

Arielle showed no signs of authentic emotion on her face in response. Instead, she shrugged innocently and uttered, "Dad, Shandie. You're both mistaken. I called out to him not because I wanted to stop him from visiting the doctor but because of the black gown incident. I suspect that Alfred is involved in this matter as well."

Upon hearing her words, Shandie felt a little embarrassed. *Darn it! Arielle has taken advantage of a loophole once again!*

Henrick softened his expression slightly after listening to those words and said to Shandie, "You shouldn't doubt Arielle at the drop of a hat every time."

He then shifted his gaze toward Alfred, his expression instantly chilling. "Are Sannie's words true?"

Feeling a chill running down his spine, Alfred explained hurriedly, "I-I know nothing about that, Mr. Southall!"

Arielle smirked when she heard those words and responded, "Frankly speaking, Alfred was the person who brought me this gown, Dad. Because the size was too big for me, I gave it to Shandie since she

was going to Yvette's birthday party. As I'm from the countryside, how could I have known that black was a taboo color for Mr. Actonward? It's also understandable for Shandie since she has only returned from the monastery and had no idea about Mr. Actonward's return to the country. However, Alfred has already worked here for so many years. How is it possible for him not to know this kind of stuff?"

Those words from Arielle caused Henrick's countenance to darken even more as he glared at Alfred intimidatingly.

Alfred could not help but tremble in fear at that glare as he noticed the murderous intent in Henrick's eyes.

Since he had worked for the Southalls for many years, Henrick had always trusted Alfred. Sure enough, Henrick had never glared at him in such a manner before.

"I-I did nothing but receive the gown on Ms. Arielle's behalf. I didn't have a clue what color it was back then..." Alfred tried to defend himself in panic.

"Nonsense! Don't believe in his words, Dad. I suspect that Yvette bribed him from the

very start. When I opened up the parcel of the gown, he urged me to wear it to the Actonward residence no matter what. I didn't give it too much thought back then, but I feel like something is very fishy the more I think about it now. You have to investigate this matter thoroughly. Having a spy from another family sneaking into our family is not a desirable thing. You know that." Arielle spoke to Henrick with a cold tone.

In response, Alfred shook his head vehemently. "It was only a coincidence! I didn't even have a clear look at it! You can't declare me guilty because of Ms. Arielle's speculations, Mr. Southall! I've served you for so long! You should know my character!"

To Alfred's dismay, his defense of himself failed to dissipate the iciness from Henrick's expression.

Henrick had always been a skeptical person and would never tolerate any wrongdoings.

Besides, he had nothing to be wary of since Alfred was only a subordinate.

He then commanded his bodyguard to pin Alfred down and requested his assistant to investigate Alfred's bank account.

The pale-faced Alfred's pupils constricted in shock as he protested, "Y-You can't look into my bank account just like that, Mr. Southall! You're invading my privacy!"

When he heard that remonstrance, Henrick narrowed his eyes. "The investigation hasn't even started yet. Is that a demonstration of fear out of guilt? Do you still have the nerve to say you have nothing to do with this matter? How can you work with outsiders to frame my daughter when I've treated you decently all these years?"

Those words rendered Alfred utterly speechless.

Not long after, Henrick received a return call from his assistant and turned on the phone's speaker. "I've looked into his bank account, Mr. Southall. There are quite a few large transactions from a card he rarely uses. The most recent remittance was yesterday. The amount is, um, two hundred thousand."

For a butler who had a salary of around ten

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thousand a month, two hundred thousand was a lot of money.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Two hundred thousand was not an amount most ordinary people could easily earn.

Moreover, it was technically impossible for Alfred to earn that amount of money overnight since he was only an unknowledgeable butler and had no involvement in any businesses outside.

Upon listening to the assistant's words, Alfred began to quiver in fear while his face twisted into a terrified expression.

If that's not an indication of guilt, what is? Henrick cast a fierce glance at Alfred before questioning the assistant, "Who's the sender?"

