

The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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This time, Serena's vision darkened, and she nearly passed out.

"Ma'am, what should we do? Should we go in and check? Could Serena have been taken hostage by some thug? Should we call security?"

Liz was all scared out of her wits by Serena's hysterical shouts.

"Don't bother" Eunice said icily. "Pretend you didn't hear anything."

"Ma'am? Ma'am." Liz, seeing Eunice walk away, wanted to help but didn't dare to act without permission, quickly followed Eunice's steps.

Serena lay trembling on the floor, fearfully looking up at Arabella. She couldn't believe Arabella had dared to hit her so hard.

Without her grandparents around, no one could save her.

She might actually be beaten to death by Arabella right here.

What to do?

What could she possibly do?

"Bella, please have mercy.' Serena, knowing she was no match, pleaded in weakness, "If you kill me, you'll have to explain to grandma and grandpa. Let me go, I won't tell them about you hitting me today. I'll say I fell and got these bruises."

"And what if you did tell?" Arabella didn't care. "Don't forget all the evidence you've left behind."

Serena froze, realizing why Arabella was so bold - she held all the evidence, making Serena hesitant to speak up, leading to a situation where both would suffer in the end.

Not to mention the time Martha tried to make Arabella slip by spilling oil, or Serena's own attempts to seduce Romeo - these scandals alone could ruin her!

And that's not even the half of it.

Arabella looked down at Serena. If she hadn't picked up a few tricks from Grandpa Beck and accidentally drunk the lemonade, the one in trouble would have been Arabella herself.

She would be the one who danced on the pole, the one who broke the table with her bare hands, and the one who kissed a tree in a frenzy.

Serena's heart was growing colder by the minute. "Next time, I won't be so lenient." Arabella threw the vanity stool at Serena with a vengeance.

Serena let out a wail, staring at Arabella's retreating figure, fists clenched in rage. Damn you, Arabella, just you wait, I will not let this go!

Later, a servant went to look for Arabella. Passing by Serena's room, she discovered Serena sprawled on the floor. She rushed in to help.

"Serena, what happened? Did you fall?"

With the vanity stool overturned next to her and no other suspicious signs, it seemed Serena might have fallen off the stool?

How bizarre.

"It hurts so much." Serena couldn't get up even with the servant's aid, tears streaming down her face.

"Take it easy, Serena." The servant could feel her pain from the cries, and after much effort, helped her to her feet, saying

respectfully, "Please wait here. I'll tell Ms. Bella something and then we'll get a doctor."

"Wait." Serena looked up in pain, "What thing?"

"Mr. Collins wants to take Ms. Bella to change her name."

The servant, thinking they were all family, shared openly, "He is dressed and is waiting in the living room. We just couldn't find

Ms. Bella earlier; don't know if she fell asleep in her room. Please wait here. I'll be right back"

Watching the servant's retreating figure, Serena's nails dug into her palms, burning with even more resentment!

Here she was getting beaten up, while Arabella was about to inherit the family fortune from grandpa?

Why her?

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When the servant called for the doctor, Belinda hurried over, only to find Serena sitting on the armchair in her bedroom, her eyes red and swollen.

Belinda couldn't help but ask, "Serena, what happened to you, my dear?"

"Grandma." Serena burst into tears as soon as she saw Belinda, her voice quivering with distress.

"Did you fall? How did you get hurt like this?"

Belinda gently rolled up Serena's sleeve, revealing bruises.

The family doctor knew at first glance that these weren't injuries from a fall but from a beating. She was shocked; she couldn't believe that someone dared to hurt Serena, to such an extent.

This was too much and the bruises looked severe. Should she tell Belinda the truth?

"What are you staring at? I'm in so much pain, please just help me apply some ointment." Serena wept, trying to control her sobs, "I fell. It was my own clumsiness, Grandma. Don't worry. it'll heal in a few days."

Hearing Serena's words, the doctor didn't dare to pry further and silently treated Serena's wounds, thinking it was better not to stir the pot. If Serena didn't want to talk, it wasn't her place to force the issue.

