

Mysterious Woman is So Gentle by Mila Chan chapter 12

Chapter 12

Soon, Janet had been brought over to Henrick forcefully.

As soon as she saw Henrick, Janet started shouting in panic, "Mr. Southall, I'm innocent! I

went out only because my useless son got into trouble again! I have nothing to do with the cobra incident! Please, I've always been loyal to the Southalls!"

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

Without any hesitation, the housekeepers did as instructed.

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

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

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

Snap! With just one whip, Janet's skin instantly split open. The pain was so unbearable she

started screaming and writhing on the floor.

Arielle watched silently by the side, her gaze cold and unfeeling. It looks like the person who had snuck onto my balcony to release the snake is this old hag. Arielle was furious and felt no pity toward Janet. It's only fair that she pays the price for

this.

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

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

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

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

the bottom of the matter.

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

investigation.

"Mr. Southall, I've asked around the markets in the southern district. One of the sellers said

he sold someone a venomous snake at midnight."

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

The housekeeper shook his head. "I didn't ask, but I did bring the seller here. He'd also be

able to confirm if the snake did come from him."

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

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

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

sold?"

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

Henrick scoffed and walked over to Janet, who hadn't dared to look up since the mention of

the snake seller. He brought her to the seller and once again asked, "Did this old lady buy the

snake from you?"

The snake seller had no idea what was going on, only that he shouldn't lie to a man like

Henrick. He took one good look at Janet and nodded, "Yes, that's her. She said she wanted to try

making some exotic snake wine, so I recommended her the most venomous snake I have."

With a witness and evidence, the truth was finally out. Henrick pushed Janet away angrily and asked coldly, "So? What do you have to say for

yourself now?"

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

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

"No, I didn't. Why would I want to harm Ms. Shandie? She's like a daughter to me!" "Then who exactly did you want to harm? Is it my father?" Arielle continued. "Did someone

else put you up to this to frame me? Or are you going to say I was the one who got you to buy

the snake?"

Janet was taken aback by that last sentence.

She had wanted to insist that Arielle was the mastermind behind all this. However, now that Arielle had brought it up herself, it'd be foolish to accuse her.

Just as Janet was hesitating about telling the truth, Arielle turned to her father and said,

"Dad, call the police. Someone as vicious as her deserves to spend the rest of her life behind bars!"

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

need me."

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

Janet had given up completely. She knew what she had to do. If she told the truth, there was still a possibility that she could get away with it. If she didn't,

she'd be serving jail time for Shandie.

No matter

what Cindy and Shandie had done for her, Janet wasn't going to sacrifice that

much for them.

"I'll tell you everything..." Janet cried out. "It was Ms. Shandie who instructed me to do it!

She ordered me to buy the snake and release it into Ms. Arielle's room. But I don't know how the

snake ended up being in Ms. Shandie's room..."

Arielle immediately piped up, "My

room is very near Shannie's, so the snake could have

crawled over from the balcony. I just never expected Shannie to hate me this much. I thought

she had always treated me well..."

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

"You old scumbag! And that little b*tch! You reap what you sow!" Henrick hollered. He let out a deep sigh and took a few deep breaths to calm himself down. "Bring Cindy

down. Let her see for herself how her good daughter had turned out!"

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

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

"You're still speaking up for her even after all this? Your kindness is going to be your

downfall! If things had gone her way, you'd have been the one bitten by the snake!"

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

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

After Janet recounted the entire incident again, Cindy's face instantly paled. How could I have given birth to such a foolish daughter?

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

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

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

little.

"Fine. I don't want to air our dirty laundry in public, so this matter ends here," Henrick said

before looking at Janet. "As for this old hag, she has to go. Get someone to send her to the farm,

and make sure she doesn't come into contact with anyone!"

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

Before long, Henrick received a call from the hospital. "Mr. Southall, Ms. Shandie has woken up, but she doesn't want to stay in the hospital. She

wants to come home as soon as possible."