Unlike before, the assistant was a little hesitant when he spoke this time. "I-It's, u-um..."

"Stop stuttering! Tell me already! Is it Yvette Actonward?"

"It's not Yvette, but Mrs. Southall..." The assistant's startled voice sounded from the other end of the line.

"What!" The bewilderment in Henrick's tone was even more striking than the

assistant's.

Before he could ask more questions, his assistant continued, "That remittance is not the only transaction from Mrs. Southall. All of those large transactions I mentioned earlier were also under her name."

That devastating statement from his assistant made Henrick widen his eyes in shock. He would have never imagined that the person who bribed Alfred was his wife, Cindy, instead of Yvette.

If Cindy were beside him right now, Henrick would have given her a brutal slap on her face without question. *I knew it! That woman must have been scheming something! Why would she want to curry favor with my shareholders otherwise? Thank goodness I've discovered everything in time!*

Little did he know, the person standing behind him, Arielle, was grinning mischievously.

"You b*stard!" Henrick landed a kick on Alfred's face to vent his anger.

Consequently, Alfred shrieked in pain with blood dripping out from his nose.

As if that was not enough, Henrick planted two more kicks on Alfred while roaring at him, "What an ungrateful sc*mbag! I'm your rightful owner! How can you betray me!"

He was exuding a terrifying and murderous aura at the moment.

Shortly afterward, Alfred barely had the strength to scream because of the excruciating pain.

Meanwhile, Shandie also widened her eyes in stupefaction after hearing the assistant's words. *Is it true? Did Mom partner with Yvette to frame me? No, that's impossible!*

With that thought, Shandie suddenly recalled the period before she left the monastery. Back then, Cindy had tried to stop her desperately, even telling her that it could be a trap.

However, she had not taken Cindy's words to heart as she didn't trust her at all.

If it wasn't Mom's doing, who could it be? Following a couple of seconds of pondering, Shandie abruptly glanced toward Arielle.

Coincidentally, Arielle was looking at her as well.

The second their eyes met with each other, Shandie noticed the cold glint in Arielle's eyes and felt shivers down her spine. *T-The culprit is Arielle! I freaking knew it!*

Arielle then curled her lips into a smirk deliberately and asked, "Why are you looking at me like that, Shandie?"

Her innocent look successfully infuriated Shandie.

Shandie's face fell before she grabbed Henrick's arm and pointed at Arielle. "Arielle also has something to do with this matter, Dad! She must've known about the Actonwards' taboo and ordered someone to deliver the gown over to me! You must investigate her too!"

"Shut up!" The rage in Henrick's heart had not faded even the tiniest bit.

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The reason he kicked Alfred was not so much for his indignance toward the butler but Cindy. Given that Cindy was not around, he could only vent his anger on the unfortunate Alfred.

Thanks to Shandie's interference, he became even more enraged as he glared at her with disdain. "You and your mother are both heartless wretches! Not only did Sannie stop me from teaching you a lesson earlier, but she also clarified the matter for your sake by revealing the truth! How can you slander her now? Why did I even decide to raise a daughter like you? What a shame it is to have you as my bio-adopted daughter!"



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Henrick looked at Arielle instinctively as he had been very close to giving himself away with that last sentence. To his relief, Arielle had no reactions on her face. *Since Arielle is my cash cow right now, it won't do me any good if she knows Shandie is my biological daughter.*

In the meantime, Shandie could not believe that she would receive Henrick's disgust toward her in return for accusing Arielle.

Widening her eyes in disbelief, she uttered dumbfoundedly, "I'm telling you the truth, Dad..."

"Say that again if you dare!" Henrick smacked Shandie on her face after that rebuke.

As a result, that slap left a visible imprint on Shandie's face. She covered it while tears sprung to her eyes. "D-Dad? Why did you..."

Why does Dad choose to believe in a country bumpkin like Arielle instead of a daughter he raised? We're both his biological daughters!

