

The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1361

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Eunice feigned a faint right into his arms.

"Eunice, Eunice?"

Bard knew she was tired and came up with this little trick. If she fainted, she could naturally sleep in his embrace.

Bard didn't let a smirk show on his lips. Instead, he settled on a bench outside, draping his coat over her body and her delicate face, his eyes betraying a deep sadness and concern.

Meanwhile, Calvin couldn't help but ask, "That little girl knows medicine? Can she even go in and operate on Darren?"

"Yeah, she's just a kid, what's the deal with that?"

Arlen was also hearing this for the first time.

Bard, holding his wife on the bench, said coldly, "Dad's awakening is all thanks to Bella."

Calvin and Arlen were taken aback that such a young girl could have such prowess, solving medical issues that even renowned doctors couldn't fix.

"Is she a med student? Or did she train under some remarkable mentor? How come Louisa never mentioned it?"

Arlen was worried. If she really knew medicine and was skilled, that could spell trouble.

Thinking this, he glanced at Calvin. Calvin's eyes also flickered with anxiety.

In the operating room.

Arabella looked up at Darren and said, "Oh, there's one more thing I haven't told you. When I was checking your health before, I found that you are weak, not due to illness, but because someone had been drugging you for a long time. I didn't tell anyone at the time, because I wanted to catch the culprit quietly."

Later, she accidentally found that there was something off about Mr. Elliot from Bard's house. "My medicine was always delivered by Mr. Elliot," Darren said. "I heard from Bard that you exposed Mr. Elliot's plot a few days ago and saved me."

Arabella nodded, "I suspected it was Mr. Elliot who poisoned you, but he has no grudge against you, yet he listens to Mafia

Rock, who is Calvin and Arlen's lapdog."

Darren gave a bitter smile, finding it hard to believe his own brother would stab him in the back.

"We're almost out of time." Arabella checked the time, then summoned a few doctors and nurses from a side door.

There was a large rest area connecting several operating rooms, where the medical staff who were in on the act waited, giving

Arabella and Darren enough time alone.

Arabella called them over, suited up in sterile attire, quickly tidied up the scene, and then had the operating room doors opened.

By this time, Eunice had been asleep for half an hour. Seeing the operating room doors open, Bard gently roused the person in

his arms, "Eunice, Dad's out. The surgery's done."

Eunice slowly opened her eyes, groggy, "Dad's out? Where is he? What did Bella say? Is everything okay?"

Calvin and Arlen rushed forward, anxiously inquiring.

"Girl, how's your grandpa? Is his life in danger?"

"Why hasn't he woken up yet? Is it serious?"

Calvin and Arlen also hurried over, feigning concern.

"Grandpa suffered a shock. We've done all we could. Whether he can wake up now is up to fate."

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Calvin gripped the edge of the bed as if it was the only thing keeping him upright, "Darren, you've got to hang in there, man. This

family can't lose you"

"Darren, it's all my fault. Just open your eyes, and whatever you want to do to me, I will take it like a man!"

"Your words are prettier than a song." Eunice stepped forward, her gaze icy as it swept over them, "If you're really looking to make amends with your lives, why don't you just go bash your heads against the wall and be done with it? Why waste breath on empty talk?"

Calvin and Arlen were speechless.

"Arlen, I will remember what you said. If dad wakes up, you better not chicken out when it's time to face the music."

The color drained from Arlen and Calvin's faces at her words.

"Aunt Eunice, you and Uncle Bard should go back and get some rest. Grandpa won't be waking up anytime soon, probably not till tomorrow morning at the earliest."

Arabella's suggestion made Calvin and Arlen exchange a glance before quickly looking away.

"No, I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying here at the hospital to keep your grandpa company tonight"

As Eunice's words hung in the air, Bard chimed in, "I'm staying too. Bella, I'll have someone drive you home to rest."

"I'm not tired." Arabella insisted, facing them, "If anything happens to Grandpa, I want to be here to help."

"Then is there a spare room?" Bard asked the attending doctor.

"There are a few empty rooms down the hallway. Mr. Bard, if you don't mind, the family can make do and rest there."

"Thanks," Bard said, and then turned to the others, "Calvin, Arlen, if you have nothing further, please feel free to head home. We can't really play host right now."

He put an arm around Eunice's shoulder, whispering, "Let's go."

"Mhm." Eunice nodded and gestured to Arabella, "Come here to me."

In the end, Darren was placed in room 919, Bard and Eunice took 918, and Arabella settled into 917. Calvin and Arlen, among others, still sat on the hallway benches, seemingly reluctant to leave. Ten minutes later, the lights on the entire floor went out.

Quick, light footsteps hurried towards room 919, the door swung open, and Darren was stabbed over a dozen times.

In other rooms, 918 and 917, sleep gas was released, and after a moment, the doors were opened for a swift and silent takedown.

Calvin, waiting in the hallway, soon heard from his underling, "Boss, it's done. They're all gone."

"What did you just say?" Perhaps unable to believe how smoothly things had gone, Calvin asked in a hushed tone, "Are you sure?"

"Saw it with my own eyes, boss. It's the honest truth!"

Seeing his subordinate bowing with utmost respect, Calvin still couldn't believe it. He began to stride towards room 919.

Pushing open the door to the room, the lights flickered on, and Calvin saw the white bed sheets soaked in blood.

Arlen, following close behind, was equally incredulous, a glint of elation flickering in his eyes, "Dead? Is Darren finally dead?"

Calvin and Arlen were both shaken and ecstatic, "Is he really gone? This is great."

Now they could rest easy.

Calvin hadn't expected Darren to go out like this. His emotions were tumultuous, and it took a while before he could compose himself, step by deliberate step, he approached the bloodied bed.

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On the hospital bed lay a man with a face identical to that of Darren, except his heart and stomach had been stabbed over a

dozen times. The wounds oozed blood, and their gaping maws were a horrific sight to behold.

Calvin felt a semblance of relief wash over him.

"Darren, you've only got yourself to blame. You know, if you had just slept

through and not woken up, I would have been there for you for the rest of your days. But tonight, you just had to wade into the

Arlen family mess! You can't blame us for playing rough now."

"Darren, you've had it all these years: wealth, family, the works. Now it's time for your brothers to have a turn."

