

## Happiness Chapter 126-136

### Chapter 126

Seeing how the little boy's face contorted with rage, Natalie sniffed the **fragrance of** the roses with a smile and said, "I love these very much..."

Franklin seemed taken aback for a moment before turning around to hide his smug smile.

Not wanting to be outdone, Sophia took out some colorful **candies from her little** backpack and handed them to Natalie.

"C-Candies... Sweet..."

**Steven was** just about to translate that, but Natalie spoke up. "These are your favorite... Wait, I understand. You're giving them to me so that I can taste the **sweetness** and forget about the pain of my wound, right?"

"Mm-hmm." Sophia nodded enthusiastically.

Steven looked at Natalie in **astonishment** but suddenly felt that he should not be surprised. After all, this was not the first time the latter's ability had impressed him.

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There was nothing she could not do for the twins and Samuel; she was invincible.

Natalie's gaze subconsciously landed behind Steven to see if Samuel was there.

Noticing that, Steven hopped in to explain the situation. "Sam has been on a business trip these past few days to attend an important meeting for Centurion Corporation. That's why he's not here to pick you up."

Natalie bit her lip.

She instantly shot a cold glance at Steven while snapping, "Why are you telling me this? I don't recall asking about Samuel."

Steven was absolutely speechless.

*Indeed, she didn't ask me about him but can't I explain things out of my own will?*

Nevertheless, he completed the discharge procedures and drove Natalie home.

Xavian greeted Natalie once she arrived with a loving hug and a warm bowl of mushroom soup.

While watching her enjoy the soup, Xavian held his chin and asked, "Mommy, why didn't Mr. Bowers come with you?"

Natalie's eyes narrowed at that. With lightning speed, she put down her spoon to ask, "When did you and Samuel get so close?"

"I-I. That's not true..."

Xavian denied her statement, yet inexplicable anxiety kept flickering in his dark eyes.

"You better not be close with him." After taking another spoonful of mushroom soup, she resumed in a grim tone, "Samuel and Mommy are from different worlds, so... there will never be a happy ending between us."

Yet, Xavian's brows only scrunched in confusion at her statement. "Mommy, what do you mean by 'different worlds?' I don't understand what you're saying. It's too complicated!"

"You don't have to understand it." Natalie lovingly tapped Xavian's nose and said, "You shouldn't get involved in the affairs of adults. All you need to know is that although you and Clayton only have me as a parent, I'll do my best to protect both of you."

A solemn look shrouded Xavian's face as he responded, "Clayton and I only want you to be happy, Mommy. Although we're only five years old now, we'll grow up quickly and make a lot of money for you in the future. By then, Clayton and I will support the family, so you can sit back and relax."

A warm feeling swelled in Natalie's heart.

*I must have done so many good deeds in my previous life to have such a pair of talented and loving children.*

Xavian did the dishes after Natalie finished up the soup. Meanwhile, she headed back to the room to deal with her work.

It was then that she received a call.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me." Shawn's gentle voice rang out from the other end of the phone.

His sudden call made Natalie worry as she felt it had something to do with Max's health condition. Concerned, she

inquired to the phone, "Has something happened to Old Mr. Watsons? Are you calling because he finished the medicine I previously prescribed him?"

"No..."

"Oh." Natalie stiffened before finally speaking up. "Then what's up?"

"It's my grandpa's birthday this weekend. I hope you can attend his party **as my partner.**"

Natalie stroked th

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On the other end of the call, Shawn's lips curved into a smile.

He continued sincerely, "Of course, I am. You're my **grandfather's savior, and it's my honor to have you as my partner.**"

Natalie hesitated for a moment.

**It was** not a problem for her to attend Max's birthday party. However, she was afraid that it might cause misunderstandings if she attended as Shawn's **partner.**

Thus, she hinted at her reluctance through a polite statement. "Mr. Watsons. I doubt it's necessary for you to show up with a partner at your grandfather's birthday party--"

"I need you as a shield to ward off other women. Is that a good enough reason to **convince** you?" Shawn's candid voice elaborated, "Grandpa invited many of his elite **friends.** If they notice that I'm alone at the party, they will definitely try to **promote** their daughters and granddaughters as ideal wives to me. Man, just the thought of that already gives me a bad headache."

Natalie had never experienced that, nor could she imagine how awful it would be.

Her dubious voice asked, "Is it really that bad?"

"You'll know when you get here for the party." Shawn's tone turned into one of helplessness as he resumed, "Those wealthy, modern-day princesses all act the same way. It's like they got shaped from the same mold or something. These **women would** do anything to get closer to me. Hell, there's no doubt that they'll flock over **to me** right when the party starts. How annoying..."

Natalie visualized the scene and mentally agreed that it would be distressing.

Thus, she decided to do Shawn a favor.

"Okay, I'll go as your partner."

"It's a deal, then."

After hanging up the phone, Natalie sent Ross an email about the **arrangements for** the birthday party during the weekend.

It was not long before the day of Max's birthday party arrived.

