the other direction. He exclaimed, "Mr. Nightshire?"

Shandie hadn't expected to see Vinson at the airport either. Now that it had happened, Shandie batted her lashes and cleared her throat shyly to attract Vinson's attention.

Vinson's assistant was reporting the progress of their recent project. Now that Henrick had rudely interrupted, Vinson shot a glare in Henrick's direction.

Seeing how Henrick and Shandie threw themselves at him, Vinson's glare turned murderously cold yet confused at the same time. He growled, "Do I know you?"

Henrick brushed his nose awkwardly at this. He was startled that Vinson didn't recognize him.

Shandie, on the other hand, clenched her jaw in irritation.

We've already met plenty of times. How can Vinson not know who I am? Is he really that forgetful?

In reality, Vinson had an excellent memory. He was simply selective about whom and what he felt was worthy of remembering.

Thus, he wouldn't waste even a drop of his time or mental effort on people whom he deemed unimportant.

As for Arielle, she had noticed Vinson as well but didn't intend to greet him.

We're just passing by. There's no need to engage in pointless conversation.

Henrick frowned at how Arielle was letting this golden opportunity slip. Nevertheless, he quickly introduced himself, "I'm Henrick Southall. Surely you remember me, Mr. Nightshire? You attended my daughter's birthday party a few days ago."

Vinson tried to recall. However, he had attended four birthday parties this week, so he couldn't quite figure out who this man named Henrick was.

Sensing the confusion on Vinson's face, Henrick briskly shoved Shandie aside while

yanking Arielle forward. He then reminded, "Seems like you have forgotten about me, Mr. Nightshire. But perhaps you remember my daughter?"

Arielle was now visible to Vinson. He hadn't seen her earlier, no thanks to Cindy, who questionably stood in front of Arielle and blocked her.

Vinson's eyes roamed over Arielle's appearance. Unlike the other three, who wore fancier clothing, Arielle seemed like a regular student. It was as if they were from different class groups.

Vinson raised a brow, curious to see Arielle's reactions. He feigned confusion as he asked, "Apologies, I'm not very good with remembering faces. May I ask who you are, miss?"

Arielle blinked. *Did he forget who I am?*

Despite her initial shock, Arielle wasn't at all sad that he didn't recall her.

She responded placidly, "That's normal. You must see too many faces every day to remember mine. We won't be in your way now. Dad, let's go."

Now that she had excused their family, Henrick couldn't prolong the conversation with Vinson. Without a choice, Henrick begrudgingly complied with Arielle's request.

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What rubbish was that? How can my eldest daughter be so inept at seducing men? How stupid can she be?

Henrick grew more frustrated at the thought of this. It was evident in the way he quickly stormed over to the boarding gate.

Cindy and Shandie were pleased with how things turned out. They stood straighter with delight as they watched Henrick leave.

What perfect timing for Arielle to ruin things. I doubt Henrick will continue to spoil her rotten after this.

Thinking this, Cindy paced in Henrick's direction.

Shandie and Arielle quickly followed suit. At that moment, Shandie's mood soared sky-high. It wasn't long before a mischievous thought flitted through her mind.

Walking alongside Arielle, Shandie mocked in a quiet voice, "Oh dear. I assumed that something special was going on between you and Mr. Nightshire, but I guess not. I can't believe that he didn't even recognize you. Well, don't be sad. It's normal for busy men like Mr. Nightshire to forget a country bumpkin like you."

Shandie made sure to emphasize the words: country bumpkin. She stared excitedly at Arielle, hoping to see her face blow up with

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anger.

Nothing would please her more than to see Arielle red-faced with helpless frustration.



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Yet, Arielle remained emotionless as if she weren't the least bothered.

And that was the truth; she truly couldn't care less about being forgotten by Vinson.

She knew that the Southalls wanted connections with the Nightshires because of their elite social status. Despite this, that prestige wasn't what she wanted or needed.

So, it didn't matter whether Vinson remembered her at all.

Shandie scoffed when Arielle didn't react to her.

Liar! Keep acting like you don't care then, Arielle. I bet that deep down, you're crying like a big baby who's hurt about the whole thing.

Serves you right!

Vinson would never be interested in a plain country bumpkin like you!

Little did the four Southalls know, Vinson's eyes had burned holes in the back of Arielle's head for quite some time.

He stayed that way until Arielle boarded her flight. Only then did he let out an intrigued chuckle.

Beside him, the assistant's eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

What's going on?

Mr. Nightshire never laugh. He's usually unsmiling, and some would even say intimidatingly distant. I can't believe he's chuckling to himself now.

Also, this isn't sneering laughter. No. It's more genuine, like an amused laugh that comes from deep within one's chest.

It's been ages since I last saw Mr. Nightshire laugh like this.

While the assistant was deep in thought, Vinson's voice suddenly sounded. He asked, "Did you notice a difference between her and the others?"

There were three women in that family. Which is he referring to?

The assistant had worked alongside Vinson for several years now, so he knew better than to ask Vinson outright. He pondered for a while before recalling that Arielle had dressed differently from the others.

Then he answered hesitantly, "Indeed. The other three have donned well-known designer brands while that young lady's clothes... Well, they seem like some randomly bought clothes from an unknown stall."

Even with such a sharp observation, Vinson still

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shook his head.

The assistant instantly stiffened in shock. *Did I guess wrongly? Was Mr. Nightshire not referring to that lady?*

Just as the assistant felt flustered, Vinson's voice spoke up once again. "I'm not talking about her clothes."

The assistant heaved a sigh of relief since he had at least guessed correctly.

Still, he frowned in confusion. "If it's not the clothes, then what is it?"

Within seconds, Vinson's facial expression returned to its usual indifference. "It's nothing. Let's resume."

Then the assistant dropped the topic altogether. He didn't dare to probe any further, so he continued with his report.

On the plane, the four Southalls sat in the same row. Henrick had been in a foul mood ever since Arielle's stunt. Because of this, he ordered Arielle to carry out several mindless tasks throughout the flight. She was told to move their luggage to the overhead cabin, then tidy their coats and put them into the luggage, followed by taking out their chargers and so on...

Everyone else on the plane assumed that she

was merely their housekeeper.

Arielle wasn't bothered with doing all those tasks. All she did was comply with Henrick's request without any complaints.

Eventually, Henrick couldn't hold it in anymore. He boomed icily, "Enough! Get over here."

Once Arielle sat down next to Henrick, he interrogated with a sharp tone, "I thought you said that you helped Mr. Nightshire. So why didn't he remember you at all?"

Arielle shook her head candidly. "I only did him a small favor then, so it's normal that he doesn't remember me."

"Then you should have..." Henrick faltered as he looked at Arielle. *I guess having a naive daughter isn't always a beneficial thing.*

If only it were Shandie who knew Vinson... she would have immediately caught on to my intentions and tried to get closer to him.

Henrick then huffed begrudgingly, "Forget it. We'll talk about this later. There's still much you have to learn."

"Okay," Arielle nodded obediently. With eyes rounded and lips parted, she feigned a child-like innocence as if she didn't know what she had done wrong.

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Right then, the flight attendant approached them. "Good day, Mr. Southhall. According to your flight mileage, we're able to give you a free upgrade to first-class."

Henrick deliberately chose economy-class seats not only out of stinginess but also because he knew that they could get a free upgrade.

Pleased, Henrick beamed as he bounced onto his feet. "Thank you. Please lead the way."

Shandie and Cindy stood as well.

The flight attendant soon noticed Arielle, who was the last to stand. Then he immediately explained, "My apologies, sir. You only have enough mileage for three free upgrades. Here, have a look."

"Three?" Henrick's temples started to ache. *Then who will go with us to first-class? Shandie or Arielle?*

Seeing that Henrick was conflicted, Cindy chimed in, "I'm sure you've realized that Arielle isn't very quick-witted. She won't be of much help at all. Plus, we're heading to Shandie's awards ceremony. So why don't we give the seat to Shandie this once, hmm?"

Henrick's face turned grim before he finally agreed.

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He promptly turned to Arielle and explained in a matter-of-fact tone, "I can't help that there are only three seats. We'll still see each other once the plane lands. Ergo, it's not all that different."

Arielle stared intensely at Henrick.

Disappointment shrouded in her chest, but she couldn't show it on her face. She refused to let Cindy and Shandie feel triumphant.

Thus, Arielle pressed her lips into a tight smile and said, "It's fine."

"Sorry about this," Henrick uttered while averting her gaze. He then pranced away with Cindy and Shandie for the first-class cabin.