"How did you get hurt so badly? Did some of these happen when you were tossing and turning in your sleep last night?" Belinda was deeply concerned when she saw the bruises on Serena's back.

Serena didn't dare to confirm or deny, and just tearfully whispered, "It hurts, Grandma"

"Doctor, please be gentle." All Belinda could do was watch anxiously.

Serena, seeing her grandmother's concern, thought to herself that if her pain could elicit such sympathy, perhaps it could even strengthen their bond.

Meanwhile, Bard came home from work and immediately headed for the study to find Eunice.

"Eunice, I heard there was some friction between you and Serena this morning. Was it because of what happened last night?"

At Bard's question, Eunice looked up from her laptop, her voice steady, "I have a feeling she's behind what happened to Bella"

Bard knew Eunice's intuition was often spot-on, but he had watched Serena grow up and found it hard to suspect her without evidence, even though he found Eunice's suspicions compelling.

"I know everyone in this family has treated her like a princess and has truly adored her for eighteen years," Eunice closed her laptop, stating the facts.

The time and affection everyone had poured into Serena over the years had become deeply ingrained, like a seed rooted firmly in the soil, growing into a towering tree that couldn't be easily shaken.

Eunice didn't want to challenge Serena's place in the family.

"I just feel that the old Serena was innocent and kind, without a hint of guile.

She was sweet and sensible. But now, she seems like a different person"

The old Serena wouldn't use her fragility and tears as weapons; she wouldn't squander the trust and goodwill she had built up over eighteen years.

But now, she appeared to wield these tools with ease.

"Mom and Dad haven't suspected her, and I understand. As grandparents, they can't just suspect their own granddaughter of being malicious without cause. Especially when they've watched her grow up, believing they know her character, understanding who she is. So we wouldn't suddenly doubt her just on someone else's say-so, let alone cast her out." Even if a pet cat scratches the owner, she'd think it was an accident. Who would believe that the cat has ill intentions, plotting to harm its owner?

Even if one's own pet cat scratches its owner repeatedly, to the point of drawing blood, she might just think it's misbehaving, not knowing any better.

At worst, she might scold it or give it a smack to teach it a lesson, but who would throw it out of the house, abandoning it?

That was the dilemma Eunice was facing.

Serena had been part of the family for far too long. Her identity had been unknown, and the emotions and time invested in her couldn't be negated by a couple of mistakes.

Eighteen years was a long time. Even if it was a tree planted in the yard, wanting to uproot it all at once would make one feel heart-wrenching and difficult to let go.

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Imagine a world where eighteen years of nurturing and affection for a child could be tested by the bitterness of sibling rivalry.

"I'm just worried that Bella might be getting the short end of the stick, Eunice admitted candidly.

The fear was that ever since Bella's return home six months ago, she had been walking on eggshells for the sake of family

harmony, always yielding to her sister Serena. After all, the family already owed her so much.

If Arabella continued to compromise and step back, wouldn't that add insult to injury?

"That's why I want to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible. If it turns out Serena is behind the tampering, maybe we can get Louisa to cut the knot and minimize the damage to Bella," Eunice continued.

The longer the issue dragged on, the greater the potential hurt to Arabella.

The family's affection for Serena was deep, and the revelation of her true character would only bring them more sorrow.

"It wouldn't be good for the family either."

"Don't overthink it. Once the investigation is done, the truth will be clear," Bard comforted her. "I just dread the day we might have to make a choice between Serena and Bella."

One had been cherished like a daughter for eighteen years, raised and protected.

The other, deeply indebted to, had given so much to the family.

Just then, a servant approached with news, "Ma'am, Ms. Bella has arrived."

"I have something to ask her," said Eunice, standing up. "Bard, shall we go downstairs?"

Bard offered his arm, and they descended together.

Darren, his mood buoyant after officially bequeathing everything in the wooden chest to Arabella, hummed a tune on his way home.

A gentle smile graced Arabella's face, her joy seemingly tied to her grandfather's happiness.

"Bella, you're back!" Eunice greeted her with warmth as she descended the stairs. "I was wondering what to do with the gifts

Romeo brought last night.

