

Arabella 1921

Chapter 1921

Most villas had a similar design: a skylight in the ground floor to let the sunshine stream into the basement. It was a clever way to brighten up the space and improve the airflow down there.

"I had no clue there was a skylight." The man explained with a mix of urgency and helplessness, "The grass is so tall around here, from a distance all I could see was a sea of green. I told you, I'm new here.

I was just looking for the restroom. I saw a small door from afar and thought to check it out. I didn't know there was a skylight that wasn't meant to be walked over."

"You were looking for the restroom and you couldn't ask someone? With all the staff bustling about in this villa, don't tell me you didn't see a soul," the head of the bodyguard still sounded skeptical.

"I saw that most of the staff were women; it felt kinda awkward to ask, and they all seemed so busy."

The man tried to explain further, but seeing no sign of belief from the bodyguard, he turned to Arabella with a helpless look, "Ms. Collins, I really didn't know I couldn't just wander around here. I was only looking for the restroom."

"You think you can fool Ms. Collins that easily? You better come clean today, or don't blame me for not being nice!"

The head of the bodyguard was ready to take action, hand inching towards his tool of authority, poised to apprehend the man.

"What's going on here?"

Just then, an elegant voice cut through the tension.

The man looked towards the source of the voice as if he had found his savior and quickly explained,

"Madam, I was just looking for the restroom and accidentally went the wrong way. This man is insisting I'm up to something, talking about looking for some basement, some skylight."

Beverly maintained a gracious smile throughout, "It's a misunderstanding. Harry is a new chauffeur I've hired. It's his first day here, and he's not yet familiar with our house rules or recent events."

With that, she turned to Harry with a smile, "I'll handle this; why don't you go ahead and use the restroom."

"He can't leave."

As the head of the bodyguard moved to intercept, Beverly's laugh, light and amused, filled the air,

"When nature calls, it calls. I appreciate your dedication as head of bodyguard, but if it makes you feel

better, once he's done, I'll have him come back and you can question him all you want."

With things put that way, if the bodyguard persisted, it would make for an unsightly scene. But he didn't want to let him go either; what if the man destroyed evidence? What would be the point of questioning him after that?

"Changing chauffeurs at the turn of the new year?" Arabella inquired with a smile.

Typically, as the year drew to a close, people stuck with the staff they had, not making changes lightly.

"Couldn't be helped." Beverly said, her smile unwavering, "Our former chauffeur Gene, his wife just had a baby. He wanted to be there for her postpartum period, and with a new addition in their family, he wanted to spend the holidays together. So I gave him two-month off."

Beverly continued with genteel ease, "I've vetted this new chauffeur thoroughly; there's no issue. But if you're still worried, feel free to question him further."

"If you say he's fine, then naturally, we have no reason to hold him."

Hearing this, the head of the bodyguard became desperate, not wanting to let the man go just like that.

What if he was trouble?

"What are you waiting for? You need thank Ms. Collins." Beverly said with poise, "If it were any other

lady, they would have surely held you back."

Harry quickly bowed in gratitude, "Thank you, Ms. Collins. I won't make the same mistake again."

Arabella kept her smile, nodding her head.

As Harry stepped away, the head of the bodyguard was beside himself with anxiety. He couldn't let this go.

Chapter 1922

Just as the tension in the air could be cut with a knife, a small object suddenly fell from Harry's pocket.

Both Arabella and the head of the bodyguard saw it clearly - it was a folding knife that now laid exposed for all to see.

Harry glanced back at them, his movements hurried as he scooped up the knife and stuffed it into his pocket, his face awash with a shade of panic.

"Hold it right there!"

The bodyguard stepped forward, "You dropped something. Show us what it is!"

Beverly's face fleetingly betrayed her nerves before she regained her composure, "It's a precaution we've advised him to take."

"Yeah, when Mr. Lucas Collins and Mrs. Beverly Collins don't have their bodyguards around, I carry this. It's for their protection. Don't tell me you guys don't carry something similar?" Harry retorted.