Shandie intentionally slowed her steps. Once their parents were a good distance away, she taunted in a low voice, "It seems like Dad loves me more. You'll have to work harder to catch up now! I'll be off to the first-class cabin, so you rest up here in economy-class, hmm? There's actually not much difference between the two cabins, save for the bigger seats and better service in mine. But hey, don't let that get to you."

Arielle gritted her teeth at how Shandie was gloating around like some proud peacock.

Face twisting into a mocking smile, Arielle motioned towards the first-class cabin. She then provoked, "You'd better hurry over. Dad

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might change his mind and let me go with them if you keep dilly-dallying."

Shandie panicked upon seeing Arielle's maliciously gleaming eyes.

Then she grabbed her bag and shot straight for first-class, fearing that Arielle would somehow end up in the superior cabin instead.

Soon after, all three Southalls plopped down comfortably in their first-class seats. Shandie had even ordered a glass of the cabin's complimentary red wine.

In economy-class.

Arielle could finally shut her eyes to rest now that Henrick and the others were gone.

Her chest sank with sorrow at that moment. She was human, after all; she felt sadness like every other person on this planet. However, she was terrified of revealing her emotions and vulnerabilities as anyone could use them against her. So she concealed everything, hiding away under the guise of an unbothered girl.

Fake it till you make it, she reminded herself.

Just as she got comfortable in her newfound peace, a voice suddenly sounded beside her.

"Excuse me... Are you here by yourself, miss?"

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May I sit next to you?"

A man had politely asked Arielle that question. He watched her with a set of wide eyes as his throat bobbed, gulping anxiously.

Arielle met his gaze with an icy expression. She turned him down, "Sorry, my family will be back soon. These are their seats."

The man didn't need to be told twice. He turned to leave while letting out a wistful sigh. *Who am I kidding? I'm out of her league. There's no way I can get a gorgeous girl like her.*

Although, I wonder what kind of man will be able to reel in such a great catch...

Not long after the man left, someone else approached Arielle. "Excuse me, miss..."

Arielle's head flung upward with a pinched expression. Just as she took in the person's face, her mouth fell open.

Isn't that person who was reporting stuff to Vinson at the airport?

The man proceeded to introduce himself, "I'm Mr. Nightshire's assistant. He would like to invite you over to his private jet. I've already taken the liberty to clarify things with the attendants on your current flight, so please come with me."

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Arielle hesitated for a moment, then promptly nodded when she thought about the man who approached her earlier.

There were many people on this flight, and she wasn't keen on being interrupted again.

"Alright," said Arielle.

"Follow me then. This way, please." The man gestured towards ahead.

They needed to pass through the first-class cabin to exit the aircraft.

As they walked by, Shandie immediately took notice.



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She shot onto her feet and shrieked, "Arielle, what's the meaning of this? Can't you suck it up this once instead of vying against me for the first-class seat? Need I remind you the reason we're on this flight? It's because we're going to my awards ceremony! Mine!"

Arielle spat coldly, "Relax. I'm not here for your precious first-class seat."

Shandie knitted her brows before interrogating loudly, "Then why are you here?"

Right then, Henrick had overheard the commotion and joined in with a thunderous voice. "What do you think you're doing, Arielle? And here I thought you were a sweet and obedient girl. Was that all just a façade?"

Arielle was about to respond, but the man beat her to it. He interjected with a sharp gaze, "I'm afraid you're all mistaken. Ms. Moore is not here for the first-class cabin. Rather, I'm escorting her to that private jet, the one next to this aircraft."

"What!" Shandie bellowed as her eyes shot over to the window in disbelief.

What she saw next clouded her thoughts with resentment. It was a luxurious private jet with an extremely sleek and polished exterior. Across the jet's body was an elegantly written word with fine penmanship—Nightshire.

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That's the Nightshire family's private jet!

Shandie whipped around to stare daggers at Arielle, jealousy flitting across her dark eyes.

Even Cindy, who had been silently observing, balled her fists after seeing the Nightshires' jet.

Henrick soon snapped back to his senses and quickly asked the man, "Sir. I'm Sannie's father, and our family is traveling together on this flight. If it's alright, can the rest of us go as well?"

The man maintained a neutral expression as he pointed out, "Apologies, Mr. Nightshire has only extended his invitation to Ms. Moore alone. Not to mention, the three of you got a cabin upgrade but chose to abandon Ms. Moore in economy-class by herself. Is that how a family should be with one another?"

Regret festered in Henrick like a tumor.

Damn it! I should have upgraded Arielle's seat to first-class too. If I had done that, then maybe I would be lounging in Vinson's private jet at this very moment...

The man couldn't care less about what Henrick thought. He swiftly turned on his heel and bowed respectfully to Arielle. "This way, Ms. Moore."

Arielle nodded, then cast an icy stare at

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Henrick. "I'll meet you guys at the airport."

With that, Arielle held her head high like royalty and disregarded Shandie completely. She followed closely behind the man as they exited the airplane.

Shandie's and Cindy's faces twisted with jealousy at the luxurious private jet that parked beside them.

Shortly after, Arielle boarded the jet. The first thing she saw was Vinson, whose head was lowered to focus on reading a contract.

The assistant spoke up, "Mr. Nightshire. I've brought Ms. Moore over."

Vinson hummed a simple *Mm-hmm* in reply without even looking up.

Arielle felt uneasy. Not knowing how to respond or what to do, she tensed with her feet planted on the ground.

Thankfully, the assistant came to her rescue. He advised, "Mr. Nightshire is currently busy. You may make yourself comfortable in the cabin that's inside."

"Okay." Arielle nodded. She then cautiously walked past Vinson and entered the cabin.

Once inside, Arielle's jaw dropped in shock. She exclaimed, "Rain?"

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The blonde man lifted his gaze and gawked, equally as surprised. "San? I never thought I'd see you here. Have you returned to this country?"

"Mm-hmm, I just got back some time ago."

Rain cheerily patted at the seat beside his, beckoning her over. "Come sit with me."

Arielle obliged. Once she sat down, questions about her current life came out of Rain's mouth with burgeoning excitement. He also invited, "I'm heading to Norham for the academy's award ceremony. If there's nothing on your schedule, would you like to attend as well since you are one of our academy's founders?"

Rain was the principal of the Crown Coffee Academy and a world-renowned coffee sommelier.

Back then, Arielle and Rain were the ones who came up with as well as established the Crown Coffee Academy.

They wanted to create a place where coffee enthusiasts could expand their knowledge on coffee-making.

What they never expected was for the academy to develop into a well-known spot for socialites. Hence, Rain created a restriction whereby only ten students may receive the expert level barista certificate. This way, only the elite,

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talented, and worthy coffee connoisseurs could receive these certificates.

Arielle's lips curled into a devious smile when she heard that Rain was on his way to Shandie's award ceremony. She stated, "What a coincidence. I'm heading there myself..."

Rain beamed at once. "That's wonderful! The students will be ecstatic to meet the academy's founders. They'll be over the moon!"

"No." Arielle shook her head and requested, "I was hoping that you'll keep my identity confidential."

Rain's vibrant smile fell glum in an instant. He then inquired, "Why?"

"I have some personal reasons."

"Alright then, I'll be more than pleased as long as you attend the event."

Arielle flashed a faint smile but didn't say anymore.

Two hours of flight later, the jet gradually made its descent into Norham airport.

Vinson had already left by the time Arielle disembarked from the jet.

Unbothered, she exchanged goodbyes with Rain and went to look for the other three

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Southalls.

That's strange. Didn't we agree to meet up after getting off our flights? So why aren't Henrick and the others here at the arrival hall as promised?

Airelle held her ground in silence. She knew that Henrick wouldn't abandon her because she was still of value to him. So she waited.

Right then and there, a bodyguard dressed in a coal-black suit strode towards Arielle's direction. Beside him was a man that she would recognize anywhere—Vinson.

Despite standing next to a tall bodyguard, Vinson still towered with his superior stature.

Some passersby curiously paid attention to Vinson. Their faces either turned a bashful shade of red or gawked as they vividly babbled about Vinson's appearance.

"That guy's incredibly handsome! Do you think he's a celebrity?"

"No way. If he is, then he should have blown up all over the internet by now. Even those influencers can't compare to his good looks."

Compared to the eagerly buzzing crowd, Arielle's skewed frown was an underwhelming reaction.

She glanced briefly at him before focusing on

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her phone and dialing Henrick's number.

The call went through, yet Henrick had instantly rejected. Arielle knew that this must have been Shandie's doing.