He went overboard, and I haven't even unwrapped them yet."

The packaging alone looked expensive.

If not for Serena's outburst the previous evening, the elders might have already met Romeo and been singing his praises.

Arabella then remembered Romec's instructions about the gifts.

As she distributed them, she said with a soft smile, "It's just a token of his regard. Please, accept them."

Darren unveiled a set of exquisite chess pieces, hitting right upon his hobby.

Belinda received a painting of inestimable value, her eyes lighting up with admiration and affection.

Bard's gift was an antique vase worth a fortune.

And for Eunice, a tea set of unparalleled value.

From the top of the stairs, Serena watched the scene unfold, her irritation mounting. She couldn't believe that Romeo had spent so much just for a first impression. If he wasn't serious about Arabella, he wouldn't have bothered.

With that thought, Serena's resentment towards Arabella deepened, her own misfortunes stark against Arabella's happiness.

Suddenly, she realized that Martin hadn't sought her out all day.

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"Romeo is such a big spender, just look at this chess set he got me; Darren exclaimed with a mix of admiration and bewilderment. "You can't just find a fine set like this every day, even if you had the cash. I can't figure out where the kid managed to dig this up. He's really outdone himself this time. Belinda chimed in with a warm smile, "And the painting he gave me, it's just to my taste. Not only is the craftsmanship top-notch, but every flower, every tree in it is so full of meaning. The boy is wishing me a life filled with blessings, longevity, and smooth sailing."

Her grin was so wide it looked like it wouldn't fit on her face.

Bard, holding the vase in his hands, added his praises, "The kid really put his heart into this one. I saw this vase at the auction earlier this year. Missed out on bidding, and it nagged at me for a while. How he got wind of it and managed to get it from that collector, of all people, and even in the original box" It was no small feat, that was for sure.

The collector who had snagged the vase was a man who wouldn't part with his treasures for all the money in the world.

So for Romeo to have gotten his hands on that vase was a marvel in itself.

"Last time Romeo visited, he must have noticed my love for tea. He went out of his way to bring me this beautiful tea set" Eunice

said, her eyes softening at the memory.

The set had caused quite a stir at the auction because of its unique design.

It was known to enhance the flavor of the tea, making it a coveted item among tea enthusiasts.

Eunice had wanted it, but out of consideration for a business partner who was also set on acquiring it, she stepped back.

"Romeo filled a gap I had resigned myself to, Eunice said, her smile as beautiful as it was grateful.

"We really need to show our appreciation for all these precious gifts he's given us. It's clear he values Bella and respects us

elders. But with things happening so suddenly last night, I feel awful we couldn't host him properly,"

Darren said, feeling apologetic.

"Don't worry about it," Belinda reassured. "Let's have Bella ask him when he's free to come over. We should return the favor.

Eunice, you always have the best ideas. What do you think we should give him?"

They wanted to find a gift that was far from ordinary, something that would really touch his heart, but Belinda was at a loss for what that could be.

"Bella knows his tastes best, doesn't she?" Eunice suggested with a knowing smile, turning to Arabella. All eyes turned to Arabella, who suddenly realized that she hadn't paid much attention to Romeo's preferences. She was at a loss for what he truly liked or wanted.

"Bella, what have you given him in the past that he's been happiest with?"

Belinda asked curiously.

"Me?" Arabella said truthfully. "Even if it's just a mug or a tie, he's always happy".

"He's not picky." Belinda realized. "Well, that makes it easy then. Whatever's rare and valuable, that's what we'll go with."

"LT think" Eunice said thoughtfully, "that boy just wants to be accepted by our family. It probably doesn't matter what we give him.

Even just inviting him over would make him happy"

Although Eunice said this, everyone agreed that they should still reciprocate Romeo's thoughtful gifts with something that showed their affection and approval.

As the family discussed the matter of the gift, Serena stormed off to her room, fuming. She checked her phone, and still, Martin hadn't reached out to her! She thought Martin was playing hard to get with her! She was seething with frustration and indignation.