Arlen interjected, unable to contain himself. "Don't worry, your wife is with your younger son, Sampson. He'll take good care of her. Your elder son, Bard, would pass away by now, you two can leave the world together. As for the Griffith Group, we brothers will take the reins. You just rest easy, we'll see to it that you have a grand send-off."

At this point, Calvin couldn't help but ask, "With Darren gone, along with Bard and Eunice, how do we get their shares and assets transferred to us?"

"Yeah, they didn't sign anything, what if?"

Before Arlen could finish, he was interrupted with a chuckle, "You two numbskulls, scared witless, huh? Just use their hands to stamp the transfer papers later, right?"

"That makes sense. It's a shame about that girl, though. Heard she was quite the medic." Calvin's tone carried a hint of regret.

"If she can't be of use to us, then she's no use at all" Arlen said firmly. "Let's get those stamps done!" Calvin wanted to feel that weight off his chest as soon as possible. Once Darren, Bard, and Eunice's stamps were on the transfer

papers, everything would be settled.

He reached for Darren's hand, about to make the stamp, when suddenly something felt off.

"Hold on."

His voice caused all the brothers present to look up in confusion. "Calvin, what's wrong?"

"Something's off about Darren's hand." As Calvin examined it closely, it wasn't just the hand that was wrong. On closer

inspection, the face and the limbs of the corpse seemed peculiar too. The features on the body before them looked strange. And the hands and feet seemed a tad chubbier and shorter than Darren's.

What on earth was going on?

"My dear brothers, what a clever scheme you've concocted!" Darren's voice startled the brothers, causing them to step back in

fear, eyes darting between the bed and the door, "A ghost, a ghost!"

But Darren on the hospital bed said nothing. Instead, a tall and authoritative person appeared in the doorway.

Darren's sudden appearance left everyone in disbelief, their eyes darting between the door and the hospital bed.

How could there be two Darrens?

Darren wasn't dead. He strode into the room, followed by Bard, Eunice, and Arabella.

The brothers' eyes widened in shock. "Darren, what's going on?"

Why was there a Darren at the door and one on the bed?

Why was everyone alive?

Darren approached them, delivering a resounding slap to each of them, shaking with fury.

Calvin and Arlen were terrified, heads bowed, unable to meet his gaze.

What was going on?

"The man in the bed was one of the goons you sent to surround the manor. We picked out a few with similar builds, dressed them up, added prosthetics and wigs."

Darren's explanation brought realization to his brothers. So, the man on the bed wasn't really Darren himself.

It was one of their henchmen, disguised after they'd surrounded the manor!

It all made sense now.

"They'd been drugged into a deep sleep, but then your men went and stabbed them a dozen times. No saving them now.'

The brothers finally understood they had fallen for Darren's trap. It had all been a set-up by Darren himself!

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Was Eunice the one who spilled the beans about the birthday bash to Darren? It seemed like he had set a trap, just waiting for them to take the bait.

If they could claim that the previous incident was all a misunderstanding, tonight's fiasco was irrefutable evidence of their treachery. No amount of excuses would do any good now.

Darren had seen with his own eyes, heard with his own ears.

They had laid bare every treacherous thought in their hearts.

"You bunch of backstabbers!" Darren snatched the leather belt from one of his men and lashed them with fury,

"I treated you like brothers, and you plotted against me, wishing me dead!"

They not only wished him dead, but they didn't spare his son, his daughter-in-law, nor his dear granddaughter!

How could they be so heartless?

The belt was an heirloom, a "family sanction" passed down through generations. Even through the thick winter coats, each strike inflicted pain that made them grit their teeth and wince.

"Darren, we were wrong. the brothers whimpered as they recoiled.

"It's okay if you kill us, but don't get worked up. You've just recovered, it wouldn't be worth it."

"When you were stabbing me over and over earlier, I didn't see any of you concerned about my health.

Now that you've been caught, you start with your crocodile tears?" Darren swung the belt, striking them again and again.

Calvin took a hit to the face, a red mark instantly surfacing.

Arlen got it on the head, the pain was so intense it felt like his skull was splitting.

Trying to dodge the relentless belt, Calvin and Arlen's heads collided, stars exploding in their vision, disoriented by the pain.

They knew Darren was truly disappointed and angry this time!

"Darren, your lashes have awakened me. I'm worse than an animal!"

"If you decide to beat me to death today, I wouldn't utter a word of complaint. Even in the afterlife, I'd kneel and apologize to our parents.'

"Then get in line to apologize to them." Darren fumed, whipping them mercilessly without any sign of stopping.

The brothers hadn't expected Darren to be so determined to flay them. Bard, Eunice, and Arabella blocked the door, and on the ninth floor, jumping out the window wasn't an option. Besides, even if they managed to escape, Darren had ways to drag them back.

All they could do was cry and beg for mercy.

But Darren had no trace of compassion, only ceasing when he couldn't lift the belt anymore, panting heavily.

The brothers' clothes were torn, revealing wounds that trembled with pain in the cold winter night.

Calvin was barely hanging on, crawling to Darren's feet, clutching at his pants leg and pleading,

"Darren, we're old now. Please spare us. I won't have many years left anyway."

"Darren, don't let us die easily. Wouldn't it be better to let us live out the rest of our lives in torment and regret?"

Arlen crawled over as well, weeping and begging,

"Darren, for the sake of my grandchildren, spare my life.'

"Darren, my youngest daughter is about to get married. Please give me a chance to see her in a wedding dress.

You know she's my darling girl."

Calvin fell to his knees before Darren, weeping bitterly, "I promise you, after the wedding, I'll take my family and leave, never to

bother you again. We'll relinquish our shares, the dividends, everything goes back to you, Darren.

Do with them as you wish.'

"Exactly, I'll resign immediately, I won't be involved with the company anymore. Transfer all my shares to you, Darren, and I don't

want the monthly dividends. The house we live in, the cars we drive, you can take them back anytime." Arlen knelt before Darren too, tears and sobs mixing as he admitted his guilt, "I just beg you, Darren, spare my life."

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The brothers wailed in unison, "Darren, we really see the error of our ways!"