*Ding dong?*

Xavian opened the door and saw a middle-aged man in a dark blue suit.

His cheeks reddened at the stranger's sudden appearance as his shy **voice queried,** "Who are you looking for, sir?"

"Is this Natalie Nichols's house? Is Ms. Nichols in now?"

“She was examining a body the entire night and has just returned, **so she’s taking a nap** right now.” Xavian blocked the door with his tiny body **as he said, “She’s tired.** You may leave a message with me if you have anything you’d like to tell her. I’ll relay it when she awakes.”

The middle-aged man then handed an intricately embellished box to the little boy.

He explained, “Mr. Watsons has specially prepared this for Ms. Nichols. He hopes that she will wear this dress to attend Old Mr. Watsons’ birthday party later in the evening.”

“Okay, I’ll pass it to her and let her know.”

“Thank you.”

Xavian shut the door and carried the surprisingly heavy box with all his strength inside.

He also noticed the box’s packaging was way more luxurious and expensive than ordinary boxes.

Curious, Xavian’s little hands grazed the box as he muttered, “He even **sent someone** to deliver a special dress for the party. Mommy, who has the world’s slowest wit, is probably the only one who doesn’t realize what’s going on here...”

There were many moments where he wanted to open the box and see what dress lay inside.

Therefore, the little boy could only hold the box until Natalie finally **woke up.**

Hours later, a woozy feeling hit Natalie as soon as her eyes opened.

She got up and walked out of her bedroom. It was then that she noticed a sparkly eyed Xavian, who gawked at the elegant box in his hands.

Natalie approached him while pointing to the box. “What do you have there, Sweetheart?”

“Mr. Watsons **sent someone** to deliver it to you, Mommy. He **wants you to wear this** dress at the birthday party.”

*Shawn?*

Natalie was a little surprised at first. However, knowing that Shawn had always been thoughtful, she did not question **his motives.**

Meanwhile, Xavian seemed to be more eager than Natalie. He kept urging, “Mommy, hurry and open up the fancy box!”

Moments passed before she untied the shimmery ribbon and removed the lid. Inside **was a silvery-white,** elegant mermaid dress.

In addition to the dress' exceptionally silky fabric, tiny crystals got strategically placed in different areas, giving off an ethereal and dazzling shine under indoor lighting

It was evident that a famous tailor had created this dress.

Natalie picked it up, placed it against her body, and gazed in the mirror.

Next to her, Xavian's brows twisted into a frown as he thought, *Samuel is doomed! He has met a formidable opponent! What should I do?*

Anxiety surged in his veins. He quickly pulled out his phone and sent a message to Samuel.

*He texted: Bad news, Mr. Bowers! Mommy is going to a party with another man!*

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Alier Xaviani sent the message, he stared at the screen in anticipation of Samuel's reply

Time passed by, but there was not a single word from Samuel,

*What's taking him so long! Does he want to be our stepfather or not?*

Xavian thought again: *Mommy is wearing the gown the other guy gifted her! Where are you? Are you giving up now? That guy will become our stepfather if you do not appear immediately! Triumph!*

As Xavian stared at his phone with a downtrodden expression, Natalie changed into the silver gown that Shawn gifted her. The bottom of the gown flared out like a mermaid's tail, and hundreds of inlaid diamond bits glittered under the light. The gown outlined Natalie's curves and complemented her figure well.

Xavian raised his head and looked at his mother. "You look beautiful, Mommy"

"Of course I am! It's all thanks to the designer of this dress," said Natalie as she winked at him. "I just spoke to Cecilia on the phone. Apparently, this dress was her best creation of the year, and she spent ten million to design this gown..."

Xavian mumbled to himself, "So it was designed by Aunt Cecilia. No wonder the gown looks so pretty."

*Ten million.*

*I can't believe Mr. Watsons willingly spent so much money on Mommy. If things go on this way, Samuel will definitely lose the race.*

"Sweetheart, what's with the long face?" asked Natalie.

"It's... nothing." Xavian forced a smile through his bitter expression. "I'm just worried..."

"What are you worried about?"

Amidst

his anxiety, an idea flashed through Xavian's mind. He dashed toward the side table, picked up the freckl

ed hyper-realistic mask, and shouted, "The **mask**, Mommy! I'm worried that you might forget to bring your mask. Please remember to wear it tonight!"

Scanned with CamScanner

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"I know." Natalie reached out to take the mask and frowned. "Sweetheart, you're acting weird. I thought you always hated it when I wore the mask."

"No, I don't," Xavian replied as he fiddled with his fingers, trying to hide his feelings of guilt. *If Mommy shows up without her mask and wearing this beautiful dress, she will undoubtedly be the center of attention at the gala dinner. Then, Samuel will have to deal with even more competitors besides Shawn.*

**Xavian was** only five years old; he was much too young to be this stressed over his future stepfather's love life.

Natalie put on the hyper-realistic mask, tidied herself up, and prepared to leave the house. "Xavian, make sure you take care of yourself while I'm out, okay?" she instructed.