Although Cindy is a wicked woman, she wouldn't be so stupid to use such sloppy tactics against me.

It seems like Shandie is trying to get on my nerves by keeping me in the dark about their whereabouts. Game on, then. I'll patiently wait here for them.

Noticing a lounge nearby, Arielle headed over for some refreshments.

What she hadn't realized was that she walked right into the lion's den; just as she entered, the lounge door flung shut behind her.

Arielle instinctively turned around but was shoved to the wall by a towering man. His powerfully built body pressed against hers, trapping her.



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Immediately, Arielle prepared to lash out. However, her movements came to a screeching halt when she caught sight of the man's face.

"Mr. Nightshire? Y-you..." She stared at him and blinked in utter disbelief.

Vinson interjected before Arielle could finish speaking. "Why did you pretend not to recognize me?"

Arielle looked at Vinson with a gaze full of puzzlement. On the other hand, Vinson's stare resembled the look of a ferocious and enraged lion.

Is he angry because I didn't greet him when I walked past him earlier? Doesn't that mean he recognized me? Then why did he act like we were strangers in the airport? He even ignored me when we were on the plane!

"You were the one who ignored me first! Besides, how would I dare disturb such a busy man like you?" Arielle replied in bafflement.

What on earth is he thinking? He clearly recognized me. Yet, he pretended like he didn't. He should have continued the act. Why is he cornering and berating me for doing the same thing?

Arielle tried to push Vinson away to put some distance between them. "No matter what... you should let me go first. People will

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misunderstand if they see us like this."

Arielle's words seemed to go in one ear and out the other. Vinson's gaze remained fixated intently on hers.

He found that her bright eyes were like pools of clear water. At the same time, her gaze was as deep as the bottomless ocean.

There wasn't a trace of fear nor flattery present in her brilliant gaze. The only thing Vinson saw was suspicion. She treated him like he was an ordinary person.

An ordinary person... How long has it been since someone treated me this way?

"Are you angry because I couldn't recognize you at the airport?"

"I did not get angry," Arielle said and jutted out her bottom lip. *Why would I get mad?*

Vinson fell silent after he heard her answer.

He could not express the complicated feelings within his heart.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Vinson released her from his grasps and stepped back all of a sudden. "Why did you come to Norham? Are you following me because I haven't given you an answer?"

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"Following you? I'm not as free as you think; I certainly don't have the time to be following you. Besides, what answer do I need from you?" Arielle replied with a confused look.

All of a sudden, she recalled the last words Vinson had said during the birthday dinner.

Her eyes widened as round as saucers as she crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Are you still thinking about the joke I made the other day?"

"As I said, the truth is hidden within your joke. You don't have to worry; I'm still thinking about it."

"Haha!" Arielle burst out in laughter as she tilted her head. "I wish I could peer inside that head of yours to find out if your brain is made out of cotton!"

"That is something I should say to you instead," Vinson replied impassively.

"What on earth are you talking about..." Right at that moment, Arielle's phone began to ring.

The moment she answered the call, Henrick's voice echoed through the phone. "Arielle, where did you go? Why did you keep your sister waiting for so long?"

Waiting? I haven't even seen Shandie's shadow.

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Immediately, Arielle acted as if she had been wronged. "This was the first time I took the plane... I must admit that I was totally clueless. Dad, I'm sorry. Where are you? I'll try to look for you," Arielle murmured softly.

"Look for the airport staff. We are at the information desk."

"Alright, I'll head over right now!" The moment Arielle ended the call, her image of a prim and proper woman vanished into thin air.

"My Dad is looking for me. I'll take my leave first. Also, let me repeat myself. I was joking the other day! You can forget about it!" Arielle called out as she waved her phone in Vinson's direction.

With that, Arielle turned on her heel to leave.

She only managed to take two steps before Vinson's suspicious tone echoed behind her. "What is your relationship with your family?"

His question left her confused. "We are just family." Arielle whirled around to face him again.

"Yet, I think that they don't see you like family," Vinson replied in a monotonous voice.

"Why do you say that?"

"My assistant told me that you were the only

one who did not sit in the first-class cabin when we boarded the plane.”

“Oh, that's what you are referring to; I have a complicated relationship with my family. Ten years ago, I went missing. Now that we are reunited, these trivial issues don't matter to me anymore.” Arielle grinned as she said this.

Vinson opened his mouth as if to say something. A look of hesitancy painted his face. In the end, he handed her a gold business card. “Call me if you need anything. You can also bring this card to the Nightshire Group if you want to meet me.”

“It's alright...” Arielle raised her hands to decline him. Yet, Vinson merely shoved the card into her palm before he left the lounge.

Arielle glanced at the gold card in her hand. Emblazoned on the card were the words- Nightshire Group.

Is he trying to... show off?

Arielle owned a company located overseas. Although it wasn't as renowned as Nightshire Group, her company was quite famous too.

Just as she made a move to discard the card, she changed her mind and kept it instead.

Vinson is correct, what if I need his help? This card will be useful. After all, Jadeborough is a

place I'm unfamiliar with.

Arielle placed the card in her pocket as she changed her mind and walked out of the lounge.

When she finally arrived at the information desk, Henrick looked like he was on the verge of exploding in anger. It was clear that he was impatient after waiting for her.

"There will be dire consequences if you delay your sister's ceremony!" Henrick scowled.

In contrast, Cindy spoke in a very demure and gentle tone. "It's still early. She won't delay the ceremony. I was just scared that Arielle would have gotten lost in this foreign place. Arielle, look at your sister; she was so worried that she burst into tears when she couldn't find you at the exit."

Arielle turned to look at Shandie. True to Cindy's words, Shandie's eyes were red and swollen. There were even glistening tears around the corners of her eyes. "Arielle, it's alright... I'm just glad that you are safe." Shandie sniffled as she said this.

When Arielle shifted her gaze downwards, Arielle caught sight of several red gashes across Shandie's thigh underneath her skirt.

In order to make Hendrick scold Arielle, Shandie had resorted to such extreme tricks

and schemes.

When Shandie noticed Arielle's gaze, she quickly used her hand to cover her thigh.

Immediately, Arielle looked away under the pretense that she hadn't noticed anything. She did not provide an excuse to Henrick. Instead, she apologized profusely. "Dad, I'm so sorry that I made everyone worry. I'll make sure to sit next to everyone so that this incident won't happen again." Arielle's face was pale as she murmured apologetically.

Upon hearing Arielle's statement, Henrick finally remembered that they had booked first-class seats on the plane. On the other hand, Arielle sat in the economy class.

Henrick coughed awkwardly; it seemed like he couldn't find it in himself to remain mad at her anymore. "It's fine. Let's go. We'll be late if we don't set off now."

"Alright." Arielle nodded her head obediently. She even reached out to help Cindy with her luggage.

In the blink of an eye, Henrick's anger dissipated.

Yet, this experience seemed to show that his eldest daughter was someone compliant and weak-willed.

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Perhaps I should shift all of my attention to Shandie instead.

In a flash, Shandie garnered his love and attention again. Henrick went out of his way to book the hotel located closest to the ceremony. He even reserved a suite just for Shandie.

In the room, Shandie was utterly delighted. "Mom, isn't my plan brilliant?" She beamed and asked Cindy.

"I told you not to make any move behind my back!" Cindy did not seem to share Shandie's joy. Instead, a deep frown graced her forehead.

Seeing Cindy's anger, Shandie tugged on her arm in a coy manner. "Mom, don't be angry anymore... Wasn't the final result satisfactory?"

Cindy suddenly remembered that Henrick had arranged for Arielle to stay at the cheapest room in the hotel. Immediately, her mood brightened. "You rascal. The next time you try to do anything, you should let me know first," Cindy chastised Shandie and flicked her nose mischievously.

"Relax, Arielle isn't as strong as you claim to be. I bet she's throwing an enormous tantrum right now!"

On the other hand, Cindy was deep in thought.

Anyone who fell into Shandie's schemes would

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have lashed out or defended themselves. Yet, Arielle did not. She merely admitted her mistake and tried to improve her flaws.

This means that Arielle is someone who can endure hardships and stay calm despite being blamed. She would be extremely dangerous if she decides to lash out.

"Darling, listen to me. I've thought about it. You should just receive your trophy obediently. Don't try to say anything else. We should try our best to understand her. There will be plenty of chances to deal with her in the future," Cindy said solemnly.

"Alright, Mom." Shandie nodded her head in agreement. Despite her actions, she didn't seem to share the same thoughts as Cindy.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



Send a Gift to the Writer!