Darren looked at them with disdain, their pitiful state laid bare before him. Just moments ago, they had claimed they'd rather die

than utter a word of complaint, and now they clung to life as if it were gold.

“You value your lives, but to you, mine and those of my son and daughter-in-law, my granddaughter are less than the dirt beneath your feet.”

Having had enough, Darren unleashed his anger with a leather belt, lashing at them until exhaustion stayed his hand.

"From now on, we go our separate ways. Our bond ends here. You're no longer my brothers! You have two days

to disappear. Don't let me catch sight of you in Dawnstar or Solterra again!"

The brothers were stunned, hardly believing what they were hearing. Was Darren really cutting ties, treating them as strangers?

"If there is a next time, I will come for your lives myself. Now get out."

After a moment of bewildered silence, the brothers sobbed with gratitude, thanking Darren before scrambling out the door.

Finally alone, Darren's tense nerves relaxed, and he nearly collapsed.

Arabella rushed to his side to support him.

Turning to see his perceptive and thoughtful granddaughter, Darren felt a pang of sorrow. All those years of brotherhood, of

pouring out his heart, and yet this newly found girl showed him more warmth and care than they ever did.

His pride as the family patriarch seemed to melt away, leaving him feeling old and weary. 'Let's go home, he said weakly.

"Of course; whispered Arabella, aiding him as they left the hospital room. They passed by two other rooms, where the aftermath of violence was still evident—bloodied figures on beds and chaos strewn about the floor.

Back at the estate, Serena paced her room restlessly, glancing at the clock. It was half-past one in the morning!

Eunice, always played favorites, taking Arabella out and not returning for hours!

She felt disregarded, her eighteen years of being the niece forgotten.

That evening must have introduced Arabella as the true heiress, with everyone fawning over her!

During the introduction, Eunice must have mentioned that Serena had no blood ties to the Collins family, that she was just an adopted daughter!

The thought made Serena uncomfortable, feeling that her aunt had crossed a line, never considering her feelings in anything she did.

Especially now, not coming home at this hour.
Perhaps they stayed at the Arlen residence.
And Uncle Bard, what was his rush? Taking
Grandpa away without allowing her a moment to
catch up.

She had planned to bond with Grandpa while
Arabella was away at the birthday party,
strengthening their relationship.

But then it hit her—had Uncle Bard rushed off to join
the birthday gathering with Aunt Eunice and
Arabella?

Were they all staying at the Arlen residence, leaving
her alone in this big house?

That would be utterly intolerable!

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Half an hour later.

Serena heard the sound of a car outside and dashed out to see. Sure enough, her aunt and the rest of the family had returned.

Darren sat in his wheelchair, with Arabella pushing it forward, while Bard held Eunice's hand. Witnessing this scene, Serena suddenly felt like they were truly a family.

"Grandpa, Uncle Bard, Aunt Eunice, Bella. You're finally back!" Serena beamed, "I've been waiting for what felt like an eternity, and now you're here!"

"Why are you still up? It's late. You should be resting" Bard chided gently upon seeing her in a thin nightgown.

"Come inside. It's cold out here."

Serena had purposefully shed her thick, warm robe for the flimsy nightgown, all to gain a bit of sympathy from her family.

Seeing her plan had worked, she chuckled, "I'm fine. You all must be exhausted after such a long night. Bella, let me help you with something."

She wanted to make a good impression in front of her grandfather.

"No need,' Arabella dismissed her offer, wheeling past without playing into Serena's act.

A flicker of disappointment crossed Serena's eyes.

"Let's head inside,' Eunice said, patting her back.

Seizing the moment, Serena clung to her hand and caged, "Aunt Eunice, was Arlen's birthday bash fun?

Tell me all about it!

What happened?"

"It was alright' Eunice chuckled. "There were a bunch of fun things, like a clown act"

"That sounds amazing!" Serena felt envious but also miffed that her aunt hadn't taken her along.

"But the performances were lackluster, at least in your sister's and my opinion, Eunice continued with a smile.

"You were lucky to miss it. There was this thrilling event tonight that got everyone's adrenaline pumping. If you had been there and seen all that, you probably would've been in tears."

Serena couldn't help feeling slighted internally. How did her aunt know she would cry? Missing out on such a fantastic party seemed so unfair!

“Alright, time to wash up and hit the hay; Eunice said, obviously tired and ready to head upstairs with Bard.

But Serena whined, "Grandpa's just getting better, and I haven't had a chance to talk to him. Just let me peek in and I'll be off."

"You can see him tomorrow. It's not too late."

Serena pouted pretentiously, "What if he's whisked away in a rush tomorrow and miss him again?"

Hearing this, Eunice glanced at Bard with a smile, 'She's beating around the bush, blaming you for taking her grandpa away."

"Not at all! I just miss Grandpa, that's all"

“Then make it quick and get some rest. Grandpa's tired, too. He's been through a lot tonight."

Eunice didn't spell it out, but to Serena, it sounded like her grandpa and Arabella had shared significant moments she wasn't privy to, and she didn't want to disrupt their lingering warmth.

"I get it, Aunt Eunice. You and Uncle Bard should rest up, too, Serena replied with a gracious smile, though only she knew how upset and jealous she felt inside.

After a while, she approached her grandfather's room and knocked.

To her surprise, Arabella answered.

Serena's face showed her shock, "What are you doing in Grandpa's room? I need to speak with him." The unspoken message was clear: Get out, now! "He's about to sleep. Whatever it is can wait until tomorrow."

As Arabella started to close the door, Serena quickly reached out to stop it, "I just want to see him and say a few words. Are you going to stop me?"

"I told you, he needs his rest."

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"No need to rush the clock!"

Serena pushed against the door, matching her strength against Arabella's, but it was clear she was no match.

Arabella easily held her ground, her effortless stance a stark contrast to Serena's strained efforts to open the door.

"Do you really have to be like this?" Serena glared at Arabella, frustration evident in her voice. "I just want to talk to Grandpa.

What are you so afraid of?"

"Afraid?" Arabella arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow. "Shouldn't you be the one who's afraid?"

"What do I have to be afraid of?" Serena retorted, her voice tinged with defensiveness even as she tried to turn the tables.

"You're just scared that Grandpa and I will bond, and he'll end up liking me more than you, right?"