"Okay!"

"Good boy." Natalie turned around and put on her high heels. At that moment, Xavian picked up his phone and snapped a photo of her from behind.

"I'm leaving!"

"Bye, Mommy!"

The door shut, leaving Xavian alone in the house. He immediately sent the photo he took to Samuel through WhatsApp.

*He still isn't replying!*

Xavian was now beyond pissed.

He texted: *I gave you a tip-off and yet you ignored me! Mommy is going to get stolen away by another guy! You're going to regret this!*

After sending the string of messages, Xavian blocked Samuel in a fit of anger.

*Hmph!! hereby announce: the alliance is dissolved!*

Elsewhere, Natalie arrived at the Watsons Residence in her floor-length gown.

The doorman opened the car door and saw Natalie's long snow-white legs through the slit of the dazzling gown. *This girl must be a stunning beauty.*

Yet, the moment Natalie emerged from the car, the doorman was shocked beyond words.

*What the hell? Her body figure was worthy of a goddess, but what's up with her face?*

With faint amusement in her eyes, Natalie nodded at the doorman in acknowledgment and made her way to the front door.

Well-known figures from both the business and political fields had been invited to celebrate the birthday of Max. Security was tight, and each **guest needed to verify** their identity at the entrance before they were allowed to enter the residence.

A man standing at the entrance quickly spotted Natalie and approached her. "Are you, Ms. Nichols?"

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Natalie nodded. "Yes, I am."

"I am the Watsons' butler, Aaron Timbber. You can just call me Mr. Timbber," the man said politely. "Mr. Watsons and Mr. Shawn have instructed me **to await your** arrival. Let me guide you into the main banquet hall."

Realizing that the celebrity guests at the entrance were all looking at her, an unbothered smile grew on Natalie's face.

"Lead the way," she said. She followed the butler into the residence and bypassed the **identity verification process**.

*This must be the courtyard.* The European-styled building radiated an aura of grandeur under the evening sun, and it was clear that meticulous care had gone into every tree and bush planted in the courtyard.

A large fountain pool was located beside the walkway leading to the main banquet hall. The lights reflected in the flowing water created a mystical aura, making it seem like an entrance to the wonderland.

Natalie surveyed the surrounding **guests as soon as** she entered the main banquet hall. Everyone present was all people who occupied the highest places and statuses of society, making connections and developing relations with each other.

The guests all wore custom-made garments from luxurious, high-end brands or limited edition designer clothes.

Natalie smiled to herself.

*I'm definitely going to be laughed at if I wore one of my cheap, ordinary gowns to such a high class occasion.*

Shawn knew that Natalie would dress casually to the banquet. Hence, he had taken the initiative and gifted her a gown to prevent Natalie from being scorned by the guests.

"Ms. Nichols, please have some wine for now. I'll inform Mr. Shawn of your arrival," said the butler.

“Thank you.”

After the butler left, Natalie took a glass of red wine from a waiter and sipped from it slowly, ignoring the fact that the guests had been uncontrollably stealing glances at her since the moment she entered the hall.

They seemed... astonished!

*That woman is wearing “The Ocean” — the gown designed by Cecilia, the new and mysterious cutting-edge designer!*

That gown was the only creation that Cecilia had released that year. Handcrafted by top artisans, it took five months to complete, and real diamonds were used to decorate the skirt.

Countless rich and famous ladies had vied for the gown, but Cecilia refused to put it up for sale.

It was no surprise for the white mermaid gown to finally make its appearance at this banquet. However, everyone was flabbergasted that such an ugly woman was the one wearing it.

The crowd whispered among themselves, trying to figure out the identity and status of Natalie.

“Have you seen that woman before?”

“Never. I would recognize her freckled face anywhere if I had.”

“Max instructed his butler to greet her personally. She must definitely come from extraordinary roots!”

“That very well may be, that expensive gown doesn’t take away from the fact that she’s hideous.”

Even though the crowd toned down their voices, their mumbling created a humming sound as irritating as that of a buzzing fly that refused to go away.

Natalie raised her arm and finished her red wine in one gulp. She licked the corner of

her mouth with the tip of her tongue.

*What a bore.*

She didn’t think that her appearance had anything to do with these people.

Besides, they were just dissing the appearance of her hyper-realistic mask, not her true appearance.

“Ms. Nichols! What a coincidence. You were invited to Old Mr. Watsons’s party, too?” asked Belle, scanning Natalie from head to toe. “Did you buy this gown from Cecilia?”

With hints of amusement in Natalie’s eyes, she gave Belle a sidelong glance. “I’m Shawn’s partner for tonight. He gave me this gown.”



Stunned, Belle gritted her teeth inconspicuously. "Shawn treats you well," she commented, squinting her eyes.

"He asked me to be his partner and even gifted me this gown..." Natalie smirked slightly. "Perhaps his next move will be asking me to be his girlfriend. I've heard that Shawn has never been in a relationship before and that this was his first time treating a woman so nicely..."