The head of the bodyguard was momentarily speechless; he carried a weapon, yes, but not a folding knife.

His gut was screaming that this driver was bad news.

"Today is of great significance to the Collins family, attended only by kin and close associates. You're here, armed with a knife and trespassing," the bodyguard turned to Arabella, "Ms. Collins, I request permission to detain him. He's definitely up to no good!"

"I've explained repeatedly that I was unaware of the restricted access here. If I had known, I would've steered clear." Harry's voice trailed off, a note of pleading in his tone as he turned to Beverly, "Mrs. Beverly Collins, I really can't hold it much longer."

"You may leave now."

It was Arabella who spoke, and the directive took everyone by surprise, not least the head of the bodyguard himself.

Was Ms. Collins really letting him go?

Beverly's smile was radiant, "Bella knows the score. Since she's given her word, what are you waiting for? Go on, then."

Harry scurried off, casting a backward glance that flickered with unease in the middle of his retreat.

"Ms. Collins." the security chief began, his anxiety palpable. He was convinced Harry was definitely trouble.

"I notice you still have concerns. Why don't we bring Harry back later for a thorough questioning? I won't interfere with your methods."

"That's not necessary. He's just being cautious, as he shoulders great responsibilities. But I trust your judgment; there's no need for Harry to return."

Beverly seemed mildly taken aback at her words, "Well then, shall I take my leave?"

"Take care."

Once Beverly was out of earshot, the bodyguard couldn't contain himself, "Ms. Collins, I really suspect that man is problematic. Mrs. Beverly Collins is clearly covering for him!"

"Who's problematic?"

A deep, steady voice suddenly joined the conversation.

"Hans?" The bodyguard saluted him respectfully.

Arabella chimed in with a dutiful demeanor, "Hans".

Hans's gaze softened as he looked at her, "Who did you say was problematic? Who is Beverly covering for?"

He handed Arabella a cup of coffee.

The chef had prepared a batch of coffee earlier, and he had picked up Arabella's favorite flavor, having scoured the grounds for his sister before finding her here.

The head of the bodyguard relayed the full account of the incident to him.

Chapter 1923

After hearing that, Hans turned to his sister, "What do you think, Sis?"

"Beverly said the driver's clean; she ran a background check and everything. I asked him to hit the restroom, and as he was scrambling to leave, a folding knife fell from his pocket. He even gave us a deliberate look before hurriedly picking it up. Suppose he was here to off Erik, wouldn't he have to be a top-notch assassin? No way he'd blow his cover in broad daylight, especially not by dropping his weapon."

Hans nodded, "Your point makes sense."

"But there's something off about that driver," the head of the bodyguard still felt there was something eerie about the driver, like something didn't add up.

"Did you get a good look?" Arabella's gaze fell on the head of bodyguard, "When that folding knife fell, what kind of pocket lets a knife just slide out? You're wearing a suit too. Sure, the pockets are slanted, but have you ever had your phone or keys just drop out frequently?"

The head of the bodyguard shook his head; that had never happened.

"It was exactly then, before he was clear of suspicion, that the knife fell. What does that tell you? It means that blade didn't drop accidentally - he wanted us to see it. He gave us enough time to see the knife on the ground before he nervously picked it up. Why would he want to deepen our suspicion?"

"Why??" At that moment, David piped up, his face full of curiosity.

The chef had just whipped up some coffee and pastries, and David had grabbed a plate to find his sister, hoping to treat her to some, only to stumble upon this "big case" discussion.

Arabella had heard his footsteps earlier. Since he was family, she didn't hold back and laid it all out.

"Whether he dropped the knife on purpose or the way he looked back at us after tucking it away, it was all to make us more suspicious. He's doing this for one reason only - he wants us to investigate him."

The head of the bodyguard was confused. Why would someone want to be checked out??

David echoed the sentiment, "But why??"