Arabella couldn't help but laugh. "Do you think I'm afraid of that?"

Just then, a weary voice called from the room.

"Bella, what are you doing out there?"

Arabella raised her voice slightly, "Grandpa, Serena wants to see you. She says she has something to tell you."

"Just send her back. We'll talk tomorrow.' Darren's voice sounded tired. "Come here to me, Bella"

Arabella shot Serena a look and closed the door.

Left standing outside the door, Serena was stunned. She hadn't expected that overnight, Grandpa would come to rely on Arabella even more.

He preferred Arabella's company over hers. She was his granddaughter of eighteen years!

Was it simply because Arabella shared his blood that he could erase all the affection he had shown Serena over those years?

Serena clenched her fists, convinced that Arabella must be playing foul!

She knew a thing or two about medicine, surely she must've used some sort of hypnotic trick, making everyone in the family biased, making them all like her!

How despicable!

A draft blew in through the slightly opened window, sending a shiver down Serena's spine. She suddenly remembered she had left her thick robe in her room, and angrily she stormed off to retrieve it.

Arabella went to Darren's side and continued with the acupuncture, "Just two more needles, and then you'll be able to get a good night's rest."

"I just couldn't catch my breath earlier, my head was pounding, and I was so irritable. A few pricks from you, and I feel much

better." Lying in bed, Darren was think of the events of the evening.

"Don't think about tonight anymore, Grandpa. Right now, you just need to relax and get some sleep, Arabella said as she inserted the needles. "In a couple of days, Grandma is going to come visit. She'll worry if she finds you looking weak and listless."

"Really?" A spark of surprise and joy lit up Darren's eyes. "She said that to you? She's coming to see me?"

Since waking up that evening and being whisked away to Arlen's birthday bash by Bard, he hadn't had a chance to speak with his wife.

"Don't believe me, Grandpa? You can call Grandma tomorrow and ask her yourself; Arabella smiled.

"She'll be thrilled to hear your voice."

"I'll call her first thing in the morning. It's been too long since I've seen her"

To be honest, he missed her terribly.

Since falling ill, he and his wife had been forced to live apart, seeking treatment in different places.

"Just remember, Grandpa, your recovery is still fragile. No extreme emotions when you talk to her tomorrow,"

Arabella cautioned.

“Alright, alright. Darren chuckled, already feeling better.

After Arabella finished with the acupuncture, she tidied away the needles and placed a sachet on his bedside table. "This will help soothe and induce sleep. You rest up, and I'll come to check on you tomorrow."

“Thank you, dear. You've been such a help.’

Darren's eyes were heavy with sleep, and it wasn't long before he drifted off into slumber.

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Arabella stepped out of the shower well past midnight, her skin still tingling from the hot water, and realized it was already 2 AM.

Checking her phone, she noticed a few missed calls and unread messages, all from Romeo.

She quickly shot him a text asking if he was still up. No sooner had she hit send than Romeo's call came through.

"Have you been waiting by your phone this whole time?" Arabella teased, a playful smirk dancing on her lips.

Hearing her voice seemed to ease something deep inside Romeo. "Must've been quite the night for you to miss my messages.

Just hearing you now, I can tell things went smoothly."

He was genuinely happy for her, knowing she had a lot on her plate that evening and could guess what sort of things might have happened.

"It did go well, but it was a lot for Grandpa, you know. He's not young anymore, and tonight took a toll on him"

Arabella shared, her voice softening. Just then, she heard Romeo chuckle and couldn't help but ask, "What's so funny?"

"Have you noticed you're talking to me more and sharing more? You used to barely reply to my messages, let alone open up about your experiences."

"Is that enough for you?" Arabella's smile warmed her voice, "Aren't you setting the bar a bit low?"

"Just hearing a few extra words from you and knowing you're thinking of me are all the satisfaction I need."

Arabella laughed, "So, can you sleep peacefully now?"

"Are you free tomorrow?" Romeo's voice was gentle, "I'd like to take you to a few places"

He'd been in Dawnstar for a few days now and hadn't yet taken her out to explore.

Arabella thought for a moment—no pressing matters the next day—so she agreed.

"Sleep in then. Text me when you're up, and I'll come get you."

"Alright, it's late, you should get some sleep."

"What about you?"

"Drying my hair"

She had answered his call with her hair still damp, and it hadn't dried yet.

Romeo felt a twinge of regret. If he had known, he wouldn't have let her answer the phone with wet hair in the cold.

If he were there, he'd have dried it for her.

The thought brought back memories from a night long past.

"I'll bring you a hair dryer cap tomorrow,' Romeo said softly. "Use the warm setting for now, and go to sleep quickly. Don't catch a cold."

"Okay." After exchanging goodnights, Arabella hung up.

The next morning, before dawn even hinted at breaking the night, Serena was already up.

She wanted to bond with each family member before Arabella woke up.

But she had risen too early, and when breakfast time came, she found herself alone at the table.

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The sky was a blanket of dull gray, the night's curtain not yet fully lifted, when she couldn't help but ask the housekeeper, "What time does Uncle Bard usually wake up?"

"Well, usually about half an hour from now, but ever since his wife came back, Mr. Bard has been rising late with her. To be

honest, we servants can't say for certain."

Serena couldn't help but inquire further, "And what about Grandpa?"

"Mr. Darren woke up just last night. He's usually in a comatose state, so his routine is unpredictable."

Serena could only put down her fork, "Then I'll go for a morning run, and we can all have breakfast together when they wake up."

At minus three degrees, even clad in thick clothing, the bone-chilling wind made Serena shiver uncontrollably.

But she jogged on determinedly, thinking to herself, what if Uncle or Grandpa woke to find her running before dawn, impressed by her self-discipline and drive?

So, braving the cold, she ran around the garden for 40 minutes, and with still no one awake, she couldn't bear it any longer and hurried back inside.

Half an hour later, Bard was the first to come downstairs. Spotting Serena at the breakfast table, cradling a bowl in her hands, he couldn't resist asking, "Serena, why so early? And your face is so red. Is it from the cold?"

"I ran outside for an hour. It started snowing, so I stopped. Good morning, Uncle Bard." Serena spoke, her breath visible in the air.