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

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

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

Southalls.

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

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

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Chapter 13

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

Southall.

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

Soon, they arrived at the Southall residence.

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

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

I'm still the precious princess of the Southalls.

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

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

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

immediately.

Wait. Arielle didn't even bring anything with her. She can just leave immediately! The more she thought about it, the more excited she became, and the quicker she walked.

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

“Mom!” Finally, Shandie entered the living room.

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

That was not the scene she had imagined.

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

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

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

Right then, Shandie recalled what she had wanted to tell them. Ignoring the odd tension, she

uttered, “Mom, I’m fine. I’m back because I have something important to tell Dad.”

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

“No, Mom, I have to tell him now!”

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

I can’t wait anymore! Shandie felt that her mother was too hesitant. At a time like this, she should be decisive.

Thus, she pushed away Cindy and headed toward Henrick. “Dad, I have something to tell you.”

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

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

“What is it?” Henrick questioned with a glacial expression. If Shandie admits to her mistake, I might forgive her this time.

Yet...

Shandie

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

Henrick froze. He had not expected Shandie to blame Arielle for it despite being the culprit. How did I raise such a vicious and stupid daughter? Hearing his silence, Shandie thought it was because he was reluctant to get rid of Arielle.

Thus, she added, “Dad, you can’t give in now. She failed to kill me this time, so she’ll definitely

try it again. If she has the guts to hurt me, she’ll have the courage to hurt you too!”

At that, Henrick narrowed his eyes.

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

Slap! The loud sound reverberated in the living room. It was much harder than the one Cindy had dealt with Shandie. Almost immediately,

Shandie spat a mouthful of blood out.

Along with her blood was a white tooth.

Henrick’s slap had made her lose a tooth. At that moment, Shandie was dumbfounded. What... is going on?

Shouldn’t Dad be slapping Arielle? Why is he hitting me? Shandie covered her cheek in disbelief. Just as she was about to ask why Henrick had hit her, Cindy ran over and grabbed Shandie.

“Don’t say anything. Let’s go up first.”

“No! Why do I have to go upstairs?” Shandie was frustrated.

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

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

“Am I not? I was hospitalized. The doctor even said that if I were to be there a few minutes

later, I wouldn’t be breathing right now!” Recalling it now still sent shudders down her spine.

Arielle’s lips curled, but the smile soon dropped. Taking a step forward, she muttered,

“Shandie, why are you still refusing to speak the truth even at a time like this? Must you anger

our father and give him a heart attack?”

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

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

depraved you are.”

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

Arielle smiled. “You really don’t know anything, do you? Janet has told us everything. You’ve

asked her to buy a venomous snake to murder me, but the snake slithered into your room from

the balcony. Shandie, it’s time to lay on the bed you make.”

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

Janet... betrayed me? Abruptly, she recalled the odd tension in the air and the way Cindy kept trying to stop her

from talking when she entered the house.

So they all know the truth now?

No wonder. No wonder there was a taunting look in Arielle's eyes. No wonder Dad slapped me. Shandie panicked. She tugged Cindy's sleeve and mumbled, "Mom..." At the end of the day, Shandie was still Cindy's daughter, and she could not help but feel

upset about the situation. Pulling the younger woman into her arms, she whispered, "Stay quiet

and follow me upstairs."

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

up the stairs.

"Stand right there!" Henrick demanded. "From now on, you're grounded. You're not allowed

to leave your room for a month. I'll be hiring a teacher from an etiquette school to teach you

how to be a decent human being."

Shandie took a step back in shock.

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

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

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

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

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Chapter 14

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

solemn look in them.

It seems like the slap from Cindy is worth it. However, this will be the last time Cindy will be allowed to hit me.

Once Shandie was gone, Henrick walked toward Arielle and said, "Sannie. I remember you

used to be called Sannie, right?"

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

anymore.

"What about this, Sannie?"