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With a huff, she tossed her phone aside, refusing to reach out to him first.

Martin sat behind his desk, his usually bright eyes now shadowed by a cloud of melancholy and dejection.

His deputy, sitting nearby, was at a loss for words on how to comfort him.

Since this morning, Martin had been planted at his desk, silent, not working, lost in his thoughts.

The scenes from last night replayed in Martin's mind.

Serena, full of heartfelt emotion, kept calling him Romeo and saying those things.

How much she liked Romeo, how her boyfriend was Romeo, and that he, Martin, was nothing in comparison, not even fit to be her boyfriend.

When he offered her a cup of soup to sober her up, she had scorned it, telling him to get lost and stop interrupting her "date" with "Romeo."

The way she tiptoed to plant a kiss on "Romeo" was so loving, so lost in the moment, so shy and endearing—a stark contrast to how she was with him usually.

The more Martin thought about it, the more his heart ached.

Until the screen of his phone lit up, showing a text from Serena.

He quickly opened it to find a picture of a wound and a crying emoji, with the message, [It hurts so bad.] Martin immediately called her back to ask what had happened.

"Last night I had a bit too much whiskey and said some things I shouldn't have. My sister thought I was flirting with her husband and without any discussion, she stormed into my room and gave me a beating. Slapped me several times and hit me with a vanity stool. I'm in so much pain. The doctor says my injuries will take about a month to heal, and my hand is fractured."

By the end, Serena's voice was filled with such self-pity.

"What are you saying? That's outrageous,' Martin's anger swelled in his chest, "Does she always get away with this at home?

What about your family?

Didn't anyone stand up for you?"

"I didn't want to disturb the peace at home, so I didn't say anything."

"How can you be so naive! She can't just treat you like that!" Martin was irate, "I'm going to settle this with her".

"Martin, I don't want to upset my family, I want to continue living in this house."

"She was the one who started hitting you, she's in the wrong. Mr. Darren and Mrs. Belanda would surely see to justice if they knew. If you don't want the family to know, I can deal with her privately"

"She'll definitely tattle! Besides, she has Romeo backing her. Forget it, Martin, it was my fault last night, I said things I shouldn't have, and caused a misunderstanding." Sensing the mood set just right, Serena then asked in a pitiful tone, "You don't misunderstand me, do you?"

Martin, caught by her question, suddenly felt a bit guilty.

"Did you not look for me today because you were busy with work? I know, even if the whole world misunderstands me, you, Martin, will always steadfastly stand by my side, right? After all, you're my boyfriend, the person I trust and like the most in the whole world."

Martin's heart was suddenly touched, and with a tremble in his voice, he called out softly, "Serena."

"Thank goodness for you. No matter what the world turns into, no matter how much malice comes my way, as long as you are with me, i'll always have a place to belong"

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Serena's voice softened into a blissful murmur, "Martin, having you is just amazing. With you by my side, I feel like I'm not completely abandoned by the world. Even though I'm not born into the Collins family, and I can't enjoy the privileges I once had, or claim a noble title, you still treat me like a princess. My happiness is still intact. Seriously, having you as my boyfriend is the best thing ever!"

Hearing the girl openly refer to him as her "boyfriend" wiped away Martin's previous sorrow, replacing it with a surge of emotion and a pang of guilt.

He was moved by her heartfelt confession.

And guilty because, since last night, he'd doubted her feelings for him, sinking into a funk until just now.

But now, he was thrilled, overjoyed.

"Serena, I've been terrible today, not checking in on you sooner, not even noticing you were upset,"

Martin admitted with

remorse. "From now on, I swear I'll treat you twice as well. You don't want me to confront Arabella right now, but I'm keeping a

tally. If she crosses me in the future, I'll make sure to settle both new and old scores. I won't let today's hurt go unnoticed."

"Martin, you're the best!" Serena's voice dripped with sweet happiness. "If you were here right now, I'm

afraid I might not be able

to stop myself from kissing you."

Her flirtation sparked a fire in Martin, his breathing growing heavier.