Bard hadn't expected her to change, to take up early morning runs.

"That's a good habit, but on bad weather days, you might consider an indoor workout. Your aunt does just that with her morning yoga."

Serena thought, had she known, she would have grabbed a yoga mat and practiced in a conspicuous spot indoors, enjoying the warmth and avoiding the strenuous run while still catching people's attention.

Bard joined her at the table, sharing breakfast. "By the way, Serena, you mentioned on the phone that you have a boyfriend.

How long has that been going on?"

"It started after my sister came home." Serena deliberately cast her eyes down, then mustered a smile. "It's been about half a year. He pursued me for six years, from junior high through to senior year. After the college entrance exams last summer, I gave it a shot."

"What does he do?" Bard asked with interest. "A student like you?"

"He's a freshman too, but he's exceptional. The college granted him privileges due to his grades. He only needs to take exams at the end of each semester and will graduate in four years."

Unable to resist boasting, Serena added, "His family owns a department store chain with over 600 locations worldwide. Using his family's resources, he started a logistics company and recently secured funding. He owns fifty cargo planes and exclusive rights to certain flight paths."

Bard was well aware of what owning fifty cargo planes meant at such a young age, especially with exclusive domestic flight path

rights — no small feat.

"He's expanded the air freight business nationwide, the fastest in the country, outpacing other logistics companies, including those owned by the Collins and McMillian families." Serena made a point of comparing him to the Collins and McMillian families.

Bard nodded, "Impressive. Young, ambitious, with a unique vision."

"Thank you, Uncle Bard"

Serena thought to herself how Uncle could so easily overlook the truth. In comparison, Martin was clearly no match for Romeo!

"Since my sister is the true Collins family heiress and I'm just an adopted daughter, it's only natural that the arranged marriage between the Collins and McMillian families should be for her."

Serena put on an understanding face, not mentioning whether Romeo was interested in her or how she reluctantly settled for Martin.

If she could have her way, she would be Romeo's wife!

"My granddaughter has a boyfriend now.' Darren's cheerful voice came from the doorway. "I sleep for a little while, and I miss my granddaughter getting a boyfriend."

Eunice, supporting Darren, added with a smile, "It's not too late for you to find out now, Dad."

"Bring him over to meet us when you get a chance,"

Darren suggested with a twinkle in his eye. "I

overheard at the doorway that

the young man is in logistics. Not bad at all, quite the

business acumen for a freshman. He has a

promising future."

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The Princess and the Pauper

(Arabella)

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"Grandpa, you finally came!" Serena quickly left her seat, went up to Darren, and took his hand affectionately. "I wanted to talk to you last night, but Bella said you were off to bed" "I was pooped last night," Darren replied with a warm smile.

But Serena couldn't help thinking, if he was so tired, why did he keep Arabella in his room for a private chat?

"Grandpa, you have no idea how much I missed you while you were out of it," Serena said as she pulled out a chair for him and helped him sit down. She then sat beside him, still holding his hand, and cooed, "It's been such a relief to finish the semester so I could come to see you. And Aunt Eunice made it back safe and sound, too. It's just so great to see all of you!"

At that moment, a servant brought in breakfast, and Serena hurried to help serve it in front of Darren.

"Grandpa, this is your favorite pumpkin and millet porridge."

The bowl was a bit hot, and after setting it down, Serena quickly touched her earlobe.

"Did you burn your hand?" Darren asked with concern.

"No, it's fine," Serena laughed, serving the other side dishes in front of him and arranging the silverware before sweetly adding,

'Eat up while it's hot, Grandpa!"

Darren chuckled. "Such a thoughtful child."

Another servant brought Eunice her breakfast. As Serena helped serve it, the bowl was indeed too hot, and just half a meter from the table, she accidentally let go.

In a flash, Bard swept Eunice into his arms and turned to shield her.

The soup splashed onto Bard's clothes and spilled all over the table, creating a messy scene.

Serena, burned by the heat, recoiled and was visibly shaken. "I'm so sorry, Uncle Bard, Aunt Eunice, are you both okay?"

She just wanted to make a good impression but ended up messing things up again.

Seeing that his wife was unharmed, Bard finally said, "It's alright."

Eunice, noticing his stained clothes, pulled out a tissue to wipe him down, thankful that the thick clothes and cold weather prevented any burns.

"I'm so sorry, it's all my fault. I tried to be clever and just messed up,' Serena said, full of remorse.

"It's okay, I know it wasn't on purpose. Let's have breakfast,' Bard instructed the servants to prepare another serving.

Two more servants quickly started cleaning up the chaotic table.

Then Arabella arrived.

Everyone greeted her with smiles as she entered the room.

Serena felt a twinge of jealousy. Everyone seemed more enthusiastic about Arabella than her!

Despite her discomfort, Serena still managed to smile and called out to her sister, making sure to keep up appearances.

The servant respectfully approached, "Ms. Bella, for breakfast we have soup, pumpkin porridge, bread and pastries, milk, cheese

omelets, sandwiches, and rolled omelets. Plus, we have some side dishes. What would you like?"

"Give Bella a little of everything, Darren said enthusiastically. "It's not every day we have her over, so bring out all the good stuff

for Bella! And Bella, if there's anything you don't like, just tell me, and I won't let them make it anymore"

"I'm not picky; Arabella said with a smile. "But serving too much might mean I can't finish it all."

"You downed more fried chicken than me last night, so I'm pretty sure you can handle it. It's no problem for you!" Darren teased.

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Arabella grinned, "Grandpa, are you implying I'm a big eater?"

"It's a hearty appetite, my dear. It cheers me up to see you enjoying your food,' Darren replied with a twinkle in his eye, "Tonight,

let's dig in again for some late-night snacks."

Serena, overhearing the conversation, felt a pang of discomfort. Had Grandpa and Arabella had a midnight feast last night without inviting her?

That was just playing favorites!

"Grandpa, now that you're on the mend, are you sure you should be eating fried chicken?" Serena asked with feigned concern.

"Of course! We've got Dr. Bella here. If she says I can eat it, then there's no problem," Darren chuckled merrily. As the servants brought in the meal, he eagerly presented each dish to Arabella.