"Beverly kept vouching for him, which only made us more suspicious. The more she insisted he was fine, the more likely we were to dig into whether he really was."

David nodded, "Then what?"

"First off, who does he work for?" Arabella probed.

David blurted out, "Beverly's driver."

"If he's shady, doesn't that suggest Beverly might be too?"

David nodded again, "Right."

"If we suspect Beverly and we check out Harry the driver, only to find his record is squeaky clean; won't we feel like we've accused the wrong person and misunderstood Beverly and her driver?"

"That makes sense," David agreed, nodding.

"Once we clear Beverly, wouldn't we shift our focus to others and stop watching Beverly so closely? So,

if I'm not mistaken, back in the living room, she probably felt we were onto them, which is why they staged this whole thing. We can leave the driver out of this; whether or not he's clean, just Beverly's actions alone are a dead giveaway, aren't they?"

"Wow, Sis, you're a genius!!" David finally got it, "Beverly must've thought she could clear her name by leading us to her driver, but she had no idea you've got a head full of smarts. So, does this mean Beverly really is involved? Was she part of what happened back then?"

Arabella and Hans nodded together, speaking in unison, "Possibly."

If Beverly hadn't acted this way, they might not have suspected her so soon. Now, it was definitely time to dig deeper; not into the driver, but into her and her husband.

Chapter 1924

"Man, I was just scratching the surface with my thoughts. If it wasn't for Ms. Collins's sharp wit, I would've been led by the nose by Mrs. Beverly Collins," the head of the bodyguard was in awe of Arabella's smarts.

"Thing is, Beverly's always been a piece of work. You've been with the Collins family for years, have you ever seen her break a sweat?" Arabella's gaze shifted to the head of the bodyguard standing

before her.

He shook his head. Mrs. Beverly Collins seemed to always carry herself with a grace that was unflappable, no matter the situation.

"So back there, when the driver dropped a switchblade, her face flickered with panic. It was just too forced." Arabella mused, "If that driver were really up to no good, she should have been the epitome of calm, but her poise came a second too late."

"Ms. Collins, you truly show there's always a bigger fish." The head of the bodyguard was thoroughly impressed, "So this means the truth from all those years ago is about to come to light."

Just then, Arabella's phone vibrated. Glancing at the screen, she announced, "I'm off to pick up Romeo."

"Romeo's really coming over for dinner?" David seemed surprised. That guy really didn't see himself as an outsider, "Hey sis, you haven't touched the pastries I brought you."

Quick as a flash, David grabbed one and hurried over, popping it into his sister's mouth.

Arabella chewed on the treat while sipping her coffee, sauntering leisurely towards the front door.

Suddenly, she felt two pairs of eyes drilling into her back. Her instincts told her they were coming from

the floor-to-ceiling windows of the main house.

With a subtle lift of her lips, she continued towards the door, her stride unbroken.

Romeo was already there. Today, he was donned in a sleek black coat that accentuated his tall frame.

His hair was cropped short, giving him a dashing look, his handsome features even more striking.

Upon seeing Arabella, his entire demeanor softened, and a tender smile spread across his face,

warming her like the first days of spring.

The gatekeeper buzzed the door open, and as Romeo stepped through, he wrapped Arabella in a

gentle embrace, his eyes brimming with happiness, "Grandma and grandpa said after we have dinner

here, I should bring you over. They're eager to have a meal with you. I told them you'd be stuffed, but

they insisted you could just join for the fun; they're dying to meet you."

He gazed into her eyes, his voice soft, "I've been hearing about it non-stop these past few days; I

almost can recite every single word they said."

Arabella chuckled, "Is it them who want me over, or is it you?"

"Of course, I want you there too." Romeo affectionately tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear, "If

you're there, this year will be the happiest, most fulfilling, and most wonderful New Year I've ever had."

"They would be sad to hear that. Before you came into my life, they were the ones you spent New Year with."