Belle knew that Natalie would be invited to the banquet, and she had made plans to embarrass the latter on that day.

However, Natalie had predicted Belle's moves and made preparations beforehand. She uttered those words on purpose to make Belle jealous of her. Once jealousy and rage reached a certain point in Belle's mind, she would no longer be able to think rationally.

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Belle's grip on her glass tightened as her eyes glowered with rage. "Do you really think that you're going to marry Shawn?"

"Of course." Natalie swiftly glanced at Belle before looking away again, placing her **now-empty glass onto a passing** waiter's serving plate. "Who else would he marry? You? You've known Shawn for so long, but it seems like you **two can never be** anything more than friends."

Upon hearing those words, Belle's face immediately fell, and the graceful image she had been maintaining instantly disappeared. "You b\*tch! Don't get so full of yourself!"

Natalie continued with her onslaught. "Why not? If you were in my shoes, you would have said worse things than I did."

"You...!"

Belle had been the most pampered child in the house since young. Even as a girl, her **status** surpassed even that of her brother. Not once had a person of lower status ever spoken to her in such a manner.

Provoked by Natalie's words, Belle threw her glass of red wine in the woman's **direction**.

Natalie saw her actions and took a step backward, followed by a nimble turn of her body. She dodged the wine completely and managed to keep her gown spotless.

Instead, the wool carpet on the floor was now dyed red as a result.

Internally, Natalie sneered.

*I knew it. These spoiled brats have no other tricks up their sleeves.*

Belle's last-ditch attempt to embarrass Natalie in front of the crowd had failed. Meanwhile, Shawn rushed over towards them.

"Are you alright, Natalie?" Shawn immediately wrapped an arm around Natalie's waist, glaring at Belle.

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Belle was caught off guard by his sudden appearance.

"Belle! Natalie is an important guest invited by Grandpa and me. What do you think you're doing?" Shawn lashed out.

"Shawn, I... I'm just..." Belle knew that her actions were caused by a fit of anger. As she calmed down, she realized that splashing wine in front of a large **crowd was a low blow**.

*I already set up a trap for her. I shouldn't have acted so early.*

"She didn't do it on purpose. Her hand slipped," explained Natalie as she gave Belle a friendly smile. "Am I right, Ms. Green?"

Knowing that there was no other way to save herself from this awkward situation, Belle reluctantly agreed with Natalie and put on a smile. "Yes, you're right."

Of course, the three of them knew that Belle was lying.

Without

sparing Belle another look, Shawn took Natalie's hand and proceeded toward the second floor of the hall. "Come on. Grandpa is waiting for you."

Shawn's gesture caught the attention of everyone in the banquet hall. Gossiping with each other loudly, they fixed their gazes on the duo as Shawn and Natalie ascended the stairs.

"What just happened?"

"What's wrong with Shawn's beauty standards? Why does he prefer a freckled-faced woman over a flawless beauty like Belle?"

"Argh! I wouldn't have gone for laser treatment if I had known he liked freckles!"

"Is that woman going to become the granddaughter-in-law of the Watsons family soon?"

**W**

Belle stood rooted to her spot. Her face was drained of color, but anger flared up within her heart.

*I'm going to make you suffer a complete defeat and cause your fall from grace tonight, right here at this banquet. You can stay smug for all you like, but there's something big coming your*

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way.

After reaching the upper floor, Natalie lightly twisted her wrist to release herself from Shawn's grasp.

Startled, Shawn said, "I'm sorry for acting so abruptly."

"Don't misunderstand." Natalie gazed into Shawn's eyes. "My feud with Belle was purely personal. It had nothing to do with you."

Natalie's eyes were clear and bright. **Shawn had seen numerous pairs of eyes**, but they had all been filled with desire and greed. This was his first time seeing someone with such a pure gaze.

Natalie had said all those in order to establish her boundaries and keep her distance from him, but Shawn only grew even more mesmerized by her.

His finger slowly moved upward, and his gaze fell to her jawline. He wanted to rip off the hyper-realistic mask from her face and see what she truly looked like.

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When Shawn's finger reached the side of her cheek, Natalie subconsciously took a step back and mumbled, "Shawn, what are you doing?"

Realizing that he had gone overboard, he retracted his hand immediately, staring at Natalie apologetically.

"I'm sorry. I did not ask for your permission and tried to remove your mask..."

"This mask is indeed hideous. But, for now, I cannot remove it and be myself."

"I know."

Aaron, the butler from before, spotted the pair lingering at the lounge entrance and approached them. "Mr. Shawn and Ms. Nichols, Mr. Corden has arrived. Old Mr. Watsons and the other family members are all waiting for you."

He opened the door for Shawn to enter the room, followed by Natalie.

However, as soon as she stepped into the room, she saw Max accompanied by his two sons, Chris and Charlie, along with Chris and Charlie's own wives.

Max saw Natalie and grinned from ear to ear.

However, the two sons and their wives seemed gloomy all of a sudden.

**O**

"Dad, I thought you were announcing your inheritance distribution today. What did you invite this girl over for?"

