

OBSESSED CEO THROWS HIMSELF AT ME

CHAPTER 1

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

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

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

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

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

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 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

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

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

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 shooed 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

“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."