"Don't call me Dad! I don't have a shameful

daughter like you!" Henrick continued to berate Shandie.

Still, he felt exhausted because of the continuous outrage as his expression turned dull.

After taking a deep breath, he turned around and instructed the housekeeper, "Monitor her and deliver food to her every day. Do not allow her to leave her room. Anyone who neglects their duty by letting her leave will suffer severe consequences. Understood?"

"Y-Yes, Mr. Southall!" the housekeeper answered with a shudder.

Soon after that instruction, two tall and muscular bodyguards grabbed Shandie's shoulders.

"Please! No!" Shandie struggled to break free from the bodyguards with all her might and strength.

I'd rather stay in the monastery if he locks me up again. At least the monastery has a much bigger space for activity than the house. I will lose my freedom if this persists. No, no!

She also wondered why Henrick had a sudden change of attitude after Arielle's words. *He was still feeling sorry for me only minutes ago! Why did things take such an abrupt turn? I can't accept this! I won't!*

Seeing that the bodyguards had not brought Shandie upstairs yet, Henrick frowned in displeasure. "Are you two weaklings? Can't you take a woman who's much smaller in size than you upstairs?"

That derogatory remark stamped out the bodyguards' concern instantly as they dragged Shandie upstairs by force straight away.

As expected, no one gave a rip about Shandie when she was wailing non-stop in anger.

"How will you deal with Alfred?" Arielle questioned Henrick as soon as Shandie had disappeared from their sight.

Henrick took a cold glance at the half-dead Alfred before replying emotionlessly, "I remember he has a son who is searching for a job. I will inform the companies associated with me to refuse to hire him as their employee!"

Even though Southall Group was not as influential as Moore Group, its connection was still pretty decent. Once Henrick notified his associates, more than half of the major companies in Jadeborough would never hire Alfred's son.

Upon hearing that upsetting statement, Alfred pleaded, "I-It's all my fault, Mr. Southall! I shouldn't have listened to Mrs. Southall and acted so recklessly. I'm willing to return the money she has given me to you, so please spare my son!"

Shooting Alfred one final penetrating gaze, Henrick waved his hand and ordered, "Break his legs and kick him out. If I see him again, you'll receive the same fate as his. Let me give all of you a solemn reminder. If I find out any one of you still recognizes Cindy as the only head of the house in the future, your fate will be even more horrifying than his!"

Those words stirred the housekeepers to reconsider doing things for Cindy.

In the end, Henrick was the true head of the house, after all.

Despite looking tranquil, a chilling glint

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flashed across Arielle's eyes when she heard Henrick's words. *In this way, things will never be the same as before even if Cindy returns by some unknown method.*



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Since Henrick had gotten rid of Alfred - Cindy's best right hand other than Matthias - Arielle believed Cindy would not be able to cause any trouble in the manor anymore.

Nonetheless, Arielle did not let down her guard because of that. *I'm heading to the only profitable department in Southall Group tomorrow. Making early preparations is essential.*

Early next morning, a piercing scream from the same floor that Arielle stayed in awakened her from sleep.

She woke up as soon as the scream sounded as she was a light sleeper. *What happened?*

After putting on a jacket, Arielle left her room hastily and discovered quite a few people standing outside Shandie's room.

At first, she thought Shandie was making a scene for refusing to be locked up, but she sensed something off when she saw the housekeepers' unwillingness to enter the room. *It doesn't seem like Shandie is causing trouble intentionally. It looks more like she's-*

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Arielle then walked over to the room while frowning her brows. Stepping inside, she saw a motionless Shandie lying in a pool of blood.

There was a wound on Shandie's wrist, and the blood most likely came from there.

D-Did Shandie slit her wrist?

She noticed that the blood on the ground had coagulated, while the wound on Shandie's wrist had stopped bleeding as well. Those were indications that Shandie had slit her wrist for a while already.