Eunice offered Arabella a bowl of soothing almond and bird's nest pudding. "Try this, it's cooling and moisturizing, perfect for beauty and wellness."

"This cheesy omelette is pretty good too; Bard suggested.

"I think these are the best! Give them a try, even just a bite."

Seeing everyone fuss over Arabella, Serena couldn't help feeling even more sour. "Grandpa, are those good? I want to try one too!"

But with the chef having prepared only three, and Darren having already enjoyed two, only one was left.

"It's just one left" Darren had already placed the last one on Arabella's plate when he turned to a servant and asked, "Do we have any more in the kitchen?"

"The chef only made three, as we never repeat breakfast dishes and had them yesterday. I remember Serena didn't fancy them much back then."

So, only three were made.

"That was a long time ago" Serena said, her discomfort apparent. "Then I'll try this cheesy omelette that Uncle Bard mentioned."

But Bard had already served the cheesy omelette to Arabella, looking surprised as he asked, "Serena, I thought you didn't like cheesy omelettes."

"It's just been so long, I've forgotten how they taste. I just wanted to try again. It's okay, Arabella can have it. I'll have something else."

Serena's words made the three adults present sense her mood. She seemed to be taking things to heart. Always regal and commanding, Eunice exuded an air of nobility, embodying the poise of a powerful woman.

"If Serena wants more, just have the kitchen make some, Eunice said decisively. Then turning to Arabella, "You eat now, and we'll have the chef prepare some for Serena later."

"No need, Serena said with a strained smile. "This is plenty for me."

The servants were in a bind. Should they instruct the kitchen to make more or not?

Serena seemed upset, her feelings hurt. But once food had been placed in Arabella's bowl, it couldn't be taken back. After all,

Serena wouldn't want it if it had been removed.

"Today's breakfast oversight was on me for not instructing the kitchen to prepare a little extra"

Eunice admitted.

"If you think this is enough, then tomorrow we'll make sure they cook more of what you like. Just let the kitchen know in advance."

"Thanks, Aunt Eunice." Serena suddenly stuck out her tongue in a mischievous smile. "Don't be so worried. I'm not picky. Just being able to sit and eat with you all is enough for me. It's just a pie. I couldn't possibly fight with my sister over it."

Eunice wasn't fooled by her niece's playful facade, but Bard and Darren, less attuned to subtleties, thought Serena was just being playful, teasing them.

Darren laughed, "I thought you were so stingy that you'd fight your sister over a pie. When did you become such a tease? Eat up while it's hot. My heart, having just recovered, can barely handle the suspense."

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Serena couldn't help but laugh and ask, "Grandpa, do you really think I'm petty?"

"Of course not, my dear he reassured her with a smile. "In my eyes, you've always been the sweet and sensible girl, kind and generous to a fault"

Hearing Darren's praise, Serena felt her spirits lift. She glanced at Arabella, only to find her calmly eating her cereal, not even sparing Serena a sideways look.

A twinge of annoyance pricked Serena's heart. She suspected that Arabella was playing dumb, seething with jealousy on the inside.

After breakfast was over.

Serena wanted to put on a show for her family, but Eunice had taken a phone call and stepped away.

"Arabella, come to my study, please,' Bard called out.

Arabella was about to text Romeo that it was safe to leave when her uncle called. She nodded and followed him upstairs.

Left alone with Darren in the living room, Serena saw an opportunity. "Grandpa, we just had a big breakfast, how about we take a stroll in the garden?" she cooed, linking her arm through his. "It's been ages since we walked together. Do you remember when I was a kid, running ahead while you chased after me? I picked a little flower for you and promised that when I grew up, I'd buy you a bigger mansion and plant the most beautiful garden.

You used to say that all you needed to be happy was for me to visit and walk with you."

Darren looked outside at the snowy landscape, hesitating, but Serena's enthusiasm won him over.

Serena was thrilled. Before stepping out, she didn't forget to instruct the help, "Take a few pictures of us from behind, will you?

For Facebook."

Once they stepped outside, a bone-chilling wind made them shiver.

"Grandpa, do you know? When my sister first came back home, I was totally stunned. I couldn't believe I wasn't the biological

Collins.' Serena confided.

Darren's teeth chattered with cold. The mansion was warm and cozy, but outside was another story.

To make matters worse, he was wearing slippers.

Even with thermal socks, the biting wind made it hard to walk.

"I was so afraid of losing you all. I'm thankful she let me stay. Walking with you is wonderful, like reliving my childhood; Serena

mused, resting her head on Darren's arm, hoping for a picture-perfect moment.

However, the help found that Serena's thick pajamas and wind-tossed hair, combined with Darren's

hunched, shivering posture,

did not make for a beautiful picture.

"Grandpa." Serena snuggled closer, admiring the snowy landscape.

Darren, puffing white breaths, suggested, "Serena, it's too cold. Let's go back inside and have some coffee. I haven't heard you play the piano in a long time."

"Grandpa, I didn't tell you, but I won first prize at the last piano competition!" Serena boasted, not mentioning that Arabella's piano skills surpassed her own.

"Really? Then I must reward you properly!" Darren was hoping this meant they could go back inside. But Serena pressed, "What will you reward me with? Clothes, jewelry, or something else?"

Darren was too cold to think. "Whatever you want, I'll buy it for you," he said blankly, dreaming of the warmth inside.

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His lips had turned a pallid shade of blue from the cold, and all he wanted was to hurry back to the main house.

Just then, the sky began to drop its snowy payload, a blizzard of flakes whisking through the air with each gust of the biting wind.

The snow fell with such intensity, as if the heavens were furiously sowing seeds in a relentless barrage. "Snowing, huh?" Serena couldn't believe their luck, grasping her grandfather's hand with a tinge of regret.

"Guess we'll have to take our walk some other time." Darren was of the same mind, silently relieved at the prospect of returning indoors.

A servant not far off raised their phone, aiming to capture a snapshot or two of the scene.

Seized by a sudden inspiration, Serena thought if she were to break into a gentle run with her grandfather, the visual would be absolutely charming!

Yet, as she took her first strides, her feet clad in slippers betrayed her on the slippery ground. Because she was holding onto her grandfather, both of them tumbled to the ground in a heap.