Henrick sighed before pursing his lips. Then, he said, "I've spoiled Shandie. It's partially my fault that she has done such a horrible thing. We should've called the cops, but she's still your younger sister, and we're a family. Moreover, you're fine, and she has reaped what she sowed.

Let's forget about this, all right? However, I'll still punish her and compensate you. Is that okay?"

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

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

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

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

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

As long as it was nothing threatening to him, he would not easily abandon Shandie. After all, the more daughters he had, the more chances for him to cling to a wealthier

family.

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

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

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

However, she showed none of that on her face. Instead, she plastered a sweet smile on her face and nodded. "I can't decide, so, Dad, I'll just heed your words. Shandie's still young, so I won't blame her for anything. I'll pretend nothing happened, and I'll still be a good sister to her. I just hope Shandie won't mind too."

"Don't worry. I'll ask her to forget about this as well. No one will mention this anymore. I'm

sure the two of you will be able to get along fine."

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

Anyone who looked at her would assume that she was innocent and sensible. Henrick sighed in relief, feeling glad about the situation. Not only was this daughter of his pretty and forgiving, but she was also obedient. She's much more obedient than I thought she would be. That's good. She'll be easy to control. "It's getting late. I'm sure you must have been shocked today too. Rest earlier. Tell me what

you need, and I'll do my best to fulfill your requests." Henrick was in a good mood. For once, the

miser was not stingy, for he handed Arielle another card.

"There's one million in this. In total, you'll have two million, including the other million I've

given to you earlier. You can spend it on anything you like. Once you've spent it all, you can come and ask for more. You shouldn't live as you used to in the village. You've got to act like the daughter of the Southalls.

I'll ask Alfred to bring you to shop for clothes tomorrow."

"Thank you, Dad! You're the best!" Ego stroked, the upset from Shandie's incident dissipated from Henrick's mind. He then

hummed a tune as he went upstairs.

The moment Arielle returned to her room, the sweet smile on her face disappeared. Even if Shandie's stupid, she has Cindy watching out for her. On the other hand, I have no one.

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

Maybe there's nothing bad with being alone. Moreover, it's not that I'm alone. Dad and Mom overseas are very nice to me. And my

brother, too. He's dependent on me.

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

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

Yet, when she thought about her brother, the corners of her lips curled upward.

Right then, her phone rang. When she picked up the call, she realized it was from a friend from Moranta. "Sannie, how are you?" the other person on the line had an accent.

"I'm quite fine, Vance. To be honest, I'm back at my old family home in the country.

Although I've encountered some minor matters, it's been resolved now. Why are you calling, by the way?"

Arielle was speaking in fluent Ustranasian, as if she was born and raised overseas.

Sounding a little embarrassed, the other person continued, "You know I've been working on

an island project, but the ending part of the project costs a lot, and I'm having issues with the

funds. I was wondering if you could lend me some money, or perhaps invest into my project."

Arielle answered, "I'm quite interested in your island project. What about this? How much

do you need? I'd be happy to join you."

"That's great. We'd be even better with you joining us. I'll be needing a billion. Are you all right with that?"

“No problem,” came Arielle’s swift response. Upon ending the call, Arielle contacted her overseas personal financial advisor. She then used her computer to transfer a billion into Vance’s account before asking her lawyer to sign the contract for the investment.

When she was done, she then glanced at the two cards Henrick had given to her and barked out a laugh. The next thing she did was delete the history of the transactions on the computer.

On the other end.

After Cindy brought Shandie back to her room, she finally cursed at her out loud. “You idiot! How many times have I told you not to do anything rash before figuring out

Arielle completely? Why won’t you ever listen to me?”

As tears streamed down Shandie’s face, she sobbed out, “I— I didn’t think things would turn

out this way. But, Mom, you have to believe in me. Arielle must have been the one to let the

snake bite me! I’ve clearly asked Janet to let the snake into her room.”