Chapter 20

Inside Arielle's room.

Arielle felt neither unhappy nor unsettled in any way as she surveyed the modestly decorated interior of the hotel room.

Never mind that she had temporarily fallen out of favor with Henrick, her very presence had already thrown this family into disarray, and amidst the ensuing chaos, she reckoned that she would surely find the truth which she sought!

The ceremony would begin in half-an-hour.

Before leaving the room behind, Arielle went before the mirror to straighten out her disheveled hair.

The girl staring back at her in the reflection looked unbelievably fetching, coltish and acquiescent, but only she herself knew this to be a mere facade.

A wolf masquerading in sheep skin bit faster, more incisively and viciously, and left no chances for its enemies.

The venue for the ceremony was extravagantly luxurious, with the aroma of coffee from the sampling stations of the various sponsoring roasters saturating the air inside.

Shandie picked up a cuppa the moment she entered and took a whiff from it before tilting

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her head toward Henrick. "This is pretty good, smells full-bodied. And judging from its form, I reckon that it should be from... Corleon."

The sponsor at the side approached appreciatively when he incidentally overheard her. "You've a good eye, Miss. Our beans are indeed sourced from Corleon."

The man's effusive praise for Shandie made Henrick's heart swell with joy as he looked proudly at her.

While Shandie was basking in her moment of glory, she lifted her head to see that sponsor looking absolutely mesmerized by Arielle.

Shandie had no doubt that the man would start drooling were he to carry on ogling, and that irked her to no end.

Although Shandie was a little over twenty just as Arielle was, the former still came across as a young lass who had yet to shake off her own girlishness.

In a few more years, there would be no telling whether Shandie herself would even be fit enough to be a complementary leaf to the ravishing rose that Arielle could become.

The very thought of that had Shandie gnashing her teeth and wishing for Arielle to disappear.

She thought that a country girl like Arielle

Chapter 20

should not show up and mess up her life like this!

Shandie took two steps to her left to block off the man's line of sight, and harbored deviousness in her eyes when she picked up a cup of coffee in the same motion.

She shoved the beverage into Arielle's hands and said, "Have a taste of their coffee too, Arielle. I thought it's rather decent."

Before Arielle could respond, Shandie pressed a hand to her own mouth as if she had hit upon a realization. "I forgot that you've always stayed in the countryside... so you must not have taken coffee before, haven't you?"

The sparkle vanished from the sponsor's eyes behind her. He was looking for an ambassador for his company and had thought Arielle's outwardly appearance fit the bill.

It did not occur to him that she was from the countryside and had not even drank coffee before.

As lovely as the girl was, he deemed her unsuitable, or even undesirable, as a brand ambassador since such an appointment would likely be received negatively by netizens.

Arielle paid little heed toward Shandie's comments and only wished to taste it for herself.

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The result of her sampling drew a frown from her. "Too bitter."

As fragrant as the coffee smelled, it was too acrid to the taste-buds and apart from the bitterness, there was little complexity to the aftertaste - The quality was not all that Shandie made it out to be.

Shandie snatched the cup back from Arielle, adamant in the view that it was Arielle who did not understand coffee.

What does a country bumpkin like her know about coffee?

Arielle's response was exactly as Shandie anticipated, and that greatly pleased her. The latter then turned to the sponsor apologetically. "I'm sorry, mister. It's not that your coffee isn't good, but my sister here doesn't know how to appreciate it."

The man became more certain than ever that Arielle, who did not understand his product at all, should not be up for consideration.

Once again, he regarded Shandie smilingly. "That's okay, since not everyone is a coffee lover. In that case, I'll be taking my leave. Good day, ladies."

The sponsor nodded at Shandie before turning away.

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Henrick was thoughtful as he watched the man depart, believing his younger daughter to be far more capable than his elder girl.

Afraid that Henrick might be upset, Cindy purposefully chided, "Really, Shannie. Why did you have to let your sister drink coffee in front of so many people?"

Shandie's appeared quite indignant. "It just slipped my mind..."

Henrick waved it off. "The girl had always been forgetful, but Arielle, how could you tell the sponsor in his face that his coffee was bitter? You've really embarrassed me back there!"

With her head bowed, Arielle lowered her gaze apologetically. "I'm sorry, Dad. Don't be mad..."

"Bah, forget it!" Henrick looked away in annoyance before he regarded Shandie. "It's almost time, so you should go prepare yourself backstage. Dad and Mom would be waiting out there for you to receive your prize."

"Okay, Dad." Shandie smiled pleasantly and waved to Cindy before she took her pass backstage, while Arielle followed Henrick and Cindy to the gallery.

Whether by accident or intent, Arielle found herself left far behind by a Henrick who looked like he was trying to keep his distance from something repugnant, acting as if they did not

arrive together.

Well, that was her dad. A good father who would happily toss her aside once she no longer proved useful!

Arielle's eyes darkened in wistfulness, albeit for a second, but she kept her own emotions in check and continued walking pliantly behind Henrick.

The ceremony commenced shortly after they were seated.

The number of visitors on the day was more than usual, primarily because of the presence of Vinson Nightshire as one of the guest-of-honors this year.

Many had fought tooth and nail to secure a slot at the event just for the opportunity to get close to him.

Finally, the guests emerged after the introduction by the host; starting with one of the founders of Crown Coffee Academy; followed by a renowned barista in the industry; and then Rain Evans, who Arielle ran into earlier on the plane.

Last but not least, the host welcomed in the final guest. "Please put your hands together for the CEO of Nightshire Group, Vinson Nightshire!"

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The rapturous reception at the mention of his name ignited went far to illustrate that more than half of the crowd were here for him.

Those mounted video cameras were promptly directed toward the door leading backstage. At the end of the ceremony, the technicians would edit the footage and post it onto Crown Coffee Academy's official blog.

The documentation of the ceremony each year would receive extra attention largely because of Vinson's expected appearance.

When Vinson strolled unhurriedly to the front of the stage to greet the audience, he suddenly caught sight of a familiar face.

Is that... Arielle?

His gaze lingered upon her for awhile before pulling away. He then extended a bow to the people gathered in the seats. "Hello everyone, I'm Vinson Nightshire."

The applause from the audience grew ever more fervent.

Seeing the positive response from the audience, the host called after him while he was about to take his place amongst the other guests. "Look at the crowd, Mr. Nightshire. Why don't you share a few more words with us?"

Vinson considered turning down the invitation,

Chapter 20

but could not help but agree when his thoughts came to that someone seated in the gallery.

He cleared his throat and unprecedentedly added, "It's an honor to be able to attend the awards ceremony at the invitation of Crown Coffee Academy. Today, I shall be announcing the brand ambassador for Soir Coffee after the prize-giving."

These words which were amplified by the sound system reached the ears of Shandie backstage and sent her heart racing. Her eyes lighted up as though she would be accelerating to the highest point in her life within the next second.

Becoming an ambassador for Soir Coffee meant that she would be able to meet with Vinson in-person quite often, and that could only help her secure a role in Sam's new film and catapult her into the upper echelons of society—pure icing on the cake.

The very notion of that made Shandie grip her fists tightly. Being the champion meant that the role of brand ambassador was surely hers for the taking!

Meanwhile, at the front of the stage.

The host warmed up the crowd and saw Vinson to his seat before inviting the presiding judge Rain onstage.

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Rain was all smiles and glanced ambiguously in Arielle's direction before he turned to regard the audience. "Thank you, everyone, for taking time away from your busy schedules to attend the awards ceremony..."

After some opening statements, he went on straight to the matter at hand. "Now, we shall announce the results of this round of competition, starting with the second runner-up..."

With the second and third placed prizes handed out, Rain took a pause before he declared, "Congratulations to our champion, Shandie Southall!"

Backstage, Shandie held her breath before she elatedly walked onstage amidst thunderous applause.

A blushing Shandie then received the winner's trophy from Rain.

Made of pure gold, the trophy was quite hefty inside her hands, but she felt like she was riding on cloud nine.

"Thanks, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Evans. And I'd also like to extend my gratitude to my parents for their continued support. I'll promise to keep working hard!" Shandie was almost choking up with emotions.

At that moment, Rain said, "Now, let's invite Mr.

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Nightshire onstage to announce his choice for brand ambassador.”

Watching Vinson step up only made Shandie even more antsy, so much so that she nearly forgot to hand the microphone over to him in the process.

Vinson began when he took over, “I’m going to keep this brief and get right to the announcement.”