“He’s right! The people gathered here belong to the Watsons family. What’s an outsider like her doing here?”

Although the two brothers were always at each other’s throats, they would unanimously join forces if it came to dealing with outsiders.

“I invited Natalie over because I included her portion into the distribution of my inheritance,” Max explained as he waved around his walking stick. “Corden, please read the notarized will to them.”

Corden took out the document and started reading.

“Upon the passing of Max Watsons, ninety-five percent of the equities under his name will be inherited by Shawn Watsons.”

“The mansion under his name will be evenly distributed to Chris Watsons and Charlie Watsons.”

“The remaining five percent of the equities and his antique collections will be inherited by Natalie Nicholas.”

The two younger Watsons couples were already shocked by the first part of the will. After Natalie’s part was read, they sprung up from the sofa, unable to contain their anger.

“Dad, I am your son! I didn’t even get a single portion of your shares! Why did you give your shares to her instead? She doesn’t deserve them!”

“Remember, dad, blood is thicker than water! Why would you distribute your shares to an outsider instead of your own children?”

Max’s daughters-in-law were both also wearing matching expressions of panic and confusion.

The old man stomped his walking stick heavily on the ground, exclaiming, “Both of you should be grateful that I decided to give you anything at all! After all, the four of you fed me with a different kind of poison each!”

“You should feel fortunate that I did not send you directly to jail out of respect for your mother. Yet, you dare demand more from me? Would you prefer actually being sent to prison to repent for your sins?”

His words took everyone by surprise.

“Natalie saved my life, and I am giving her what she rightfully deserves. And since Corden is here with us, I will immediately disown whoever dares to question the content of my will.”

At that moment, Chris and Charlie finally swallowed their pride and kept their mouth shut. They knew that it would not be out of character for Max to act on his words and actually send them to jail.

After the meeting, Max asked Natalie to stay behind to talk to him.

“Natalie, do you mind being given so little of my inheritance?”

She shook her head. “I saved you to return a favor on Mr. Jones’ behalf. You really shouldn’t have given me the shares; it’s much too vast of an amount for a normal person like me...”

“It is indeed a vast amount for a normal person. However...” Max’s eyes glittered with confidence. “I have seen various types of people throughout my life, and you... You are not a normal person.

“I hope that you can become my granddaughter-in-law and give Shawn your full support, but I can tell that you are not interested in my grandson. The five percent shares I gave you serve as an investment in you, and as a sort of plea that you will save the Watsons family once more in the future.”

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Walking out of the lounge, Natalie bumped into Chris and Charlie and their respective spouses by the door.

The two couples glared daggers at her as if hoping that their gaze could burn holes through her.

There was a glint in Natalie’s brown eyes as she asked lazily, “Mr. Corden, can I ask you something?”

“Go ahead, Ms. Nichols.”

“Since Old Mr. Watsons’ will has taken effect, what will happen to the portion that I’m supposed to inherit should something untoward happen to me?”

The man was stunned for a moment, but he quickly recovered and replied, “According to Old Mr. Watsons’ instructions, the shares under your name will be donated to Chanaea’s charity organizations under your name and the Watsons family’s joint names.”

Narrowing her eyes, Natalie nodded satisfactorily.

“Did the two gentlemen and their wives hear this loud and clear?”

The two couples’ faces darkened. However, Natalie just turned around and walked off without a second word.

*Although these two lame excuses of men have done despicable things, Max is still unwilling to send his own children to jail. The five percent equity not only makes me an effective shield for Shawn, but it also means that I have to help him out when he’s in trouble. I have to say: Mar, as the head of the Watsons family, is one cunning man. The inheritance given to me is also apt, making it difficult to refuse.*

Shawn interrupted her train of thoughts as he queried, “Natalie, what did Grandpa talk to you about?”

“Grandpa asked me to examine him,” Natalie lied smoothly. “Although the toxins in his body were removed, he still needs to pay attention to his diet and exercise given his age.”

"I see..."

"Why do you ask? What do you think Grandpa told me in private?"

"N-Nothing."

Shawn's heart beat wildly.

His feelings for Natalie were overflowing.

Although he tried to contain his feelings and show restraint, he was afraid that Max saw through him and told Natalie about how Shawn truly felt.

Completely unaware of the other man's feelings, Natalie accompanied Shawn downstairs.

More guests had arrived.

Natalie stood out like a sore thumb as she took her place next to Shawn.

Many wealthy and famous people approached them to exchange pleasantries with

Shawn, and the conversation naturally moved onto the topic of Natalie, who always graciously introduced herself.

Shortly after, everyone at the banquet knew the ugly girl with a face full of freckles as Natalie Nichols.

While socializing, Natalie chanced upon her family of three, whom she had not seen for a long time.

*I did not expect that they would receive an invitation from Old Mr. Watsons to attend tonight's banquet. I haven't seen them in almost six years... That middle-aged man with a face full of smiles has probably already forgotten that he has a daughter called Natalie.*

"Shawn, I'm going to get a piece of cake."