"Having you with us would make them feel the same way. It would be the happiest, most satisfying, and most joyous New Year for them too. You're incredibly important to us, and we already see you as part of the family."

With that, Romeo noticed the coffee in her hand, "What are you drinking? Let me hold that."

He took the latte in one hand and intertwined his fingers with hers in the other, walking towards the main house.

"Hans said the chef just whipped it up. You should try it."

Romeo took a sip, "It's good."

Chapter 1925

Romeo planned to ask the chef for the recipe later, so when Bella married him and longed for a taste of home, he could whip up a comforting cup for her, or perhaps they could make a trip back together.

"Did your family's thing wrap up that quick?" Arabella asked offhandedly.

"Yeah, grandpa and grandma were both eager to get cooking, thinking of impressing you tonight with

their skills. Mom and dad were not to be outdone. When I left, all four of them were battling it out for kitchen space, with the chef standing by, totally stressed out, unable to intervene but also unable to watch them turn the kitchen into a disaster zone." Romeo said with a light chuckle, "They know you love seafood, so tonight's feast is mostly seafood-themed."

"That's so considerate of them." Arabella said with a laugh, "Dinner here should be over by six or seven; then we can head over to your grandparents' and nibble on something."

"If they heard you say that, they'd be thrilled." Romeo pulled out his phone, "I'll shoot them a message to hold back on the experimental dishes. Otherwise, I might ban you from next year's feast."

The elders weren't sure if Arabella would make it today, but they were all vying to cook, hoping she would come and get a taste of their culinary efforts.

If they knew Arabella was definitely coming tonight, they would be over the moon, eagerly awaiting her arrival.

"You're really crashing our dinner?" David stood by the long banquet table, watching Romeo stroll in hand in hand with his sister. He felt a twinge of jealousy, "Can you maybe show a little restraint in

public? The deal isn't sealed yet, and here you are, all over each other. Does Bella's reputation mean nothing to you?"

"What can I say? You're just jealous you don't have a girlfriend," Romeo let go of Arabella's hand only to drape an arm around her waist, drawing her even closer, looking like the perfect pair.

"Just because you've got Bella on your side now, doesn't mean you can do whatever you want around me. Listen here, she calls me bro, and you better show the same respect! Otherwise, you can forget about stepping through this door!"

"If just saying 'bro' can get me such an amazing fiancée, then I'm making out like a bandit." Romeo said with a playful grin, acknowledging his friend's tacit approval, "Thanks for acknowledging me as your future brother-in-law so soon, David. I'm looking forward to all the advice you'll give me."

"Advice, my foot." David grumbled, pulling Romeo's shoulder away from Bella, "If it weren't for the fact that you're my longtime buddy and the whole 'keep the benefits in the family' thing, I'd never let Bella end up with you."

"So, I'm pretty important to you. Is that so, David?"

"Cut the crap." David said, "Don't get used to call me like that so easily."

Before he tried to make Romeo consider him as his brother; turned out it was a herculean task. Ever since Bella came into the picture, Romeo had changed so unnoticeably fast.

"Once a brother-in-law, it'll be a done deal." Romeo joked, "I'll be calling you 'bro' until the day you're six feet under."

"Get out of here, talking about graves on New Year! Whether you remain my brother-in-law depends on how you act from here on out. I've been dancing my bones off at concerts recently," David feigned a shoulder ache.

Romeo got the hint, "Bella, David wants me to give him a massage. Hang on a sec."

"No, no, I did not say that!" David blurted, not expecting Romeo to be so cunning as to use Bella against him.

"The thing is, I can't have physical contact with anyone else, even guys, it's just not right," Romeo said with feigned resignation.

"Bella, he's bullying me!!"

Arabella couldn't help but laugh, "Have you guys ever had a moment of peace in all these years?"

Always this love-hate relationship?

Chapter 1926

"We're doing alright." Dave slung an arm around his buddy's shoulder, grinning from ear to ear, "If only

he didn't have a knack for bullying and taking advantage, we could be even better."