“I know!” Cindy gritted out. At the harsh tone, Shandie froze. Then, she muttered, confused, “Why aren’t you helping me

explain the situation if you know the truth? Arielle’s a wicked person.”

Cindy sighed. “I’ve taught you so many things, but until now, you haven’t been able to read

the room. Your father clearly trusts her now. Moreover, you were the one to put the snake into her room first. How are you going to explain that? Nothing you say will help you; you’ll only

make your father even angrier.”

“Then what do I do? I can’t be slandered in this way! Have you seen how the housekeepers look at me? Everyone in the manor thinks I deserved this.”

At that, Cindy was silent for a moment. “It seems like Arielle is much more complex and difficult to figure out than I thought. I’ll try my best to find out her history. Before that, you’ll

have to get along with her. Even if it's tough, you have to do it well. Pretend to admit to your

mistakes and live in harmony with her for now. That way, your father will be happy. You know

he hates family conflicts and disobedient people.”

“But... I've been grounded. I can't go out.”

“Silly girl, have you forgotten about how you're going to get your certificate in a week's time? Be patient for a week. Once you become a star at the ceremony, everyone will forget about

this matter.”

“All right. I'll work hard with practicing this week. I'll definitely stun everyone at the ceremony.”

“I'm glad you can think this way.” In a blink of an eye, five days went by.

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Chapter 15

Neither Shandie nor Cindy did anything. Likewise, Cindy no longer begged Henrick to shorten Shandie's punishment. Cindy even took increasingly good care of Arielle, which Henrick approved

That incident with the venomous snake was explicitly banned. No one was allowed to utter a single word about it. Hence, the manor's inhabitants resumed their following days as if

nothing happened.

Likewise, Henrick returned to his and Cindy's bedroom after five days of sleeping in the study.

By the sixth day, Henrick headed out with a bounce in his step; even Cindy had a glowing and cheery expression. It wasn't hard to guess what happened the night before.

Things became so amiable that Cindy offered an entire drumstick to Arielle during dinnertime.

At this, a delighted smile crept onto Arielle's face. She responded in a sweet tone, "Thank you, Aunt Cindy."

"Call me Mom from now on." Cindy beamed back as she continued, "I'll look after you as my own child. Just like Shannie. She's not my biological daughter, but I've always cared for her like

she is. So, don't hesitate to ask me if you ever need anything."

Arielle scoffed inwardly. Not your biological daughter? I don't believe it one bit.

Shandie is only a couple of months younger than me, which means that Henrick had an affair with Cindy during my mother's pregnancy.

Henrick obviously won't allow this scandal to leak.

Cindy must be up to something. Why else would she suddenly suggest that I call her "Mom"? Still, she's got some nerve asking me to call her that.

I only have two mothers: my biological mom and my adoptive mother. No one else is worthy of that title.

Skeptical, Arielle looked at Henrick for help. "Dad. I—it's too soon. I'm not used to calling her that..."

She flashed a pair of puppy-dog eyes at him. Her eyes rounded and became slightly moist as she put on a pitiful act.

If this were an award show, Arielle believed that she would have won the title of Most Convincing Actress

True enough, Henrick's features softened after glancing over at her. No man could resist Arielle's puppy dog eyes, not even her own dad. Henrick cleared his throat and consoled, "That's quite alright. Take it slow and go at your

own pace. There's no need to rush into calling her Mom."

"Thanks, Dad." Arielle then cast an apologetic look whilst saying, "And I'm really sorry, Aunt Cindy. I'm sure I'll eventually ease into your new title."

Anger welled in Cindy's chest. This wretched brat! How dare she refuse to call me Mom!

Even so, Cindy was better at tamping down her emotions compared to Shandie, so she feigned a kind smile. "I understand that this must be difficult for you. Please don't apologize. I should be sorry for pressuring you. Don't worry, dear, take all the time you need to adjust. After all, we've got the rest of our lives as a family for you to do so."