Since when did his little princess become such a flirt?

Catching him hook, line, and sinker, Serena giggled coyly, "Stop it, I've got to go."

Before Martin could respond, a beeping tone signaled the end of the call.

His gaze softened, and a content smile played at the corners of his mouth.

The deputy at his side stared in disbelief. Was Mr. Martin smiling? And not just any smile, but one filled with pure happiness and satisfaction.

Who on earth was on the other end of that phone? That person was capable of turning Mr. Martin's stormy mood sunny! Martin opened WhatsApp and messaged the girl, [Did the doc give you anything for the pain? A month to recover seems too long. I'll find you another doctor, maybe you can heal faster?]

(Sure.) Serena replied promptly, punctuating her message with a kiss emoji.

Without hesitation, Martin immediately reached out to a doctor.

Serena agreed because she wanted him to see her injuries, even the ones on her back, through the doctor's eyes. She wanted

Martin to know the extent of her suffering.

The more he hurt for her, the deeper his hatred for Arabella would grow.

And the more he would become her unsuspecting pawn.

Come evening.

Darren wheedled Arabella, "Bella, that fried chicken we had the other night was divine, I can't stop thinking about it. How about we have it for a midnight snack? Maybe throw in some BBQ skewers?"

Arabella chuckled, "You're still not fully recovered; we should stick to lighter fare.

"Just a little bit, please!"

After much cajoling from Darren, Arabella relented, "But not too much."

"Don't worry, just a few!"

With his granddaughter's blessing, Darren eagerly ordered the meal. In no time at all, the chef wheeled in two large barbecue grills, loaded with hundreds of skewers.

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Arabella chuckled lightly at the sight before her, a playful glint in her eyes.

"Isn't it just a couple of grilled skewers you wanted to satisfy your craving?" she teased.

Darren, with a skewer in hand, couldn't stop himself from devouring more.

"What I meant was, a few of each flavor." he said through mouthfuls.

Just then, Serena limped into the garden, having been invited by a servant.

Darren, seeing her uneven gait, couldn't help but express his concern, "Serena, what's with your foot?

Why are you limping like that?"

Serena cast a fearful glance at Arabella and then spoke meekly, "It's nothing, I just..."

Before she could finish, Eunice jumped in, "She was just throwing a tantrum last night and took a spill.

Honestly, Serena, you

should apologize to your sister. You said so many harsh things and acted out of line. You owe Arabella an apology."

Tears welled up in Serena's eyes, her face the picture of misery and injustice.

She had been roughed up by Arabella and couldn't even tell her grandparents, and now she had to apologize to Arabella in front of everyone?

Was her aunt showing favoritism so blatantly?

"Exactly, you were way out of line with what you said to your sister last night."

chimed in another voice.

Those words from last night were too much for Belinda to bear, "Even though it was said in the heat of the moment, it still came from you. You should still apologize and make amends with your sister"

"I know I was at fault last night," Serena said, trying to play the victim. "Even though I got hurt too, and even fractured my palm, what was said was said.

Sister, I'm sorry. Let me toast to you."

She reached for a small glass of juice on the table, but Eunice interrupted by pushing a bunch of grilled skewers towards her,

"No need for toasts. What if the juice is spiked? Just eat a skewer, and your sister will forgive you".

Serena looked at the handful of skewers, coated with a thick layer of chili powder, and with tears brimming in her eyes, she protested, 'Aunt Eunice, I can't handle spicy food' "That's exactly why you should eat it, to show your sincerity, Eunice said gently. "Besides, it's not really that spicy, just a formality.

I wouldn't actually make you suffer, would I? Let's have your grandma try it and see."

Eunice purposely picked a non-spicy skewer and handed it to Belinda, who took a bite and nodded, "It's really not spicy."

"Your aunt knows you don't usually eat skewers, so she thought it'd be nice for you to have some now, Eunice said, grabbing

Serena's hand to hold the skewer. "Alright, let's all dig in!"

Serena felt the greasiness in her hand and took a bite, only to be overwhelmed by the heat.