"Quit bad-mouthing me in front of my fiancée."

Where had he bullied anyone or taken advantage?

"Do you really think Bella's only got eyes for you? As if her pretty little head is filled with nothing but

your mug?"

At that moment, Arabella sized up Romeo's face and found it rather fetching.

He looked even more handsome than he had a few days ago, his features even more pleasing to the

eye.

"Notice anything different about me today?" Romeo's gaze fell on Arabella, oblivious to the others.

"Your hair's shorter." Arabella chuckled, "And you're wearing the shirt I designed."

"What else?" Romeo admired her with dotting eyes.

"Hey, hey, hey, can you two spare a thought for my feelings here??" Dave, with his millions of followers,

felt utterly ignored by the pair, which was a blow to his ego.

"Romeo's here?"

In the meantime, Louisa emerged from the main house. Seeing Romeo, she beamed with affection.

"Come on in, take a seat. David, what are you doing clinging to Romeo? Let go!"

She approached her son and whispered, "Can't you give the lovebirds some space? You've been hanging all over Romeo the whole way here, leaving your sister in the dust. To the uninitiated, they'd think you two were the couple."

Dave was riddled with question marks in his head, but before he could clarify, Louisa had already ushered Romeo inside, and in a low voice asked Arabella, "You going to the Fairfield Manor tonight?"

"Yeah."

Louisa's smile couldn't be wider, "Then I'll have the kitchen prepare the dinner early."

"Alright."

"Romeo's arrived!" Louisa announced as she entered, and the living room filled with grandparents, aunts, and uncles, all coming to greet him.

"It's been a while, the boy's grown even more handsome!" Bernard always had a soft spot for Romeo, seeing him as a young man of many merits, with no flaws to speak of. He affectionately patted his shoulder, "Come on in, I've been waiting for you."

"He's been looking forward to seeing you, asked about you so many times. A few times he wanted Bella to reach out to you, but I stopped her." Cornelia said with a smile, "Now we've finally got you here."

"I heard from the staff that you brought plenty of gifts. You shouldn't have, really!" Louisa called out, "Someone bring in some tea and snacks. I'll go check on the kitchen and make sure they speed up the dinner preparations. You've got to head to Fairfield Manor after dinner."

David hadn't expected they'd be off to Fairfield Manor after dinner - a place belonging to Grandpa Phillip and Grandma Shirley.

Suddenly, he had a feeling, as if his sister wasn't really a Collins anymore. She was practically a McMillian now.

He felt a sense of loss, as if he were about to lose his sister.

All the elders fussed over Romeo, who, normally quiet and reserved, was especially charming that day.

Bernard and Cornelia, Darren, Belinda, and even Bard, were all exceedingly pleased with him.

"Romeo's here?"

Just then, a playful voice rang out, as Alma walked in from the garden, her face bright with a smile,

"Now our whole family's truly together."

Laughter filled the room, and Romeo also stood to greet Lucas and Beverly.

"Please, have a seat. We're all family here; no need for formalities." Lucas beamed with admiration at

the handsome young man, "Romeo's got to be the son-in-law every elder dreams of having -

respectful, good-looking, well-educated, capable, and loyal."

"Lucas, what are you saying? Are you suggesting we're not up to par with him?" David couldn't resist

the jab.

Chapter 1927

"You're a household name, a superstar through and through. My mistake, a Collins never falls far from

the tree - Romeo here's proof of that, all charm and charisma, hahaha."

At that moment, Kenneth glanced at his watch, "Make yourselves comfortable. Today marks Bella's first

year with us. I've got to whip up something special."

“Dad, please, let Bella spend a nice New Year here. Your skills...” David interjected with a grimace,

“And Mom, let’s not turn this evening into an episode of ‘Kitchen Nightmares,’ okay?”

It was a big holiday, and a trip to the ER was the last thing they needed.