The servant, who had just captured the moment, rushed over in alarm to offer assistance.

The snowy conditions had made the ground treacherously slick, and the domestic footwear that Serena and Darren donned offered no traction, ensuring their spill.

"Grandpa, are you alright?" Serena, less concerned for herself, saw her grandfather's pained expression and quickly offered her support, "Let me help you up."

"Serena, don't move him!" The servant shouted from a distance, "Let me do it!"

Serena felt a sting of irritation. How dare a servant stop her? Was he trying to steal the limelight?

"Mr. Darren's fallen and we can't just yank him up willy-nilly. If he's hurt, it could make things worse;"

said the servant, crouching down to Darren and asking gently, "Sir, do you feel dizzy at all? Any nausea?"

Serena was already annoyed from being shouted at, and hearing the servant ask seemingly trivial questions only fueled her anger.

“What are you on about at a time like this? Grandpa's still sitting on the cold, wet ground, and with the snow coming down like this, if you won't help me, at least hurry up and help him up!” Serena took the opportunity to settle her earlier grievance.

But the servant didn't argue with her, instead patiently explaining, “Serena, please, I'm just trying to see if he's hit his head and if he's still lucid.”

After this, the servant turned back to Darren and asked in a soft tone, “Sir, can you move your limbs?” If he couldn't move his hands or feet, it might indicate a fracture. Trying to stand up in such a case could lead to bone displacement and cause secondary injuries.

“I can move. it's just that my back hurts something fierce.”

Darren had landed squarely on his back when he fell, and now the pain was so intense he could hardly move.

Serena, still feeling guilty for a past incident that had led to her grandmother getting hurt, was now worried about what her uncle and aunt might say once they found out. She didn't want to tarnish her image in their eyes.

“Grandpa, let me rub it for you!”

No sooner had Serena started to rub Darren's back than she heard his pained cries.

"Serena, you can't rub it!" the servant interjected urgently, "Rubbing like that after a fall can worsen the injury, lead to swelling, and even misalignment."

Serena hadn't realized there were so many complications to consider, "Then what are we supposed to do?"

They couldn't just sit there indefinitely, after all.

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"Ms. Bella will know what to do. I'll go fetch her!"
The servant had barely taken a step when Serena's sharp voice cut through, "By the time you're done running around, Grandpa's either going to be in agony or frozen stiff. Let's see if he can stand up first, we can talk about everything else back inside!"

The last thing she wanted was to lose face in front of Bella and she certainly didn't want Bella stealing the spotlight!

"I'm fine." Darren didn't want his granddaughter to worry. He tried to stand, grimacing with the sharp pain in his back, groaning several times before. With the help of his granddaughter and the servant, he managed to get on his feet.

In the study.

Bard spoke softly to the girl before him, "How did you find evidence about all those past incidents?" Some of these things happened months or even years ago, yet Arabella had managed to uncover evidence of Calvin and Arlen's schemes against her grandparents. It was no small feat.

"It was actually something I overheard from your staff. Only a few people knew about my grandparents' travel plans. I had them

list those people and started looking into them. Eventually, I cracked Mr. Clarence's phone, exported his chat logs with others, and traced the connections from there."

"You know how to crack into people's phones?" Bard was surprised but nodded in acknowledgment,

"Makes sense. If you can tamper with multiple security systems, what's a single phone to you?"

Bard laughed, "Bella, you keep impressing me. You're going places, kid"

"You flatter me, Uncle Bard."

"How was Grandpa's mood in the OR last night?"

Bard couldn't help but ask with concern.

"Disappointed, heartbroken, and furious,' Arabella summarized succinctly, "But he came to terms with it later."

"That's good to hear." Bard sighed in relief, "I was worried about his emotional swings causing more health issues when he called you to his room last night."

"He was indeed unwell, with a headache and feeling irritable. I gave him some acupuncture, and he fell asleep after that."

"Thank goodness for you." Bard looked appreciatively at the girl before him, "You've had to carry so much on your slender

shoulders lately. This family owes you a lot, and yet we still lean on you."

"You're too kind, Uncle Bard. I'm happy to contribute to the family"

"Now that things have settled, once I wrap up a few loose ends, I'll take you out for some fun"

Arabella smiled, "No need, Uncle Bard. You should spend time with Aunt Eunice when you're free.

Romeo will take me out."

At the mention of Romeo, Bard paused, then smiled,

"Ah, you've got plans with that young man, huh?"

Here I am holding you up

from your date. Go on then, enjoy your day with him.

Don't worry about us. I'll make sure Grandpa is well taken care of.

"with you and Aunt Eunice here, I'm not worried;

Arabella beamed, "If there's nothing else, I should get going."

She didn't want to keep Romeo waiting.

"Alright, have fun, Bard said warmly, watching her,

"And bring Romeo by sometime. I'd like to meet him, see how he treats you.

Your wedding's just around the corner."

Arabella cut him off before he could finish, "That's jumping the gun."

"You're practically engaged, and he's chased you from Solterra to Dawnstar. How's that jumping the gun? If you say the word, I

bet it'll be a done deal in no time,' Bard laughed heartily.

"You're just teasing me now, Uncle Bard. I'm off.' Arabella wasn't aware of the bashful, sweet smile spreading across her face as she spoke.

It was the first time Bard saw his niece with such an expression, and his smile deepened, watching her leave and thinking to himself, "That McMillian lad is one lucky guy to have such an outstanding partner."

After heading downstairs, Arabella sent Romeo her location. Before she could ask him to come over, he immediately texted back, [I'll be there in twenty minutes.]

A smile curled on Arabella's lips, [No rush, I still need to check on Grandpa.]

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Grandpa was fine, and only then could she leave the house with peace of mind.

Romeo replied, [Sure thing, take your time.]

As Arabella approached Darren's bedroom door, she caught a whiff of that distinct smell of liniment—a clear sign that something

was amiss. A housemaid, likely not expecting Arabella's sudden appearance, paled at the sight of her.

"Ms. Bella"

"Grandpa got hurt? Is that liniment I smell?"

Hearing Arabella's question, the maid bent deeply, clearly terrified, "Yes, Mr. Darren had a fall."

Without hesitation, Arabella hurried inside.