"Thanks, Aunt Cindy." "It's nothing, child."

The two played out a harmonious pretense as if they were happily getting along at the dining table.

Henrick's spirits instantly improved; the exhaustion he felt from work faded away at the sight of this merry atmosphere.

As the saying goes, a family in harmony will prosper in everything; I'm content as long as they don't pull any more stunts against one another.

Just as Henrick thought so, Cindy parted her lips to speak. "There's something I have to tell you, dear. It's about Shannie."

The mention of Shandie's name ruined Henrick's mood. He slammed his spoon onto the table and thundered, "Let me guess, you're trying to put in a good word for that brat?"

Considering how grave her actions were, I've been more than merciful by grounding her for

only a month. So forget it! Don't bother defending her."

Arielle threw a suspicious glance at the woman. How uncharacteristic of her to blurt out.

She's normally good at gauging situations before speaking. Surely she knows that this isn't the

best time to defend Shandie?

What exactly is Cindy playing at?

At that moment, Cindy's face scrunched up in distress. "I'm not pleading on behalf of her, dear. It's about something else. I'm just not sure if I should tell you..."

Henrick's frown lifted slightly at this. Regardless, he still growled at a dangerously low pitch, "What's the matter?"

Cindy sighed dramatically, then pulled out a sheet of paper from her pocket. She stated, "I

just received a notice letter today. Remember the Crown Coffee Academy's competition? Well,

Shannie won it. She's the champion."

"What!" Henrick exclaimed.

He obviously knew about the competition. Its winner would obtain a brand ambassadorship

contract with Soir Coffee—the internationally renowned coffee franchise.

Henrick was overjoyed. He snatched the letter from Cindy and went through its contents

thoroughly. When he noticed that Vinson would be an honorary guest, greed flitted across his

eyes.

He clutched the letter with trembling hands whilst his voice quaked with excitement.

"That's great news. Well, why didn't you tell me earlier? The award ceremony is tomorrow

afternoon!"

At once, Cindy's shoulders slumped exaggeratedly in dejection. She explained, "It's because

of that rash mistake that Shannie made. When I told her about the ceremony earlier today, she wasn't keen on attending. She wanted to stay home and reflect on her actions."

"That's absurd!" Henrick protested.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to mingle with influential figures! How can she not go?

Has she lost her mind?

When he finally broke out of his thoughts, he happened to meet Arielle's innocent gaze. It

was as though she saw right through to his calculative schemes.

Flustered, he cleared his throat and said, "Shandie seems like she's realized her mistakes

W

and is taking responsibility for her actions now. So I don't think we have to ground her any

longer. What do you think, Sannie?"

Arielle sneered internally. That's my biological dad for you. Truly a loving dad, isn't he?

Nevertheless, Arielle wasn't one to reveal her true feelings. She flashed a gentle smile and spoke in a considerate manner, "Dad, I meant to tell you a while ago; it will do no good to ground her for as long as a month. We should let her off early. Besides, she's not a kid anymore.

She'll know how to discern right from wrong after making a mistake once. Plus, you can always enforce stricter punishments if she regresses to the making the same mistakes."

Cindy, who sat opposite them, gnawed so hard on her lips that she almost drew blood. Arielle, that brat! When

she puts it that way, it means Henrick will never let Shandie off the

hook if she messes up again!

It was just as Cindy predicted. Henrick's brows knitted taut as he declared, "That's right,

there won't be a next time. Cindy! Pass the message to her: she'll be disowned from this manor if

she pulls another stunt again!"

Anger sizzled in Cindy's chest, yet she had to play along. "I'll relay it to her, don't worry. She knows that she's done wrong. Sannie, thank you so much for forgiving her."

Arielle looked at her with a smug smile. "We're all family, after all. And compromise is a crucial part of being a family, even if Shandie wanted to kill me."