“Right, right, let me handle it. I want to create a memorable and wonderful evening for Bella,” Cornelia said while standing up.

“If Cornelia’s cooking, then I’ve got to show my skills too,” Belinda announced, rising from her seat.

“No, no, you sit down and relax. I’ll do a couple of dishes - one representing your good intentions, and one with my personal touch,” Darren said to his wife.

Arabella wanted to tell everyone not to fuss, but before she could get a word out, they all marched into the kitchen, determined to impress her. Her brothers, not to be outdone, followed suit.

Both kitchen were bustling with activity. In the end, the only ones left idle were Arabella, Romeo, and Alma.

Sensing the tension, Alma volunteered, “I’ll go check if they need any help.”

“I’d like to make something for you too,” Romeo said gently.

“It’s not necessary. We’ll have too much food as it is.”

“I’ll make two dishes.” Romeo caressed her cheek, “They’ll be your favorites.”

He kept the details a mystery.

The six massive fridges at Reflections Villa were stocked with every ingredient imaginable. If anything was missing, David would take his sister to the property’s kitchen garden for some fresh picking.

“Sis, do you like cabbage?” David asked as he noticed the robust heads of cabbage in the garden.

“Sure, anything’s fine.”

“I’ll pick some extra. Let’s see what the others whip up for you,” David gathered a hefty assortment of veggies, even taking the ones Arabella had picked, adding them to his basket. He didn’t forget to snap a selfie and post it on Facebook.

[Picking veggies with my sister. Everyone’s trying to impress her with their cooking. What should I make to outshine them all? Suggestions welcome!]

The photo captured him holding a large wicker basket, selfie stick in hand, with the lush garden and the silhouette of his sister, busy picking vegetables, in the background.

Within a minute of posting, the selfie amassed thousands of likes and countless comments offering

suggestions.

One comment sparked an idea in David. Yes, he'd create an artistic dish - broccoli fashioned into a tree of prosperity, garnished with colorful minced bell pepper, both appealing and simple, with a meaningful message.

It symbolized growth, wealth, and abundance.

An hour later, the dining table was laden with delectable dishes.

Arabella wasn't idle either, preparing a visually stunning centerpiece.

"Bella, come on over. Stop fussing in the kitchen."

Everyone was eager to explain their culinary creations to Arabella, each dish with its own special significance.

"Bella, I made this dish called 'Thrivingness'. It's to wish you an ever-rising fortune and better days ahead," Bernard explained.

"Nice!!" A round of applause filled the room.

Chapter 1928

"Mine for you is this one, a delightful dish where creamy shrimp mousse was stuffed into clams, symbolizing wealth and prosperity for the coming year."

Applause filled the room once again.

David was busy capturing every dish and well-wish on video, quickly uploading the montage to Facebook.

Friends flicked through their feeds and stumbled upon David's post, mistaking his terms of endearment for Serena. Their messages pinged with praise, envying her for being the apple of everyone's eye.

Whether it was Hans, a titan in the business world, or David, a pop icon with hundreds of millions of followers, everyone, elder or peer, happily hustled into the kitchen to cook for this young lady.

The level of adoration she received was beyond belief.

Serena watched from the garden as the sun dipped below the horizon, until the sky was draped in darkness.

"Serena, it's getting chilly out here. Shall I wheel you inside?" Dora asked, bending down.

Serena nodded, pulling out her phone to check if Martin had messaged about dinner. She noticed her phone was on silent, flooded with unread messages topping 99+.

"Serena, you're so lucky to have such a caring family."

"I can tell they all adore you. Your New Year's celebration is pretty enviable."

"A celebrity brother cooking for you. If it were me, I'd be moved to tears."

"Serena, how do you do it? A wealthy family like yours, so warm and loving behind closed doors. I'm so jealous."

"Serena, I adore your family. The elders have no airs; they respect the kids and prepare surprises, something my family lacks!"