Eagerness as well as nerves consumed Shandie. Looking inside her open palm, she found that there was already a veneer of sweat on it.

Here it comes. Here it comes!

The pivotal moment of her life!

Without even glimpsing at Shandie, Vinson’s eyes hovered over Arielle for a second before he said, “And the brand ambassador is... Arielle. Ms. Areille Moore.”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Chapter 21

Shandie's lips curled up into a smile as wide as that of some socialite and froze in place while her brain thawed.

What... Arielle?

Did I hear that right?

There was a flurry of discussion within the crowd as well.

"Who's Arielle Moore?"

"Isn't Shandie Southall the champion? Why isn't she made the brand ambassador? Is Soir Coffee breaking the convention this year and opting for someone else apart from the competition winner?"

"Even if they are not picking the champion, should they not select a candidate amongst the top three finalists? I don't see this Arielle Moore amongst any of them."

In the gallery, the unsettled Cindy turned and glared furiously at the equally stunned Arielle in the row behind, who wondered why Vinson would make her the ambassador of the coffee chain.

"Arielle!" Cindy snarled. "What have you done? Why did you pull something like that on your sister?"

Cindy's eyes looked like they were about to pop,

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and were they not in a public space, Arielle was sure that the woman would have skinned her alive.

Henrick, too, had a look of surprise on him, but it quickly evolved into a smile.

As both the girls were his daughters, it made no difference to him who got the job since he was going to get paid either way.

Henrick set aside some of his biases toward Arielle and regarded her warmly. "How could you not share this great news with me earlier, Sannie?"

Arielle was quite impassive inside.

How did he manage to forget that he was her father when he upgraded himself to first class seats and left her all by herself in the economic class?

As disgusted as she felt, she did not show her emotions as she shrugged nonchalantly. "I only got to know about this too, Dad."

"Liar!" Cindy seethed through gritted teeth. "You clearly did this on purpose!"

She was in the opinion that Arielle held back in a bid to see Shandie and herself sorely disappointed.

The vicious girl!

"Cindy!" Henrick bristled at her. "What are you doing? There's no need to differentiate because Sannie and Shandie are both our children. So stop this."

Cindy raged until she was heaving, but had to rein herself in in the presence of Henrick.

Arielle only smiled wryly when she looked at Cindy.

She had no desire to become some ambassador as she thought it was too much of a hassle and an impediment to the advancement of her plans. Seeing the hatred in Cindy's eyes, however, made her feel that this was one possible way by which she could get back at them—pissing Cindy off and dashing Shandie's hopes would surely rend this family apart.

So long as there was disharmony between them, fault-lines which she could exploit would surely surface, and that suited her just fine.

Upon seeing the sliver of a smile upon Arielle's lips, Cindy became even more unwavering in her belief that it was all intended on Arielle's part, and was determined to not let the girl clinch that role which she felt rightfully belonged to her own precious daughter.

At that moment, the host took center-stage after conferring with Vinson. "Could we have you on stage, Ms. Moore?"

Chapter 21

Arielle's eyes coincidentally met Vinson's when she looked toward the platform, and though she could not tell what sort of mood he was in through his dark gaze, she could only comply at the host's behest.

As Arielle placed one foot before the other in the direction of the stage, all everyone else could see was a slender silhouette from the rear.

Nevertheless, that was enough to impress upon them her gracefulness. Her poise was like a butterfly in flight, and the majestic air she exuded was not to be understated.


Arielle's unadorned face did little to diminish her ability to dazzle. Her visage, as radiant as the sun and as pristine as the crescent moon, left the observing Shandie gnashing her own teeth onstage.


She slowly turned herself around after she stepped into the spotlight while the audience enthralled by her back-view continued to be transfixed in anticipation.


Gorgeous!

She is simply gorgeous!

Chapter 21

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 Wait! I Have Something to Say!

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The girl on stage had defined, exquisite features and flawless looks on that most perfectly oval-shaped face to go with her almost nine-head tall frame. Her package practically reduced Shandie beside her to a figurative ugly-duckling.

Never mind the ugly-duckling, even ordinary swans would be put to shame before the real swan-princess.

Most significantly was the fact that she wore no make-up. There was no telling how breathtaking she would be if she had put some color on, as a girl like her could overshadow even the female stars in the beauty-laden entertainment industry.

No one dislikes beautiful women. Not even the girls present at the ceremony whose eyes glistened in awe.

By just standing there, Arielle was that brightest light who condemned Shandie to a mere wallflower, drawing away all the attention that ought to have belonged to the latter without exception.

Vinson's eyes, too, were riveted as well, as if everyone else had become non-existent to him.

The manner in which Shandie's eyes reddened in jealousy did not elude Arielle. The former's rage and anguish were exactly what she wanted, but she quickly averted her gaze and

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walked right up to Vinson. "Why did you...".

Then, Vinson interjected, "I haven't decided whether to marry you, so consider this a little forwarding of *interest*."

Arielle was stumped, as she wondered whether it was solely for the payment of interest that he decided to hand such a critical endorsement role to her.

She had no idea what was going on inside Vinson's head, but she felt that that role would be worth taking up just to see Cindy and Shandie throw a fit.

Vinson took up the microphone. "As you may understand, Soir Coffee has always picked the winner of the coffee competition to be our spokesperson, but I've decided that this year, we'll only choose the one whose image best represents our brand. That, I feel, belongs to Ms. Moore. So, why don't you come forward and say a few words to all our friends out there?"

Arielle took over from Vinson and was about to speak when someone rushed out and snatched the microphone from her.

"I won't stand for this!"

When Arielle reflexively turned around, her gaze collided head-along into Shandie's, whose reaction came as no surprise to her.

Chapter 22

Arielle's brows perked up, questioningly. "What are you doing, Shandie?"

Shandie ignored her and addressed the crowd directly instead. "The brand ambassador of the coffee shop has always been selected from amongst those who have proved themselves to be the most proficient at latte art. How could someone with no knowledge of it was chosen this year? This is just unacceptable!"

Cindy was the first to take to her feet.

"That's right, Mr. Nightshire! Your decision is too arbitrary and unprecedented, and we should have been informed even if you wish to make an exception to this. How can you have a country girl who isn't even a coffee drinker become your brand ambassador?"

Cindy's words had the entire hall uproarious.

"A girl from the countryside? This chosen ambassador can't carry the image of an international chain like Soir Coffee!"

"Disregarding the fact that she's from the country, but not even a coffee drinker? That's a little too much."

Emboldened by the supportive crowd, Shandie spoke into the microphone again, "Don't tell us that you've seduced your way into this role, Arielle?"

Chapter 22

Arielle's dagger-like icy stare gave Shandie quite a fright, while Vinson's even colder glare unnerved the latter so much that she dared not even look at him twice.

She took a deep drawl and a moment to collect herself before she continued, "Otherwise, kindly explain to us how someone who doesn't even drink coffee managed to snag this endorsement role."

"Who told you that I don't drink coffee?" Arielle retorted calmly.

That drew a sneer from Shandie. "Then, do you dare accept my challenge? If you could beat me at latte art, then I'd willingly give up the role of brand ambassador to you!"



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Vinson wanted to speak up but Arielle shot him a look before she replied with a meaningful smile, "Very well. Challenge accepted!"

Shandie was momentarily taken aback but recovered quickly with a smirk. "Good! Let's do it. Right here, right now!"

Cindy was not idling away in the gallery either as she went over to hash things out swiftly with the organizers, after which two coffee tables were moved onstage and equipped properly.

Vinson looked a tad apprehensively at Arielle who remained silent throughout.

Once the host saw that both of them are ready, he said, "Ladies, you may begin."

Shandie burst into action the moment his voice trailed off.

The first step to creating latte art was, of course, to prepare the espresso which had to be hand-brewed by the participants themselves.

The assiduous Shandie weighed up fifteen grams of coffee beans and fed them into the grinder with tremendous refinement.

She was surprised to see Arielle appearing quite competent when she stole a glance over, as though the latter actually knew what she was doing.

Chapter 23

Arielle had fluidly set up the paper filter inside the filter holder before she raised the kettle to pour the boiling water in, clockwise and in a circular movement.

Shandie was unable to contain herself when she observed that, noting that this was something only professional brewers would know. Pouring clockwise would allow for the filter to adhere better to the holder, and at the same time, eliminate the starchy taste from the paper and warm up the receptacle. The resultant would be a much more flavorful cuppa.

It was easy to tell from Arielle's understanding of this coupled with her deft gestures that she knew how to make coffee.