Cindy's smile tensed. She couldn't handle Arielle's not-so-subtle jabs any longer. Shooting onto her feet, she then announced, "I'll go pack my things for the journey to Norham tomorrow."

With that, she paced over to the stairs but quickly stopped halfway. Then she extended a friendly offer, "Tomorrow's a weekend, dear. You won't be going to the office. Why don't you and Sannie come along?"

Henrick immediately nodded as he thought about Arielle and Vinson's relationship. "Absolutely! Could you pack Sannie's things as well? And get her some new clothes for the trip to Norham, if you can."

"Yes, dear." Cindy finally let out a victorious smile.

Hmph! Just wait and see, Arielle. My daughter will become the star of the award ceremony.

Then, you'll be left standing in her shadow.

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Chapter 16

Once Cindy left, Henrick's gaze darted over to Arielle. "Sannie. Tell me the truth, how did

you meet Vinson? Are you two close?"

Henrick wanted to ask this long ago. However, he worried that Arielle would think he was

using her as a stepping stone. Hence, he refrained from asking up till now.

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

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

As expected, Arielle answered him without a sliver of hesitation. "I don't actually know him

that well. I encountered him by chance when my ship sank at sea. He was injured at the time, so

I treated his wounds with whatever herbs I could find. It was later when his subordinates came

for him that I got rescued and brought back here."

What he didn't know was that Arielle had summarized the story. She omitted the details

where they undressed and huddled up for warmth, as well as the truth that she saved Vinson's

life.

Hearing her story, Henrick felt both disappointed yet pleased. He was disappointed because he had hoped for some emotional entanglement between

Arielle and Vinson, but there were none.

At the same time, he was buzzing with joy that Arielle had aided the Vinson Nightshire.

Because it meant Vinson owed Arielle's family a favor for her kindness.

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

"Wonderful! That's great, Sannie! As expected of my daughter!" Henrick chortled. He stared endearingly at her as if he was looking at the world's rarest gem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even without any form of embellishment, Arielle was irresistible to the eye. Her presence

glowed with angelic purity, almost like a blooming orchid whose beauty was so rare that people could only appreciate from afar.

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

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

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

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

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

So what if Arielle is pretty? She's nothing but a pretty face that men keep around like toys. I'm the real deal with both the body and looks; the kind of woman that men want to make their

wives.

Shandie suppressed her anger. She cracked a stiff smile and said, "Arielle, I haven't had the

chance to apologize. So now that we're both here, I just wanted to say I'm sorry. I shouldn't have

thrown that childish tantrum and put you in jeopardy. Please forgive me."

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

Childish tantrum?

Humph. What kind of child harbors murderous intentions during a tantrum? Regardless, Arielle cast a gentle gaze as she held Shandie's hand. Then she soothed in a

honeyed voice, "It's alright, Shandie. There's no need to dwell on the past or apologize anymore.

We're family, after all."

Caught in Arielle's tight grip, Shandie bit down her repulse. She desperately wanted to fling

Arielle's vermin-like hand away but couldn't.

Hence, she resisted and continued to smile stiffly.

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

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

this.

According to the regulations, first class passengers were given priority to board the plane

before others.

So the Southalls had to wait in line as Henrick had bought economy-class tickets for the

Night from Jadeborough to Norham.

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

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

Vinson's assistant was reporting the progress of their recent project. Now that Henrick had

rudely interrupted, Vinson shot a glare in Henrick's direction.

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

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

him.

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

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

forgetful?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sensing the confusion on Vinson's face, Henrick briskly shoved Shandie aside while yanking Arielle forward. He

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

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

Vinson's eyes roamed over Arielle's appearance. Unlike the other three, who wore fancier

clothing, Arielle seemed like a regular student. It was as if they were from different class groups.

Vinson raised a brow, curious to see Arielle's reactions. He feigned confusion as he asked,

"Apologies, I'm not very good with remembering faces. May I ask who you are, miss?"