Confused by the barrage of messages, Serena had a hunch one of her brothers had posted on Facebook again.

Before she could check, more messages flooded in.

"In my house, the cooking's left to the housekeeper. Never seen such a wealthy family cook themselves, each preparing a dish just to make you happy."

"The food your family makes is creative, beautiful, and so meaningful."

"Hearing their New Year's wishes for you, honestly, it's brought me to tears."

"Why haven't you posted on Facebook today? You must be basking in happiness, too busy to go online. I'm so envious."

Serena couldn't read all the messages. She opened Facebook and saw David's recent video five minutes ago, and a selfie from an hour ago.

After watching everything, she was too shock to utter a word, tears welling up instinctively.

She hadn't expected everyone at home to set aside their status and cook wholeheartedly for Arabella, each blessing delivered with a sincere smile.

Such treatment was something she never got with the Collins family.

Not just grandparents in the kitchen, but even Alma had prepared a dish for Arabella! That damned Alma.

Just the thought of that little wretch would make Serena bristle with rage. Before, this wretch was always at odds with her, and now, no sooner had Serena left the Collins family, Alma began cozying up to Arabella, even cooking for her.

The biggest shock was the Collins family inviting Romeo to dinner, where he cooked not one, but two dishes!

"Serena, your fiancé is so good to you. He's wealthy, handsome, and he even cooks for you."

"How did you capture his heart? Share your secrets with us! I declare that you're officially our role model now; we should all learn from you!"

"Never expected your fiancé to be skilled in the kitchen too, making such beautiful dishes."

"Serena, you truly are the happiest woman in the world!!"

Chapter 1929

Serena closed her eyes, a cocktail of anger and pain surging through her. Her body trembled involuntarily from the stress.

Since she got kicked out of her family home, it took weeks before she could handle a fork and knife with any semblance of normalcy, or sip soup from a spoon without awkwardness.

The scars on her forehead, chin, palms, backs of her hands, and knees required laser treatments. Six months of continuous sessions were needed before the prominent scars would begin to fade.

Her left leg, fractured, demanded about three months to heal properly, and her knee needed half a year before she could ditch the wheelchair. But to walk unaided again, she'd have to endure another three months of grueling physical therapy.

In the end, she might only regain seventy to eighty percent of her mobility, a shadow of her former self.

Even if one handed her a pencil, she couldn't produce the sketches and art she used to.

Her life felt like it had plummeted into an abyss, filled with agony and torment.

Gone was the beauty she cherished, the talents diminished, her reputation tarnished, and her social standing obliterated; even her bank account had been drained dry!

All the while, Arabella was lifted to the skies, pampered like a princess by the entire family!

How could Serena let go of such disparity? Why did her once-beloved family treat her this way? Why did fate have to be so cruel?

Was she, Serena, destined to be trampled under Arabella's feet for all her life? Was she fated to always be less than Arabella?

At Reflections Villa.

Arabella eyed the grand feast spread out on the table, as each family member vied to serve her.

"Bella, try the dish I made, will you?"

"Have a taste of mine first! Does it still suit your palate?"

"How about the one I made?"

"Give my specialty a try."

"Everyone, quiet down." David couldn't help but interject, "Let Bella take her time to savor each dish, no need to rush her."

"Exactly, let Bella eat at her own pace. Don't want her choking now," Louisa agreed.

With every bite Arabella took, all eyes were fixed on her, awaiting her verdict.

If she declared it delicious, the cook would beam with joy, urging her to have more.

"You all should eat too," Arabella was not accustomed to being the center of such attention. To her, the true spirit of a feast was in sharing the meal together.

"We'll dig in after you've given your thoughts on everything," no one seemed in a hurry, all eager for Arabella's reviews.

"The texture's rich, and the flavors are exquisite. This dish is both visually appealing and tasty."

"This dish is a work of art in its presentation, a harmony of color, aroma, and taste. Delicious."

"Dad's dish has an exceptional balance of texture and flavor."