How can it be possible for this country girl to know how to brew?

In spite of her certainty that she was not hallucinating, Shandie was completely bamboozled.

Isn't Arielle from the countryside?

Shandie remained stumped for some time before she pinched herself hard and turned her focus back to the task at hand.

Brew it! Even if Arielle knows how to make coffee, will she be able to do latte art?

Chapter 23

Shandie took a deep drawl in a bid to settle herself and resume her own work.

Traditional pour-over coffee required two infusions of water, after which an aromatic cup would be ready.

Shandie quietly chuckled when she saw Arielle still awaiting her second infusion while she herself was already done, and dismissed Arielle's knowledge as something the latter must have picked up from a stint at a coffee shop.

Shortly after, Arielle completed her brewing as well, and in response, the host communicated that they could both proceed with the creation of their latte art.

Compared to brewing, the latte art was the real litmus test.

The creation of latte art required the use of whole milk, and each person needed to conceive their theme before they began.

Maintaining an elegant smile, Shandie was first to speak, "My chosen theme is: *A Snow-Covered Cottage in Freezing Weather...*"

When the microphone came to Arielle, she paused before replying staidly, "Mine will be: *The Bloom of a Thousand Pear-Flowers Ushered Forth by the Night Breeze of Spring.*"

Chapter 23

Shandie twitched her lips upon hearing Arielle similarly reciting a verse from classical poetry.

*Is this little b*tch trying to be pedantic like me?
How*

many years did she spend in school?

*I am, of course, an arts graduate from the
University of Avenport.*

Shandie scoffed at the thought of Arielle's proposed theme in the assumption that the latter was only going to put together a few pear-flowers, and went on to concentrate on shaping out her own designs with the whole milk.

First, Shandie covered the top of the coffee with froth from the whole milk, and then employed the use of latte art pen to tease out a snow-capped mountain and a little wooden house upon it.

At a glance, it did foster the feel of *A Snow-Covered Cottage in Freezing Weather*.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Chapter 24

When Shandie's swiftly realized theme was flashed on the screen, it drew gasps of astonishment.

"This artistic conception is pretty good. If this cup of coffee were to be offered in a coffee shop, surely it could fetch a good twenty?"

"This isn't coffee art, but art itself!"

"No wonder Crown Coffee Academy has the reputation of being the best place to learn the techniques of brewing!"

Cindy was extremely pleased at the reactions received, and was proud that the daughter she painstakingly nurtured had not let her down.

Shandie quietly began to grow in her complacency as she was able to listen in to the discussions taking place and praise lavished upon her off-stage.

She just knew that she would be the one to come up on top!

Her theme was secretly conceived by a famous designer, and one which she had spent a week practicing at home. There was none who could rival her work in terms of visual impact.

She could just imagine the legions of fans she would be able to garner when the video was posted onto the blog, and all before she even starred in any movie.

Chapter 24

On top of that, Vinson would also be mighty impressed, making her a winner in both love and her professional life!

The more Shandie thought about it, the more her delight grew. She then needed to pinch her own thigh in order to stop herself from laughing aloud.

Of course, she had not forgotten about Arielle, who was still busying away.

Shandie thought that though Arielle's *Bloom of a Thousand Pear-Flowers* did showcase a considerable degree of skill, its few pear-trees with budding blossoms nonetheless paled in contrast to her own creation.

When Arielle was finally done, she raised a hand and asked the host, "Could you do me a favor here?"

The host immediately went over.

Shandie sneered inside: *Sensationalist much!*

Never mind getting the host to help, Shandie deemed that her opponent had no chance of beating her even with Vinson's backing. As this was an open challenge witnessed by the masses, there was no way she would be able to pull strings here.

By this time, the host was already next to Arielle. "May I know if there's anything that

you'd like me to do?"

Arielle turned to the big screen behind her which was now focused over her coffee, and decided that the timing was right.

"Do you mind lending me the script you have in your hand?"

"Certainly," replied the host who was happy to assent to a beautiful woman's request, and generously passed his own script along.

To the side, Shandie appeared even more disdainful when she saw Arielle's design on the big screen.

So you drew up some nice looking pear-flowers?

Big deal.

She wondered what other tricks Arielle might be up to, but remained skeptical as to whether it would make any difference to the outcome.

Arielle reached out to receive the script from the host and at the same time, sought out the angle she wanted. Once she got a handle on the amount of force she wanted to apply behind it, she started to fan at the coffee with the script in hand.

Shandie was dumbstruck.

How could you fan at the latte art?

Chapter 24

Wouldn't that mess up your original drawing?

You're an ignorant country girl after all! What a joke!

While Shandie ridiculed away at Arielle inside, an astonishing sequence was unveiled in the next instant as the buds on the pear-trees seemed to bloom under Arielle's steady fanning.

Then, a few blossoms appeared to detach from the *branches* and scatter upon the ground below.

With that, Arielle stopped fanning and extended a bow to the audience and guests. "This is my work: *The Bloom of a Thousand Pear-Flowers Ushered Forth by the Night Breeze of Spring*. Thank you for watching."



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Chapter 25

All presents were so stunned that the entire hall remained hushed even after her voice faded out.

Latte art had always been static, but Arielle's effort was animated!

A cup of coffee was a one-off, but this one was worth a few times more because that few seconds of motion itself could sell for hundreds!

While the audience below was still awestruck, Vinson in the front row was the first to start clapping.

There was no exaggeration to *The Bloom of a Thousand Pear-Flowers Ushered Forth by the Night Breeze of Spring*, as that scene they witnessed expressed just that.

Now he understood why Arielle accepted the challenge.

There was not only curiosity in Vinson's eyes but also an element of admiration, as he did not expect that this uncouth lass could also exhibit such elegance and finesse.

What else was there to her that he did not know about?

Vinson's applause brought the crowd back to their senses.

Chapter 25

"Marvelous! I've never seen this form of latte art in my life. Could this be patented?"

"This is going to go viral. If the video goes online, it is going to take the coffee industry by storm!"

"Is she a student of the Crown Coffee Academy? How is it that I'm not able to find her within the list of alumni? Could it be that she isn't from the school?"

Henrick was delirious with glee and almost lost control as he jumped onto his feet. "She's not a student of the Crown Coffee Academy. She's my daughter, Arielle."

"So she's your daughter? I recall that you have another daughter onstage. You are one lucky man to have two talented girls like them!"

"The video! Could we play that segment again? I'd like to see it one more time!"

"Me too! Me too!"

"Could I get a sip of that coffee? Just one sip?"

"Excuse me, sir? Could you introduce me to your daughter? I'm the manager at Orecchiette Cafe..."

"I'm the CEO of XX Coffee and I'd like to get to know her too..."

Henrick's face was flushed red by the courtship of all the countless parties clamoring for his attention as never in his life had he been so popular with the sponsors, and for this, he had to credit his darling daughter Arielle for it!

Next to him, Cindy was already red in the face from rage, unaware that her fingernails had dug so deep into her own flesh that she was bleeding from it. All she could do was glare at Arielle onstage.

Why? How did things turn out this way?

There were no words to describe the hatred in her heart!

In less than the short one week since Arielle's return, she and Shandie had already lost out to her three times. And each time, it had been a complete slaughter.

Her own daughter who she thought the world of kept getting her thunder stolen by that wily fox Arielle!

She had to find out which burrow this vixen crawled out of so that she could bring the whole lair down as soon as possible!

Compared to Cindy, Shandie looked like she was about to explode onstage as the immense amazement she felt she saw the pear-flowers bloom and fell was supplanted by an irrepressible fury.

Chapter 25

"You are a liar!"

Shandie stormed up and grabbed Arielle by the collar. "Aren't you someone who doesn't even drink coffee? How do you learn about latte art? You liar!"



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Chapter 26

Shandie's expression bordered on savagery, to which Arielle responded with a stern rebuke. "Get your hands off. You've been warned!"

She had really been overtly polite to Shandie all the time.

Shandie was stewing as she stared straight into Arielle's eyes, but what she saw hidden inside was like a gargantuan glacier that could swallow someone whole.

That intimidating coldness shocked Shandie as it was something she had never seen before.

Arielle tugged Shandie's offending hand off her own collar and turned to the host. "Sir, I think my sister might be a little agitated, so it might be best if you could bring her backstage to cool off."

Before the host could react, two black-clad bodyguards walked onstage and positioned themselves either side of Shandie before they escorted her off.

Arielle was a little taken aback by the appearance of the duo as she did not bring along any bodyguards herself on this trip back.