"Sure."

Natalie walked toward the family of three slowly. As she stared at the hypocritical and disgusting man, the hatred in her eyes deepened.

Her mother had loved him with all her heart.

However, he destroyed her happiness, occupied Natalie's grandfather's family business, and even had something to do with her grandfather's death.

Thomas, Yvonne, and their daughter Melissa did not notice her. They felt a cold gaze upon them, but could not identify its source.

Even though Natalie walked right past them, they did not recognize her.

Melissa only paid attention to Natalie because she was Shawn's partner and, more so, because of Natalie's unique gown.

After Natalie was a good distance away, she held Yvonne's arm and said coquettishly, "Mom, that ugly woman is also called Natalie Nichols. She has the same name as that woman..."

Upon hearing this name, Yvonne's eyes flashed with disdain.

"Melissa, they may have the same name, but they lead entirely different lives. That country bumpkin slept with some guy six years ago and even became pregnant with the man's child. We have no idea where she is now. How can she be compared to this woman?"

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"Pfft. Why would you mention her on such a joyous occasion?" Thomas downed the glass of red wine in his hand and glanced at Yvonne. "That girl has a wild streak and does not know how to treasure herself. She does not deserve to be my daughter..."

Yvonne gave him an apologetic smile in response. "Yes, you're right. That girl lived with her mother in the countryside since young. There's no way she could amount to anything honorable."

Although Yvonne was a mistress who later became the lady of the house, she treated Yara like her own child and loved her more dearly than she loved her daughter, Melissa.

"Unlike Yara, who grew up by our side with first-rate education, talents, preferences..."

At the mention of Yara, Thomas' tightly knitted brows' relaxed a little.

"Yara is indeed exceptional."

"It's because of who raised her," Yvonne announced smugly. "After she marries into the Bowers family, your birthday celebrations will be as grand as Old Mr. Watsons."

Everyone in Thomas' family beamed with delight.

Natalie watched the happy family full of smiles from a spot not far away as she ate her chocolate truffle cake.

She was always an outsider in this family.

AT

She had tried desperately to be part of the family in the past but ended up being ostracized.

Now, she felt nothing but hatred and disdain left for them.

She remembered how Thomas and Yvonne ridiculed her when she returned to the Nichols family residence with her pregnancy test results.

Melissa even deliberately tripped her, hoping to make her fall down the stairs.

These painful experiences were buried deeply in her memory.

Yet, although they were buried, she had never forgotten them.

As Natalie reminisced the past, Belle appeared before her, clinging onto Ross' arm.

The two of them looked at each other, their minds racing.

However, Ross interrupted them, exclaiming with wide eyes, "Natalie? Why are you here?"

"Who are you?" Natalie quickly changed the look of surprise on her face to one of indifference, putting down the plate of half-eaten cake on the table. "I—I don't know you. You've got the wrong person."

"Natalie, you didn't use to treat me like this."

"Don't call me Natalie. I don't know you."

With that, Natalie turned around and left, deliberately running off in a panicked and flustered manner.

However, once her back was turned to Belle, she grinned devilishly.

Shortly after, Max made his grand entrance at the main hall.

After saying some pleasantries, the crowd grew more and more excited. The next event was for the guests to present him with their gifts.

The younger generation from the Watsons family and their branch family was the first to present their gifts.

Without exception, they were all lavish gifts. However, Max had already seen many such items in his lifetime, and he politely thanked them.

Soon, it was Belle's turn.

She walked forward in a dignified manner, looking like a proud and elegant black swan in her black gown.

"Old Mr. Watsons, Belle wishes you happy birthday. May you have many happy

returns."

"Thank you."

Belle was in no hurry to present her gift.

Instead, she proposed, "Old Mr. Watsons, it's too slow and uninteresting to look at the gifts one by one. Why don't we present the rest of the gifts by drawing lots? Two people who get picked at the same time will present their gifts together."



“Well, that’s something new!” Fiddling with his walking stick, he nodded slightly. “Might as well give it a try.”

Belle had already set things up before making her proposal, bribing the employees involved in the draw to switch Natalie’s gift.

Natalie would face ridicule as soon as she opened the present in front of everyone, and she would never be able to make a comeback from the humiliation.

Belle searched for Natalie amongst the crowd, staring at her with a calculative look in her eyes.

Natalie, however, was unfazed, as if she was not a part of the upcoming draw. She merely tasted the wine at the banquet. *This wine... has a full flavor and is a little sweet.*

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At Max’s acquiescence, the employees brought out the box for the draw.

“Since it’s already prepared, let’s start.”

At the wave of his hand, the employees began the draw.

The employee drew Belle’s name, and unexpectedly, Natalie’s name next.

Natalie put down her wine glass when her name was called.

“What did you get for my grandpa?” Shawn asked softly.

“It’s a secret. You’ll find out later.”

The employees went to retrieve the gifts. Natalie and Belle stood before Max. One was dressed in silver, and the other in black.

The both of them looked stunning from behind.