Arabella lightly touched upon each dish, leaving everyone with satisfied smiles.

"And you haven't tasted Romeo's two creations yet," Grandma spun the lazy Susan, bringing Romeo's dishes in front of Arabella.

As Arabella sampled the first dish, her nose tingled with emotion.

Seeing her silent for an extended period, the others sensed something amiss. They exchanged glances, confusion written on their faces, unsure of what had just unfolded.

Chapter 1930

"How on earth did you manage to make this?" Arabella looked up at Romeo, "Every New Year, Grannie

Grace would make them for me. They were a symbol of togetherness, of everything ending perfectly.

This tastes just like hers."

It was as if they were identical.

Everyone was caught off guard by this revelation, their gazes shifting to Romeo.

Romeo explained, "A few days ago, I got in touch with the old cook from the Murphy household. I

asked her about the dishes that were traditionally served at Christmas and New Year dinner, and that's

how I found out what Grace used to make for you."

His eyes softened as he continued, "Before she was hospitalized, she sensed something was wrong

with her health. Back then, she handwrote several recipes for the cook, all your favorites. But after she

was admitted to the hospital, under Olga's pressure, the cook was too scared to make any decent

meals for you. That cookbook Grace had handwritten was tucked away. Thankfully, it wasn't thrown out. I managed to get my hands on that cookbook."

With that, Romeo handed Arabella a small black notebook.

As Arabella opened it, she saw Granny Grace's handwriting outlining each recipe's ingredients, measurements, and even her own preferences, detailed to a T.

Turning to the last pages, it was evident that Granny Grace's health had been declining - her writing became shaky, but she persisted in finishing the last recipe.

She even included notes on Arabella's tastes, reminding whoever was cooking to add a bit more of this, a little less of that.

Arabella's eyes glistened with unshed tears, touched by Granny Grace's behind-the-scenes efforts.

"This dish," Romeo said, "I made it on behalf of Grace. Her blessing for your New Year isn't just for the past; it will be with you every year to come. You should be happy in the new year. Everyone who cares about you wants to see you doing well."

"Absolutely, Romeo's right." Kenneth agreed, "Grace is always with us. Her love for you can't be expressed face to face, but Romeo has conveyed it through his food."

"Romeo, you're so thoughtful." Louisa's voice cracked slightly with tears, "Your dad is right. Grace has never left us. Her care for you has penetrated every aspect of life."

Arabella lifted her moist eyes to look at Romeo, "Thank you."

Although a 'thank you' seemed too formal after six months of dating, at that moment, Arabella truly wanted to express her gratitude for his thoughtfulness, for the ways he tried to ease the regret, guilt, and remorse she felt for not being able to save Grannie Grace.

Such a man had warmed countless moments of her life, bringing her endless touches of emotion.

"There's another dish you haven't tried yet," Romeo looked at her indulgently, his gaze tender.

He had made two dishes: one on behalf of Grannie Grace, and one on behalf of himself.

The fish was shaped into a five-layer cake, with carrots carved into hearts, stars, flowers, and other cute garnishes. The whole plate was both aesthetically pleasing and filled with childlike innocence.

Arabella took a bite, finding the flavor and texture perfectly executed, leaving a lingering taste that beckoned for more.

She smiled at Romeo, nodding in approval, "Delicious."

Romeo's face broke into a knowing smile.

"Let's all eat together," Arabella called out.

"I'll try this pearl meatballs from Grannie Grace." David took a bite, his expression one of amazement,

"So delicious! It tastes like home."

"Let me have a go." Clark also took one, nodding as he chewed, "Mmm, not bad. It seems that with

Grannie Grace around, Bella was quite lucky."

Laughter and chatter filled the room as everyone served each other.

Arabella and Romeo exchanged a knowing glance. Just then, the chef approached, "Ms. Arabella

Collins, the dish you prepared is ready. I've turned off the heat. Shall I bring it out?"