Witnessing such a scene, Arielle was in utter shock as she never thought Shandie would take her own life. *Shandie is pretty foolish, but I've never imagined she would be that nonsensical. What in the world is going on? What she has done is far beyond what I expected.*

Just as she was about to check whether Shandie was still breathing, Henrick strode toward the room while shouting in a displeased tone, "What is this shameless woman up to this time!"

"D-Dad, something terrible has happened

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to Shannie! Take a look at her, quick!" Arielle said, her expression frozen in shock.

The annoyed Henrick walked over reluctantly in response. When he saw the pool of blood on the ground, he widened his eyes in bewilderment.

Subsequently, he snapped back to his senses and yelled with a trembling voice, "S-Shandie? S-Shannie?"

To his dismay, Shandie neither responded nor moved.

"Calm down, Dad. I'll go and have a look." Arielle told Larissa to support Henrick before crouching down beside Shandie to check her breathing.

However, she had no intention of doing that as soon as her hand touched Shandie. *Her body is as cold as a corpse already. There's no way she's still breathing.*

At the outset, she had thought that this was probably another one of Shandie's schemes. However, reality had proved that was not the case as her body was already thoroughly cold. *She's dead without*

question.

Regardless, Arielle did not understand why Shandie wanted to take her own life. *It's not as if Henrick has never hit her before. Why couldn't she take it this time? That is unusual of her indeed.*

"H-How is she? I-Is she alive?" Henrick questioned with a quivering voice.

Arielle turned around and shook her head at Henrick, her expression sorrowful.

"There's no heat left in her body..."

"What?" Henrick dashed forward in disbelief to personally check Shandie's breathing and nearly ran into Arielle.

Fortunately, Larissa managed to steady Arielle in the nick of time, thus preventing her from falling into the pool of blood.

A few seconds later, Henrick's wail of agony echoed around the room. "Why were you so foolish, Shannie! Why did you have to take your own life? I chose to discipline you for your own good! Don't you understand? Shannie!"

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Disheartened upon seeing Shandie's corpse, tears slid down Henrick's face uncontrollably.

Witnessing the man grieving over his deceased daughter, the bystanders inevitably felt distressed.

It was almost like he really was a father crying over his daughter's death.

The housekeepers crowded around Henrick and offered their condolences, but only Arielle understood what he truly felt.

He had spent immense effort and money to nurture Shandie, and she was quite pretty when dressed up appropriately. With her appeal, she could undoubtedly marry into a wealthy family in Jadeborough. Her sudden death was solely a blow to his master plan.

Hence, he was not grieving for the loss of a daughter but a useful pawn.

Arielle did not further contemplate Henrick's feelings. She merely stared intensely at the dagger in Shandie's hand.

Suddenly, she found something wrong.

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She stealthily took out her phone and snapped some pictures of the scene.

Only then did she walk toward Henrick and feign sorrow. "Dad, I'm as saddened as you are. However, now is not the time to mourn because I think Shandie's death might not be as simple as it seems. We should contact the police first."

As Shandie and Arielle did not see eye to eye, unfavorable rumors would arise from the former's death.

To prevent troublesome gossips, she had to prove her innocence.

However, Henrick immediately refused, "Why should we contact the police? Look at her! It's obvious that she cut her wrist. Do you want the outsiders to gossip about us?"

His words were indeed true. Besides, the injuries on Shandie's back were his work. Thus, if the police were to investigate, he would be the first suspect.

Even if he could prove his innocence, rumors would still spread among the public.

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As he was concerned about his reputation, he would never agree to the risky measure.

Disappointed, Arielle mentally shook her head. She had anticipated his refusal, which was why she discreetly took the photos earlier.

As Henrick was adamant in his stance, she did not bother mentioning the police again. Instead, she suggested, "Still, we should hold a funeral for Shandie. However, regarding Aunt Cindy..."

Henrick stood up and assured in a pained tone, "I'll appoint someone to fetch her. Also, we'll announce to the public that Shandie passed away from an illness. You don't need to worry about this matter anymore. If the news gets out, it will impede your marriage into the Nightshire family. Right now, you should head back to your room and take a rest. I'll handle this matter."