She coughed uncontrollably, tears streaming from her eyes, "I really can't. It's too spicy"

"You can't handle that bit of spice?" Eunice laughed, "Well, then, as you said, have some juice."

Serena nodded weakly.

Eunice placed a large pitcher of juice in front of Serena, standing a foot tall.

"This can't be too spicy for you, right?"

Belinda knew that last night Serena had mistaken Eunice for Arabella and had given her an earful. This morning, they'd had another argument. Eunice, always straightforward, just wanted Serena to apologize sincerely.

"So, Serena, just drink it. It's not that much" she said.

Misunderstandings within the family needed to be cleared up.

Serena stared at the large pitcher of juice. With tears in her eyes, she drank it all, her stomach nearly bursting. After gulping down so much juice late at night, she couldn't hold it in. Before long, she was rushing to the bathroom, struck by a bout of diarrhea.

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The morning after, Arabella had barely finished her scrambled eggs and toast when her phone buzzed with an urgent call.

"Boss, we've got trouble. There's a group claiming our skincare line ruined their faces. They've shown up at the company's doorstep with their families and reporters, waving banners and making a scene. Our PR team is on it, but these folks are adamant it's our products to blame. The PR head says it's your call on how to handle this. Should we go legal, call the cops, or have security escort them off the property?"

"Our skincare causing problems?" Arabella was taken aback. This was a first.

"Yes. They've got receipts, surveillance footage of them using our products at home, and even lab reports claiming our products contain harmful substances that have caused allergic reactions and inflammation."

"Are these lab results credible?"

"They're from Dawnstar, a reputable firm. It's unlikely they're faked"

"But our skincare line went through all the proper channels before hitting the market. How could it possibly contain banned substances? Could there have been a mistake somewhere in the process?"

Arabella knew the stakes were high; after all, the flagship line of the Ar-BI-Clear Group was her brainchild. If there was a problem, surely those close to her, who also used these products, would have experienced issues long before this public outcry.

"What are they demanding?" Arabella cut to the chase.

"They want to see you, face-to-face, in front of the press. They're calling for an explanation".

"I'm on my way"

She hung up, gave her aunt a quick heads-up, and dashed out the door.

Shortly after Arabella left, Eunice got wind that the Ar-BI-Clear Group was in hot water and realized why her niece had hurried out.

Outside the group's headquarters, a curly-haired woman was angrily decrying to the reporters, "Their whitening mask promised a

fair and radiant complexion. Look at my face after a month's use—ruined! Just look at this redness, these bumps and pustules.

How am I supposed to face anyone now?"

The journalists, smelling a sensational story, were all ears. "Do you have proof their product is at fault?"

"I took that mask to CCT for testing. CCT is an impartial, major organization.

The results showed that the mask contains three banned substances, which caused my allergic reaction."

Another young woman, a 21-year-old college student, kept her face hidden behind a mask. Only after much coaxing from a reporter did she tearfully remove it, revealing a frightfully red and damaged complexion.

"Is the Ar-BI-Clear Group to blame for your condition?" a reporter thrust a microphone in her direction.

She nodded, "I heard that the Ar-BI-Clear Group's top products, developed by their head executive, were the best in the brand.

Seduced by the rave reviews online, I took out a student loan and splurged over nine hundred dollars on the complete skincare set. For a student like me, it was a fortune.

I used it diligently every day, even when my skin started reacting, hoping one day I'd achieve that porcelain, rosy-cheeked look from the ads. But after a month, the burning sensation worsened, and my skin felt rough and parched. Frightened, I finally saw a dermatologist, only to be diagnosed with severe inflammation. The doctor said it would take extensive treatment to heal, and even then, returning to my original condition was impossible."

Tears streamed down her cheeks as the college girl recounted her ordeal.

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Tears trickled down her flushed cheeks, reigniting the sting she'd been trying to soothe with the gentlest of touches.

A crowd of onlookers had begun to gather.

"I heard some of my buddies rave about the Ar-BI-Clear Group's products, saying they worked wonders. How on earth could something like this happen?"