Unfortunately, when viewed from the front, Belle was clearly better-looking.

Belle straightened her back with a satisfied and haughty look on her face.

The employees brought out two wooden boxes of considerable size. However, Belle’s box surpassed Natalie’s in terms of its size and exquisiteness.

Natalie’s box was very aged and did not have any designs or decorations.

Max asked, “Whose shall we see first?”

He said so casually and without much thought.

Natalie coming to his birthday celebration was already the best gift he could ever receive. He was glad that she was gifting him anything, even if it was just an old box.

Belle glanced at Natalie. "Old Mr. Watsons, why don't you look at Natalie's gift first? She is thoughtful and will surely give you a present that you'll like..."

Upon hearing her words, all of the guests became curious instantly.

Natalie wore a designer gown and was constantly by Shawn's side.

What gift would such a woman present?

Max immediately saw that Belle was trying to ruin Natalie with her flattery, but he remained calm and asked in his usual tone, "What do you think, Natalie?"

"I'm fine either way."

Hearing this, Belle laughed. Things were all going according to her plans.

"Old Mr. Watsons, since Natalie has agreed, let's look at hers first..."

Max nodded.

Belle's hands curled into fists as she waited anxiously. However, she already had a triumphant smile on her face.

*Hmph! When Natalie opens the box, it will be akin to opening Pandora's box. She's going to become a laughing stock tonight!*

Natalie snorted slightly.

The box opened with a *click*.

Without even having seen anything, Belle screamed, "Ahhh! Natalie, what on earth is your gift? Are you mad? You're cursing Old Mr. Watsons!"

At that moment, the entire crowd fell silent as everyone's gazes immediately fell upon Belle.

However, Belle merely thought that the crowd had been shocked into silence because they were astonished by Natalie's gift as well.

"Natalie, you must explain yourself!. Just what are you up to?"

Natalie replied emotionlessly, "What am I up to?"

Thinking that Natalie was putting up a final struggle, Belle mocked, "Don't tell me that you didn't know what you gifted. Don't pretend to be innocent in order to absolve yourself of blame!"

The tension in the air thickened.

Max's face immediately darkened.

"I'm still here!"

He hit his walking stick angrily against the floor, the dragon head producing a dull sound from the impact

Belle rejoiced secretly. "Natalie, you're disrespecting Old Mr. Watsons..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Max shouted, "Belle, stop this instance!"

This startled and aggrieved her.

"Old Mr. Watsons... W-what did I do?"

She turned around to face Max and explain herself. However, her gaze fell upon the box that Natalie opened, and she was immediately dumbfounded.

Inside the old box was a wooden sculpture of the Medicine King Bodhisattva.

The sculpture carved from thousand-year-old red sandalwood wore a crown. Its left fist was tucked at the waist, and its right hand held a medicinal tree branch before its chest.

It was perfectly intact and even gave off a faint fragrance of herbs and red sandalwood. At first glance, it was worth tens of millions.

It was a valuable and apt present for a birthday celebration.

"H-How did this..."

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Belle pursed her lips, her gaze filled with disbelief.

*I bribed people to switch Natalie's gift, so why doesn't her box contain the gift that I had prepared? Where did things go wrong?*

Belle was overconfident and thought that her plan was flawless, which was why she said all those things without even sparing a glance at what was in Natalie's box.

However, Natalie was not the joke now.

She was!

"Belle..." Natalie walked up to Belle and raised a brow. "Is there anything wrong with my gift to Old Mr. Watsons that's worth making such a fuss over?"

At those words, the silent crowd started whispering.

"What is wrong with Belle today?"

"Belle has always been known for her elegance in our circle. Why is she acting like this today?"

“Don’t you think that she looks like she has been possessed? She looks weird.

Belle’s face drained of all color before subsequently turning bright red.

“L...”

“You said that I was cursing Old Mr. Watsons, right?”

Natalie’s red lips parted as she continued, “I gave him a Medicine King Bodhisattva to wish him good health and longevity. I’m not sure what taboo I’ve committed.”

Belle bit her lower lip until it bled, but she still could not find a way to explain herself out of this.

The sculpture’s price, aesthetics, and meaning were faultless and could not be criticized in any way.

She wanted nothing more than to give herself a fierce slap across the face.

*Why did I interrogate Natalie in public like that without first checking the gift?*

Shawn’s gaze was icy.

Max was livid, but chose to not express his anger on account of the relationship between the Watsons and Green family. Instead, he spoke up, “Belle must have had too much to drink tonight and saw wrongly.”

Natalie smiled coolly. “Indeed.”

Now that Max himself had come forward to smooth things over, Natalie did not pursue Belle’s attempt at defamation any further.

It was clear for all to see who was in the right and who was in the wrong.

Natalie stood there calmly, maintaining her elegant posture. She exuded an aura that was neither humble nor arrogant. The sparkle in her eyes seemed to make her dazzle in everyone’s eyes.

The more gracious Natalie was, the more angry Belle became.

In the end, the fool was her!

Max cleared his throat. “Belle, let me see what present you prepared for me.”