"All right." Arielle nodded docilely as she secretly scorned him, *He's still thinking about my marriage to the Nightshire family at such a moment? What an unbelievable man.*

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Before leaving, she stole a glance at Shandie's corpse. Upon confirming she had not overlooked any details, she turned and walked back to her room as she gestured for Larissa to follow her.

Right after they entered her room, Arielle immediately questioned, "When I arrived, you were already there. Do you know what happened? Who was the first to discover the corpse?"

With Arielle's help, Larissa's child had received treatment abroad and convalesced after some time. As such, she had now devoted herself wholeheartedly to Arielle.

She answered truthfully, "I'm in charge of the cleaning of this household. The first person to discover the corpse was a housekeeper working with me today. As you and Mr. Southall occasionally come back late, we usually start mopping the floor around five in the morning, avoiding accidents from occurring due to the slippery floor."

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Larissa paused for a while before continuing, "That housekeeper is not one of Mrs. Southall's people as she arrived quite recently. While she was mopping the corridor on the second floor, she noticed some red fluid seeping through the gap under Ms. Shandie's door. Then, she quickly called me over as I was on the second floor. We asked a bodyguard to open the door. Upon seeing the corpse, we were shocked. After that, you arrived at the scene."

Arielle nodded and asked, "Did anything happen last night after I went back to my room?"

Larissa pondered for a moment and shook her head. "No. Nothing happened last night. Although Ms. Shandie didn't take her dinner, she sounded fine. Also, she asked us for a cream that would heal wounds without leaving scars. It did not seem to me that she intended to take her own life."

Hearing that, Arielle was sure that Shandie did not take her own life.

Why would someone concerned about leaving scars on her back consciously seek death?

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Bowing her head, Arielle said, "I understand the situation now. You can head back. Report to me if anything occurs."

Before Larissa left, Cindy's image flashed across her mind. Worried, she turned and reminded, "Ms. Arielle, Mrs. Southall will definitely suspect you for Ms. Shandie's death. P-Please be careful."

Although she found Arielle clever, she was concerned about Cindy's vindictive nature.

She understood very well that a mother who lost a daughter could perform any unthinkable deed, as she had committed numerous wrongdoings for her child in the past.

Upon seeing the genuine concern brimming in Larissa's eyes, Arielle smiled and reassured, "I know, and I'll be careful of her. Thank you for reminding me."

"No, no, I'm the one that should be grateful. If it wasn't for you, my child would have..." Larissa choked up and could not finish her sentence.

Arielle gently smiled and comforted, "As

you work for me, I need to take care of your troubles too. Don't worry. Nothing will happen to me. I'm still looking forward to seeing your reunion with your child."

"All right!" Larissa wiped the tears lingering at the corner of her eyes and headed out.

Arielle then sat down and contemplated Shandie's death. After Larissa mentioned the scar prevention cream, she had ruled out the possibility of Shandie taking her own life.

Who could be the murderer? Who could commit the crime without anyone's knowledge and simulate a suicide? What is the murderer's intention, and what benefits can the murderer gain? I don't recall her making any vindictive enemies. Although she acts haughtily, she would only make some trivial enemies. However, none of them should be after her life.

Ding! As she was immersed in her thoughts, her computer suddenly rang, starting up by itself.

The atmosphere instantly turned uncanny.

Arielle immediately jolted up.

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Unafraid because she did not believe in ghosts, she frowned in bewilderment as she drew closer to the computer.

The computer was installed after I returned to Henrick. A new computer will never start up by itself, unless... Someone hacked my computer!

As expected, the desktop did not show up after the computer started. Instead, the screen was a dark red.

Arielle somberly questioned, "Who are you?"

Very soon, a sentence in black appeared on the dark red screen: *Ms. Moore, do you like my gift for you?*

It was referring to Shandie. Arielle immediately grasped the meaning and frowned as she asked, "You killed Shandie?"

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