"Maybe it's a bad batch issue? It started out great, but then to make a quick buck, they swapped the high-quality ingredients for cheap junk and threw in some banned substances. Not surprising at all!"

"But the Ar-BI-Clear Group is a big name brand. They've worked hard to build their reputation. It doesn't make sense to jeopardize their image for a few extra dollars. This kind of bad press could really hurt their business."

"Hey, you're defending the Ar-BI-Clear Group pretty hard. What, are you on their payroll or something?"

"What are you on about? I'm just passing by."

The bystanders chattered incessantly, some even breaking into arguments.

More and more journalists were swarming the scene, all eager to scoop the story.

Arabella parked her car near the group's headquarters and immediately drew attention as she stepped out.

It was her youth and beauty that turned heads. Her face was a stark contrast to the others'! Upon seeing Arabella approach, a squad of staff members from the main building broke into a brisk jog to greet her. The reporters didn't even get a chance to bombard them with questions before they reached Arabella and respectfully greeted, "President Arabella."

The crowd was in disbelief. This girl, who looked no older than a teenager, was a heavyweight in a major corporation! "President Arabella, you've arrived!" the Ar-BI-Clear Group's Vice President Catharina whispered urgently, "We've got over two dozen media outlets here"

"Where are the victims?" Arabella's presence dominated, exuding both coolness and authority. Journalists surged toward her, microphones thrust forward, bombarding her with questions.

"May I ask who you are? Can you speak on behalf of the Ar-BI-Clear Group?"

"I see Ms. Catharina treating you with great respect. Are you her superior?"

"There are claims that the Ar-BI-Clear Group's products cause facial damage.

Have you used them?"

"Is it true that the Ar-BI-Clear Group added banned substances to their products to make a quick profit, regardless of consumer safety?"

"Will you take responsibility for those who've been harmed?"

"What's your plan to deal with this situation?"

Dozens of cameras were trained on Arabella, dozens of microphones nearly shoved in her face, each journalist vying for her answer, giving her no time to think.

"Who's been disfigured?" Arabella's voice carried the cold authority of a leader, commanding the attention of all present.

The media parted to create a pathway.

A curly-haired woman, visibly irate, pushed to the front. "We're the victims here! What's your role in the Ar-BI-Clear Group? Are you important enough to discuss a solution with us? We demand to see the highest authority in the Ar-BI-Clear Group!"

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Chapter 1449

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1449

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Tears trickled down her flushed cheeks, reigniting the sting she'd been trying to soothe with the gentlest of touches.

A crowd of onlookers had begun to gather.

"I heard some of my buddies rave about the Ar-BI-Clear Group's products, saying they worked wonders. How on earth could something like this happen?"

"Maybe it's a bad batch issue? It started out great, but then to make a quick buck, they swapped the high-quality ingredients for cheap junk and threw in some banned substances. Not surprising at all!"

"But the Ar-BI-Clear Group is a big name brand. They've worked hard to build their reputation. It doesn't make sense to jeopardize their image for a few extra dollars. This kind of bad press could really hurt their business."

"Hey, you're defending the Ar-BI-Clear Group pretty hard. What, are you on their payroll or something?"

"What are you on about? I'm just passing by."

The bystanders chattered incessantly, some even breaking into arguments.

More and more journalists were swarming the scene, all eager to scoop the story.

Arabella parked her car near the group's headquarters and immediately drew attention as she stepped out.

It was her youth and beauty that turned heads. Her face was a stark contrast to the others'! Upon seeing Arabella approach, a

squad of staff members from the main building broke into a brisk jog to greet her. The reporters didn't even get a chance to

bombard them with questions before they reached Arabella and respectfully greeted, "President Arabella."

The crowd was in disbelief. This girl, who looked no older than a teenager, was a heavyweight in a major corporation! "President

Arabella, you've arrived!" the Ar-BI-Clear Group's Vice President Catharina whispered urgently, "We've got over two dozen media outlets here"

"Where are the victims?" Arabella's presence dominated, exuding both coolness and authority. Journalists surged toward her, microphones thrust forward, bombarding her with questions.