In the next second, a tall and stalwart man steadily approached her.

It was Vinson.

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His standout chiseled face appeared unapproachable without a smile, but perhaps owing to the lighting from behind him, he seemed a little more genial at this time.

"Are those two bodyguards working for you?" Arielle asked.

Vinson stopped less than two feet away from her and extended his right hand. "Congratulations for becoming the brand ambassador to Soir Coffee, the retail chain under Nightshire Group. I'll have my lawyer contact you regarding the details in due time."

Arielle did not manage to reply before Henrick's voice rang out again. "Thank you for giving Sannie this opportunity, Mr. Nightshire. As she's still young and unfamiliar with contractual agreements, I'll be standing in as her manager. So please, direct your lawyer to follow up with me."

Vinson evoked a rare smile at Henrick. "In that case, we'll be in touch again."

Seeing that Vinson was about to leave, Henrick quickly called after him. "Wait, Mr. Nightshire! To facilitate communications, would you be able to give me one of your name-cards?"

That only earned him a frosty look from Vinson.

The demeanor of his assistant beside him was just as aloof. "Mr. Nightshire's name-card is

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custom-made and is not something granted to just anyone. There's no need for you to try to reach us either, as we'll contact you as and when there's a need to."

Henrick's face shriveled and reddened and he cleared his throat awkwardly, not daring to bring up the issue of the name-card again.

The observing Arielle was a little taken aback by this.

Isn't the assistant overreacting a little? It's just a name-card.

After Vinson departed, the curious Arielle inquired of her father, "Why won't he give us a name-card, Dad? Is there any special meaning to it?"

"Of course, my girl." Henrick looked upon Arielle with the eyes of a kindly father as he patiently explained. "Mr. Nightshire's name-card isn't handed out freely, so when he chooses to give it to someone, it means that he's taken that person into confidence. Anyone in possession of Mr. Nightshire's name-card will be held in esteem, and will be able to enter and leave Nightshire Group's premises at will."

Arielle instinctively reached over the pocket holding the name-card Vinson gave her.

If what Henrick said was true, she had nearly thrown away an invaluable gift.

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She supposed that she probably would not find a use for something like that, but even if she did, she was certain she would not want to hand it over to someone like Henrick who would more than likely abuse the privilege.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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"That's why, girl," Henrick continued, "You've to try to get me one of those when you're better acquainted with him, got it?"

Arielle sneered quietly but nonetheless nodded dutifully. "Yes, Dad."

She then continued, "I'm going need more knowledge to perform my role as ambassador, Dad. As I haven't attended much school, could I use your study to do some reading? I noticed that you have quite a collection in there."

What she figured was that there might be some clues in there which may reveal the cause of her mother's death.

Henrick's study was not a place which she was allowed to access freely, so over the past week, she had not managed to find an excuse to get in.

The man hesitated before he nodded. "Sure! But you are not to go through any documents or the likes inside."

"Yes! Thanks, Dad!" Arielle's sweet smile drew the eyes of the people around her, and only she herself was oblivious to how captivating she was.

Those looks only served to improve upon Henrick's good mood, as he thought to himself what a gem he lucked out on.

Chapter 27

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Not only was she beautiful, but she was also skilled at latte art as well. He felt that somebody up there must really like him, and thought how much of a travesty it would be if he could not manage to put the Southalls on the map.

At this moment, Cindy hastened over. "Dear, I saw someone take Shannie away so could you help find out where she is? I'm afraid that she might be in trouble..."

It was only then that Henrick remembered that he still had another daughter, and proceeded to search for her alongside Cindy.

However, Shandie showed up when they were about to set off.

The aggrieved and irate woman ranted at Henrick, "Dad! Arielle had Mr. Nightshire's men lock me up inside a house! She's an evil woman! You've to set this right by punishing her!"

Henrick's face darkened as he barked hoarsely, "What are you raving on about? Keep acting out like that, and see whether I'll smack you!"

Shandie was stunned and reflexively raised a protective hand over her own tender face.

It took three days of icing for her to get the swelling down the last time she got hit, and she had not even had that broken tooth of hers

patched up to date.

Shandie staggered back two paces. She could not understand why her father was yelling at her when it was clearly Arielle who was at fault.

Henrick continued to lecture her, "Don't you know the principle of seniority? You are not to speak of your big sister again that way cause if you do, you're going to get it from me!"

"Mom..." Shandie was tearful and trembling all over.

Cindy steadied her by her shoulders. "Quickly now. Congratulate your sister."

Shandie managed to rein herself in but was unable to eke out a smile. Hence, she said stiffly, "Congratulations, Arielle..."

Arielle curled her lips and her eyes hinted at a smile. "If not for you giving me a chance, I'm afraid I'll be unable to get this endorsement deal with Soir Coffee. So thank you, Shandie. You truly are my dearest sister."

"You..." Shandie tried to take in a deep drawl, but she was so angry that she could neither breathe in or out. She felt her sight blacken and would have passed out again in public had Cindy not caught her in time.

"Arielle!" Cindy could not help but glare at Arielle as she watched Shandie recover. "You've

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already cost Shandie the ambassadorial role, so would you stop provoking her already!"

Arielle replied innocuously, "I'm sorry, but I'm not sure how I might be provoking her... Are you alright, Shandie?"



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Shandie's frustration kicked in upon seeing how fake Arielle was, and she fainted right away.

Henrick knitted his brows and said, "What an embarrassment. Quick! Send her back to the hotel!"

Cindy shot daggers at him at first but immediately hid the disdain on her face. She then called a waiter to help carry Shandie away.

The sponsor did not expect Shandie to faint. Just when he was about to defuse the tension, a group of sponsors representing various coffee brands came over.

One of them said, "Would you like to be the ambassador for our brand? We'll reward you handsomely."

The other sponsor echoed, "Choose us, Miss. We're a world renown brand!"

"Yeah, right! As if no one knows you're just a company that sells cheap instant coffee!" another sponsor mocked. He then turned to Arielle and said, "Please work with us!"

More and more sponsors from different brands walked up to them. Some even started fighting amidst the commotion.

The situation spiraled out of control so quickly that the sponsors even pushed Henrick out of the crowd.

He was utterly at a loss for words.

Are these sponsors fighting to get my daughter to be their ambassador? My daughter who grew up in the country?

Well, well, well... Despite growing up in the countryside, she has a great charisma like me. I guess she takes after me.

Henrick looked at his daughter and nodded with a smile.

Shandie finally woke up when the waiter carried her to the entrance of the ceremony.

She opened her eyes and noticed those sponsors had all surrounded Arielle. No one paid attention to her anymore.

All this happened because she wanted to challenge Arielle, thinking she would crush her in public.

But who knew, her plan had backfired.

Shandie felt a jolt of anger and fainted once again.

Shandie fainting for the second time made Cindy even more nervous. She could hardly pay attention to Arielle anymore.

By the end of the awards ceremony, Arielle received a stack of name cards from

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representatives of different coffee brands.

Henrick eventually snatched the cards away and started going through them one by one.

Arielle responded with a sigh upon seeing the excitement on Henrick's face. *What have I gotten myself into? All I wanted was just to teach Shandie a lesson...*

But she was still glad that she had successfully disturbed the family, and she knew the mother-daughter duo would not let her off easily.

Cindy had been trying to get rid of Arielle the moment she decided to return to the family. Arielle knew she would have to face Cindy head-on eventually.

Bring it on, Cindy. Bring it on!

Before leaving the ceremony, Henrick took out a card from his wallet and gave it to Arielle. "This is a supplementary card. If you've maxed out the other two cards, you can still use this."

"Buy yourself some nice clothes and doll yourself up," he added, "Don't worry about the money."

After a few perfunctory rejections, Arielle accepted the card.

The card would come in handy for her to investigate Henrick's current assets.

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Arielle had once hired a private investigator to find out more about her mother, Maureen. She eventually learned that Maureen had ten billion worth of liquidity in cash flow before she passed away.

So she was curious how much did the Southall Group own after they took over the Moore Group.

Arielle and her family soon got on a flight, and in the blink of an eye, she arrived back at Jadeborough.

They did not interact with each other when they stepped out of the airport.

Henrick had to leave for work, so his chauffeur was already waiting there to pick him up.

While waiting for their car to fetch them back to the manor, Shandie could no longer contain her anger anymore. She shot daggers at Arielle and warned, "My patience has limits. You'd better watch it."



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Arielle responded with a shocked expression. "Oh, really? You actually have the concept of limits?"

"You!"