Arielle blinked. Did he forget who I am?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thinking this, Cindy paced in Henrick's direction.

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

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

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

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

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Chapter 17

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

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

She knew that the Southalls wanted connections with the Nightshires because of their elite

social status. Despite this, that prestige wasn't what she wanted or needed.

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

Shandie scoffed when Arielle didn't react to her.

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

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

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

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

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

What's going on?

Mr. Nightshire never laughs. He's usually unsmiling, and some would even say

intimidatingly distant. I can't believe he's chuckling to himself now.

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

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

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

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

The assistant had worked alongside Vinson for several years now, so he knew better than to

ask Vinson outright. He pondered for a while before recalling that Arielle had dressed differently from the others.

Then he answered hesitantly, "Indeed. The other three have donned well-known designer

brands while that young lady's clothes... Well, they seem like some randomly bought clothes from an unknown stall."

Even with such a sharp observation, Vinson still shook his head.

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

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

her clothes."

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

Still, he frowned in confusion. "If it's not the clothes, then what is it?" Within seconds, Vinson's facial expression returned to its usual indifference. "It's nothing.

Let's resume."

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

continued with his report.

On the plane, the four Southalls sat in the same row. Henrick had been in a foul mood ever

since Arielle's stunt. Because of this, he ordered Arielle to carry out several mindless tasks throughout the flight. She was told to move their luggage to the overhead cabin, then tidy their coats and put them into the luggage, followed by taking out their chargers and so on...

Everyone else on the plane assumed that she was merely their housekeeper. Arielle wasn't bothered with doing all those tasks. All she did was comply with Henrick's request without any complaints.

Eventually, Henrick couldn't hold it in anymore. He boomed icily, "Enough! Get over here." Once Arielle sat down next to Henrick, he interrogated with a sharp tone, "I thought you

said that you helped Mr. Nightshire. So why didn't he remember you at all?"

Arielle shook her head candidly.

"I'll do you a small favor then, so it's normal that he doesn't remember me."

"Then you should have..." Henrick faltered as he looked at Arielle. I guess having a naive

daughter isn't always a beneficial thing.

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

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

you have to learn."

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

Right then, the flight attendant approached them, “Good day, Mr. Southhall. According to your flight mileage, we’re able to give you a free upgrade to first–class.”

Henrick deliberately chose economy–class seats not only out of stinginess but also because

he knew that they could get a free upgrade.

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

Shandie and Cindy stood as well.

The flight attendant soon noticed Arielle, who was the last to stand. Then he immediately

explained, “My apologies, sir. You only have enough mileage for three free upgrades. Here, have

a look.”

“Three?” Henrick’s temples started to ache. Then who will go with us to first–class? Shandie

or Arielle?

Seeing that Henrick was conflicted, Cindy chimed in, “I’m sure you’ve realized that Arielle

isn’t very quick–

witted. She won’t be of much help at all. Plus, we’re heading to Shandie’s

awards ceremony. So why don’t we give the seat to Shandie this once, hmm?”

Henrick’s face turned grim before he finally agreed.

He promptly turned to Arielle and explained in a matter–of–fact tone, “I can’t help that there

are only three seats. We’ll still see each other once the plane lands. Ergo, it’s not all that

different.”

Arielle stared intensely at Henrick.

Disappointment shrouded in her chest, but she couldn't show it on her face. She refused to

let Cindy and Shandie feel triumphant.

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

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

Shandie intentionally slowed her steps. Once their parents were a good distance away, she taunted in a low voice, "It seems like Dad loves me more. You'll have to work harder to catch up

now! I'll be off to the first-class cabin, so you rest up here in economy-class, hmm? There's

actually not much difference between the two cabins, save for the bigger seats and better service

in mine. But hey, don't let that get to you."

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

Face twisting into a mocking smile, Arielle motioned towards the first-class cabin. She then

provoked, "You'd better hurry over. Dad might change his mind and let me go with them if you keep dilly-dallying."