Belle nodded vigorously. *This is my chance to turn the tables!*

She had spent considerable thought and effort on Max’s birthday present, sourcing a precious stone and hiring a master carver to carve a goddess sculpture out of the

stone.

“Let me show you what I’ve prepared.”

Belle walked over to the side of the box and opened the lock.

Everyone stretched their necks to see what the young lady from the Green family brought.

However, the moment she opened the box, Belle screamed again.

“Ahhh!”

This scream was far, far louder than the last.

Belle’s heart was in her throat. Her hands trembling, the box fell out onto the floor and the “gift” came rolling out.

At first, the crowd could not see what the gift was, but now it was clear for everyone to see.

The hall was so silent that one could have heard a pin drop.

No one dared to say anything, and some people even held their breaths.

There was a dead bloodied black cat on the carpet.

The black cat looked as though it had suffered a painful, agonizing death some time ago.

Its black eyes were blown wide and frozen in a fierce stare, and its amber pupils looked frighteningly pitiful.

Other than the black cat’s corpse, many cotton balls filled with blood rolled out.

Belle clutched her chest and gasped for air.

*This was the present that I prepared for Natalie. How did it become the present that I ended up giving?*

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In contrast to the shocked reaction of the others, this was all well within Natalie’s expectations.

She had heard from Ross about Belle’s conspiracy.

Instead of exposing her right away, she decided to go with the flow.

She wanted to take revenge on Belle for all that Belle had done to her in the past.

Belle shook her head vigorously. “It’s not me! I swear it’s not me!”

A black cat was well-known as a bad omen since ancient times.

Not to mention, this black cat had been dead for a long time, and it was completely covered in blood, making it seem even more horrible.

Max stood up from his chair, roaring, "Belle, if it's not from you, who else would have given it to me? I have been trusting you and showering you with love as if you were my own family member. How could you do this to me?"

"Old Mr. Watsons, it really wasn't me!"

"Don't try to talk your way out of this one!"

A wave of resentment flooded Belle.

Feeling wronged, she burst into tears.

"I swear that I had prepared a goddess sculpture for you! This dead cat wasn't my doing!"

Clearly not believing Belle anymore, Max harrumphed. "Where is the sculpture, then?"

Belle didn't know of the goddess sculpture's whereabouts.

However, she was certain that this incident had to have something to do with Natalie.

"It's Natalie!" Belle pointed at Natalie, shouting desperately, "She's trying to plot

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against me! She's the one who swapped out my present!"

*She's already been exposed, and now she's still trying to drag me down with her?* The corner of Natalie's lips curled up. "Ms. Green, do you have any evidence of that?"

"..." Belle now tried begging Max. "Old Mr. Watsons, please check the surveillance footage..."

Before she could finish her sentence, she realized her mistake.,

In order to frame Natalie, she had asked her subordinates to destroy the surveillance cameras.

If the surveillance camera had failed to capture her swapping the gifts, then it naturally could not have caught Natalie doing so either.

Natalie snickered upon seeing Belle's speechless reaction.

"Ms. Green, why don't you finish your sentence?"

"Natalie, are you playing a trick on me?" Belle questioned Natalie, her eyes red rimmed with tears.

"You were the one vilifying the gift I chose and claiming that my gift is a curse." Natalie narrowed her eyes as she continued, "But now, you're claiming that I'm framing you. Are you even listening to yourself?"

Belle had said earlier that Natalie's gift was a curse.

However, the gift that Belle herself had presented turned out to be a dead cat.

Shawn managed to guess Belle's intentions in an instant.

Belle's pride had already been destroyed, so she didn't care about ruining the rest of her image or losing all her dignity.

In that moment, all she wanted was to rip the woman in front of her to pieces.

"Natalie, you shameless b\*tch..."

Shawn stepped in front of Natalie to shield her. His face darkened as he said in a

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serious tone, "Belle, watch yourself! I didn't say anything earlier on because I wanted to maintain the relationship between our families. If you dare slander her again, you're making yourself an enemy of mine."  
"

Belle really liked Shawn.

When she saw the way Shawn defended Natalie, her heart broke into pieces.

"Shawn, this woman is so ugly! Why do you like her? Did you know that she's a fickle woman? She's a b\*tch..."

Shawn did not have the habit of hitting women.

However, he smashed the wine glass in his hand onto the ground.

The glass wine shattered near Belle's feet, and the broken pieces cut her ankle.

Blood flowed from the wound, successfully stopping Belle from running her mouth any longer.

Enduring the pain of her ankle, Belle took slow steps towards Ross and gripped his arm tightly.

Her knuckles were turning white from how tight her fingers were clenched around his arm, as if she was grasping onto the last straws of hope.

"Ross, tell everyone about the relationship between you and Natalie! Let's reveal her true colors!"

*Thank goodness I still have Ross as my trump card.*

However, Ross didn't move an inch, even as Belle had his arm in a death grip.

He merely glanced coldly at Belle.

"Belle, what are you talking about?"