"I'm surprised that someone who has resorted to using a venomous snake to attack others understands what the word 'limit' truly means," Arielle said with a smirk. "I'm so sorry, Shandie. I'll be more careful next time, okay?"

Just when Shandie was about to explode with rage, she somehow managed to read between the lines. She took a few steps back and asked, "You knew it? So it was you who put the snake in my room?"

Arielle responded with a grin. "Oh, calm down. I had to send it back to where it belongs. It's yours, isn't it?"

Shandie widened her eyes and threatened, "That's enough! I'm going to tell Dad!"

Arielle nonchalantly nodded. "Sure. Go ahead and tell Dad about the snake. You're the one who released it in my room first, remember?"

Shandie, who was about to dial Henrick's number, froze instantly.

Damn it, she's right. If I were to report her to Dad, then he'll know what I did to her!

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No. I can't tell Dad about this.

Shandie's eyes glowed with a towering rage. "Go to hell, b*tch!" She charged at Arielle and tried to scratch her face.

She had been wanting to disfigure Arielle's face for a long time!

Yet unexpectedly, just when Shandie's hand was about to reach her face, Arielle grabbed her wrist and twisted it hard. In a snap of a finger, Arielle dislocated Shandie's wrist.

Shandie's wrist was so weak that Arielle broke it with just a minimal force.

Arielle looked at her icily. She did not sympathize with Shandie at all.

Cindy has slapped me once, and I swore I'll not allow her and her daughter to do that to me anymore.

Shandie was in so much pain that she almost fainted. She could not even move her wrist at all.

Shandie took a deep breath and was still in shock. She could not feel a thing with her hand at all.

Did she just snap my wrist?

Shandie gave Arielle a terrified look. *She's much*

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petite than I am. Where did she find the strength to do that?

Don't tell me she knows martial arts?

Shandie instantly stay away from Arielle. She turned around and shouted for help. "Mom! Arielle broke my wrist!"

"What?" Cindy was stunned. She did not know what happened between them as she was busy looking after the luggage.

The moment she saw how pallid Shandie's face was, she shoved the luggage aside and ran toward her daughter.

"What happened?"

Tears rolled down Shandie's cheeks. She pointed at Arielle with another hand and wailed, "She broke my wrist!"

"What?" Cindy could not believe what she heard, and she did not think Arielle had the strength to do that.

She then went up and touched Shandie's hand gently, causing the latter to scream in excruciating pain.


Upon seeing that reaction, Cindy finally believed Arielle had broken Shandie's hand.


She instantly picked up her phone and was


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ready to report Arielle to the cops.

I'm calling the cops. There's no point telling Henrick about this. He'll side with Arielle because of all the benefits he got from her.

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Arielle acted as if she was not aware that Cindy was reporting her to the cops.

Soon, a cop stationed at the airport arrived alongside the medical team.

Arielle seized the opportunity and walked up to Shandie, then grabbed her by the arm when the latter was not paying attention.

Once again, Shandie roared in pain. She pushed Arielle away and screamed, "Mom! She did it again!"

When Cindy was about to give Arielle a slap on the face, the cops arrived. Cindy had no choice but to stop. "Get her! She broke my daughter's hand!"

The cop took a glance at the innocent-looking Arielle and wondered if she was capable of doing that.

"Doctor! Please examine this lady to see if she's all right," the cop turned to the medical team and said.

Shandie pointed at her injured hand and said, "Take a look at my hand. It hurts so badly when I move."

The doctor got up and did a thorough examination. After some time, the doctor knitted his brows and took several glances at Shandie and Arielle.

"What's wrong, doctor?" Shandie asked, "Is there something wrong with my hand?"

Cindy gasped and exploded. "Nab this woman right now!"

With a deadpan expression, Arielle said, "Can you please show me some respect, Aunt Cindy? You are aware that I can sue you for defamation, right?"

"Defamation?" Cindy pointed at her and raised her voice. "How did I defame you? You broke Shandie's wrist!"

Arielle raised her brows. "Please watch your words. Let's see what the doctor has to say."

Cindy panicked upon seeing how calm Arielle was.

But with all the evidence pointed against Arielle, Cindy believed there was no way she could deny what she had done.

You are going to jail, Arielle!

Cindy immediately asked the doctor, "So how is her hand?"

The doctor gave Cindy a disdainful look and answered icily, "Is this a joke? You think we have nothing better to do but to solve your family dispute?"

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Cindy froze for a moment. "What do you mean?"

The doctor ignored her and turned to the cop. "There's nothing wrong with her hand. I have to go and attend to the other patients now."

Both Cindy and Shandie were stunned.

What? How is that possible?

Shandie tried moving her hand, and oddly enough, her wrist did not hurt anymore.

She exerted more force on her hand and realized she could move it freely again.

"How... how come?" Shandie looked at Cindy in disbelief. "Mom, I think there's nothing wrong with my hand now..."

Cindy touched her hand, and Shandie did not scream like how she did earlier anymore.

Cindy heaved a sigh of relief at first before rage seared through her again. She gave Arielle a sullen glare and asked, "What on earth have you done to my daughter?"

Arielle said in an aloof voice, "I should be asking you this question. How could you file a false police report? I feel like you're doing this to air our dirty laundry in public."

Shandie roared furiously, "I didn't file a false

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report! You broke my wrist! Stop acting like you're innocent!" She then turned to Cindy. "Mom! Look at her!"



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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The color drained out of Cindy's face. She realized they had fallen into Arielle's trap once again.

This girl is not as naïve as we thought.

The cop reprimanded the mother-daughter duo. They had no choice but to apologize since there were no surveillance cameras around to record the incident.

This incident also marked the fourth time they fell prey to Arielle's trap.

From now on, we have to put our guard up!

Once the cop left, Shandie immediately yelled at Arielle. "Stop acting, b*tch! What a coward!"

Arielle shrugged. "What? How could you expect me to confess something I've not done?"

"You are a shameless b*tch!" Shandie cursed.

Arielle snorted. "The pot calling the kettle black."

"You!" What Arielle said had rendered Shandie speechless.

Had Cindy not stepped in to stop her, Shandie would have thrown a punch at Arielle.

Since their car had arrived, Cindy immediately told Shandie to get into the car, leaving Arielle

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alone at the airport.

Arielle did not intend to travel with them, anyway. She had even thought of making an excuse to get down halfway through the journey home. A corner of her mouth quirked up when Cindy and Shandie left without her.

It was difficult to hail a cab at the airport, so Arielle had no choice but to wait patiently.

Soon, a black SUV arrived.

Arielle put her guard up and took a few steps back. The person sitting at the passenger's seat behind then winded down the window. It was Vinson.

Just when she was hesitating on whether to greet him, Vinson initiated the conversation. "Have you lost your memory again?"

Arielle was at a loss for words. "I.."

"Come on, get in," Vinson did not give her a chance to turn him down.

Arielle hesitated and rejected. "I think I should get a cab..."

"Are you scared that I might take advantage of you?" Vinson took a sidelong glance at her. The way he looked at her was as if he looked down on her.

Arielle did not know how to react to that question. *Excuse me? I'm not that narcissistic, okay?*

Since Vinson had made an offer, Arielle decided not to waste time anymore. She opened the door on the other side and got into the car.

After closing the door, Arielle said, "Please drop me at any bank around this area. Thank you."

Vinson kept mum and read the newspaper in silence. It was as if Arielle was invisible to him.

Vinson's assistant, who sat next to the chauffeur, wondered why he decided to read a newspaper when he never had the habit of doing so in the past. After noticing how he deliberately ignored Arielle, the assistant figured what Vinson was thinking.

He only did it on purpose because he cares about her.

The assistant believed Arielle was someone special to Vinson. He then replied on Vinson's behalf, "We'll drop you at the bank in Tribusbridge then. It'll be easy for you to get a cab later too."

"Thank you." Arielle expressed her gratitude.

"You're welcome." The assistant could not stop himself from smiling at that beautiful lady.

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All of a sudden, he saw a hard glint flashed across Vinson's eyes.

Vinson's murderous look sent chills down the assistant's spine. He instantly refrained from talking to Arielle.


Half an hour later, Arielle arrived at the bank at Tribusbridge. When she was about to thank them after stepping out of the car, Vinson ordered the chauffeur, "Go!"


The car then immediately peeled out, leaving Arielle stunned in disbelief.


What's wrong with him? What a weirdo!

Arielle then took out the supplementary card Henrick gave her and walked into the bank.

The information the bank provided her took her by surprise. She walked out of the bank a few minutes later.

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