"May I ask who you are? Can you speak on behalf of the Ar-BI-Clear Group?"

"I see Ms. Catharina treating you with great respect. Are you her superior?"

"There are claims that the Ar-BI-Clear Group's products cause facial damage. Have you used them?"

"Is it true that the Ar-BI-Clear Group added banned substances to their products to make a quick profit, regardless of consumer safety?"

"Will you take responsibility for those who've been harmed?"

"What's your plan to deal with this situation?"

Dozens of cameras were trained on Arabella, dozens of microphones nearly shoved in her face, each journalist vying for her answer, giving her no time to think.

"Who's been disfigured?" Arabella's voice carried the cold authority of a leader, commanding the attention of all present.

The media parted to create a pathway.

A curly-haired woman, visibly irate, pushed to the front. "We're the victims here! What's your role in the Ar-BI-Clear Group? Are you important enough to discuss a solution with us? We demand to see the highest authority in the Ar-BI-Clear Group!"

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Chapter 1450

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Chapter 1450

"Lam".

Those two simple words sent a ripple of astonishment through the room.

Though everyone had suspected the girl was someone of importance, no one had imagined she would be the top dog! Rumors had it that the flagship skincare line of the Ar-BI-Clear Group was her brainchild.

She was this young and already developing skincare products! Glancing at her again, her porcelain-like skin seemed almost too perfect, like a work of art in the sunlight, radiantly beautiful.

Was it her own products that gave her such flawless skin, or had she used the dirty money to splurge on some other brand's exorbitant skincare line?

The curly-haired woman was stunned for a moment before she bit back, disbelief evident in her voice, "Are you seriously the head honcho of the Ar-BI-Clear Group?"

Catharina, the deputy, confirmed without missing a beat, "The real deal"

The crowd was again taken aback, cameras flashing nonstop, but the girl's face remained untroubled.

From start to finish, her gaze held an undisturbed coolness, as though the setting hadn't fazed her one bit.

With that kind of presence and poise, she had to be the one in charge.

"If you're claiming to be the head of the Ar-Bi-Clear Group, then tell me, what are you going to do about my face looking like this?

Is your company really that heartless, using our faces as tools to line your pockets? In front of all these reporters, today you owe us an explanation!"

Other disgruntled customers chimed in with their grievances.

"Your products are already priced through the roof, and to look better, I maxed out my credit cards, and now my face is ruined! At such a young age, how can you be so malicious? Why sell us defective products? Are you using our hard-earned cash to maintain that pretty face of yours?"

All the cameras excitedly captured the confrontation. This kind of explosive story could cause a sensation online in no time.

The Ar-Bi-Clear Group's current predicament had already started fermenting on the web.

And this face-off between consumers and the person in charge was only going to add fuel to the fire.

"One at a time,' Arabella said calmly, turning to the curly-haired woman.

“Which product of ours caused your reaction? Do you have proof?”

"It's your whitening face mask! I bought it mid-December at one of your stores. Here's the receipt,' the woman retorted, handing over the slip of paper to Arabella.

Taking a look, Arabella quietly asked her deputy, “How long do our store's security cameras keep footage?”

"Six months."

“What about purchase records?”

“Indefinitely”

Upon hearing this, the curly-haired woman's expression soured slightly, "What are you getting at? Are you doubting that I've ever bought your product? Or that this receipt is a fake?"

“If you're asking for an explanation, we need to thoroughly investigate every aspect, Arabella instructed Catharina. "Look into the December 15th records. Check if this receipt matches our sales data and if this lady visited our store."

Before she could finish, the curly-haired lady interrupted, “I was busy that day; a friend went to buy it for me."

“Then check her friend as well."

“What are you implying? That the person isn't really my friend, or that my friend is out to get me? You're not the police, what right do you have to dig into my friend's business? Isn't this kind of harassment?”

"There's no need to get worked up. Certain matters we will leave to the police to ensure everything is done by the book and above board."

“Are you trying to intimidate us with the police?”
The curly-haired woman's words stirred the already agitated victims further.

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