Shandie panicked upon seeing Arielle's maliciously gleaming eyes.

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

Soon after, all three Southalls plopped down comfortably in their first-class seats. Shandie

had even ordered a glass of the cabin's complimentary red wine.

In economy-class.

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

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

Fake it till you make it, she reminded herself.

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

“Excuse me... Are you here by yourself, miss? May I sit next to you?”

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

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

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

Although, I wonder what kind of man will be able to reel in such a great catch... Not long after the man left, someone else approached Arielle. “Excuse me, miss...”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As they walked by, Shandie immediately took notice.

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Chapter 18

She shot onto her feet and shrieked, "Arielle, what's the meaning of this? Can't you suck it up

this once instead of vying against me for the first-class seat? Need I remind you the reason we're

on this flight? It's because we're going to my awards ceremony! Mine!"

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

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

Right

then, Henrick had overheard the commotion and joined in with a thunderous voice.

"What do you think you're doing, Arielle? And here I thought you were a sweet and obedient

girl. Was that all just a façade?"

Arielle was about to respond, but the man beat her to it. He interjected with a sharp gaze,

"I'm afraid you're all mistaken. Ms. Moore is not here for the first-class cabin. Rather, I'm

escorting her to that private jet, the one next to this aircraft."

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

What she saw next clouded her thoughts with resentment. It was a luxurious private jet

with an extremely sleek and polished exterior. Across the jet's body was an elegantly written

word with fine penmanship—Nightshire.

That's the Nightshire family's private jet! Shandie whipped around to stare daggers at Arielle, jealousy flitting across her dark eyes. Even Cindy, who had been silently observing, balled her fists after seeing the Nightshires' jet.

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

The man maintained a neutral expression as he pointed out, "Apologies, Mr. Nightshire has

only extended his invitation to Ms. Moore alone. Not to mention, the three of you got a cabin

upgrade but chose to abandon Ms. Moore in economy—class by herself. Is that how a family

should be with one another?"

Regret festered in Henrick like a tumor.

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

The man couldn't care less about what Henrick thought. He swiftly turned on his heel and

bowed respectfully to Arielle. "This way, Ms. Moore."

Arielle nodded, then cast an icy stare at Henrick. "I'll meet you guys at the airport."

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

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

beside them.

Shortly after, Arielle boarded the jet. The first thing she saw was Vinson, whose head was

lowered to focus on reading a contract.

The assistant spoke up, “Mr. Nightshire. I’ve brought Ms. Moore over.”

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

Arielle felt uneasy.

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

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

“Okay.” Arielle nodded. She then cautiously walked past Vinson and entered the cabin. Once inside, Arielle’s jaw dropped in shock. She exclaimed, “Rain?” The blonde man lifted his gaze and gawked, equally as surprised. “San? I never thought I’d

see you here. Have you returned to this country?”

“Mm–hmm, I just got back some time ago.”

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

Arielle obliged. Once she sat down, questions about her current life came out of Rain’s

mouth with burgeoning excitement. He also invited, “I’m heading to Norham for the academy’s award ceremony. If there’s nothing on your schedule, would you like to attend as well since you are one of our academy’s founders?”

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

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

Crown Coffee Academy.

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

coffee–making.

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

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

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

founders. They'll be over the moon!"

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

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

"I have some personal reasons." "Alright then, I'll be more than pleased as long as you attend the event." Arielle flashed a faint smile but didn't say anymore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Despite standing next to a tall bodyguard, Vinson still towered with his superior stature. Some passersby curiously paid attention to Vinson. Their faces either turned a bashful shade of red or gawked as they vividly babbled about Vinson's appearance.

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

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

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

She glanced briefly at him before focusing on her phone and dialing Henrick's number.

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

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

It seems like Shandie is trying to get on my nerves by keeping me in the dark about their

whereabouts. Game on, then. I'll patiently wait here for them.

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

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

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