Meanwhile, Eunice, who had not yet finished her phone call, rushed over from the third-floor bay window where she had a clear

view of Serena coaxing Darren to pick up the pace, which unfortunately led to his fall.

Following close behind Arabella, Eunice entered the room, her expression grim.

The maid knew the incident couldn't be kept secret any longer. Although Serena had strictly ordered her not to breathe a word about what had happened, if Ms. Bella were to find out somehow and the maid hadn't reported it, she'd face severe repercussions.

With that in mind, the maid bit her lip and dashed upstairs to find Darren.

Arabella quickly moved forward, passing through the living room to reach the master bedroom. There, she immediately saw

Darren lying in bed, his expression twisted in pain, with Serena sitting beside him, seemingly at a loss for what to do.

"Grandpa, did you fell? What happened?" Arabella rushed to his side, noting his clothes were still damp. "Bella, you're here" Darren winced in pain, unable to move, "I just had a bit of a tumble"

"Did you fell outside?"

Arabella's question caught Darren off-guard, "How did you know?"

"Your clothes are soaked, and it's so cold outside. What were you doing out there?" As she spoke, Arabella turned to Serena,

"His clothes are this wet, and you saw it. Why didn't you get someone to change him?"

"He said he was in pain, so we didn't dare move him."

Afraid that moving him might cause a bone to shift or lead to more trouble.

"It's nothing, I just went for a walk." Darren grimaced, the pain was too much to bear.

Arabella gently touched the area, "Is it here where it hurts?"

"Yes, yes, it's very sore." Darren contorted his face in agony.

"Let's have a look."

Arabella carefully lifted his shirt, and even this slight movement made Darren gasp in pain.

"Does it hurt here?" Arabella touched gently and asked again.

"It hurts"

"And here?" Arabella watched Darren's reaction closely.

"So sore."

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Arabella prodded gently at several spots, each eliciting a grimace of pain. "There's significant swelling, indicating muscle tissue damage. As for any fractures or ligament injuries, it's best to get an X-ray of the lumbar spine at the hospital for a clearer picture"

Though her experience hinted at no fractures, caution prevailed, and she recommended a hospital visit.

"How long would he need to rest if it's a muscle injury?" Eunice, hovering at the edge of the room, couldn't help but interject.

Surprised to see her aunt had joined them, Arabella answered truthfully, "Typically, bed rest for three to four weeks is necessary.

He'll also need some pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication. But given Grandpa's age, it might take four to five weeks for a

full recovery. Plus, there might be conflicts with his heart medication, so we'll have to adjust his prescriptions accordingly."

Serena, sitting at the bedside, murmured with concern, "How could that be?"

"If it's a fracture, the duration of bed rest could extend to eight weeks for a minor one. A severe case might even require surgery.

Could you please step out and find someone to help? I want to help Grandpa change his clothes."

Lying in discomfort was no small ordeal.

"I can help; Eunice stepped forward confidently.

As Serena reluctantly moved aside, she couldn't help but overhear their exchange.

"Just coordinate with me,' Arabella, who had often helped her Grannie Grace with such tasks, was adept at it.

Eunice, observing Arabella's expert movements, felt a pang of sympathy. How many times had this child repeated such tasks to perform them with such ease?

Changing clothes for an immobile person, especially a man, required both skill and strength.

Arabella noticed the emotion in her aunt's eyes and explained lightly, "I used to do this for the Murphy family's old lady, so I'm experienced."

"Your foster parents' mother? Why were you, a child, doing this? Where were the adults?"

Didn't the adults care?

"They weren't as good at it as me."

Arabella's simple response hinted at more to Eunice, who felt a deeper ache for her.

Thankfully, it was winter, and Darren's outer garments were the only ones damp. The inner layers were spared.

After changing him, Arabella and Eunice helped shift him to a more comfortable position.

That was when Bard rushed in, seeing his wife and niece tending to Darren on the bed, with Serena standing aside.

Bard hurried to assist, and after a moment asked, "Bella, your granddad's alright, isn't he?"

Arabella summarized the diagnosis for him and then called for a basin of warm water. "Granddad can't use this ointment. It'll

react with his current medication and could cause an allergy. We need to clean it off and apply something else."

"I've got it" Bard said, taking the towel, soaking it in the warm water, wringing it out, and then gently wiping off the liniment from his father's lower back.

Arabella lifted her gaze to the servants nearby. "Who applied the ointment to Grandpa? Why didn't you consult me first?"

Now, the servants could no longer keep silent, one of them sheepishly admitting, "Serena instructed us to. She said a little ointment would suffice, and there was no need to alarm everyone."

Serena panicked, her internal alarm blaring. She thought, "Weren't you instructed to keep quiet? And yet you spilled the beans, you coward!"

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Arabella's gaze once again settled on Serena.

"I heard Grandpa groaning in pain, so I just wanted to apply some ointment on him." Serena scrambled for an excuse, "Wasn't

Uncle Bard looking for a word with you? I didn't want to disturb you two, so I didn't ask"

Darren, worried that his granddaughters would start arguing over him, quickly interjected, "I'm fine, no need to worry. It's just a scratch."

"I'll go grab some medicine from my room." Arabella didn't continue to argue with Serena. Once she returned with the ointment, she instructed her uncle, "Apply this three times a day, a thin layer should do. It'll help with the swelling and the pain."

"Pain relief sounds good. Good." Darren could hardly move with the pain. The medicine was just what he needed.

"Come with me." Arabella shot a glance at Serena. Serena followed, her pride slightly bruised.

"Go ahead and apply the ointment to Dad. I won't watch. I'll wait outside." Eunice found an excuse and quietly followed them.

Arabella led Serena to the adjoining parlor and regarded her coolly, "Was it your idea to take Grandpa out for a walk in the garden?"

Her chilly demeanor intimidated Serena, who murmured defensively, "What's it to you?"

Arabella's eyes flashed with displeasure, "Haven't learned from last time, have you?"

"I already explained last time, it wasn't on purpose. I just wanted to take Grandma out to enjoy the snowscape in the garden. I

didn't anticipate the icy path, the wheelchair slipping. None of that was expected. If I had known it could've caused Grandma to fall, I would never have taken her out!"

Arabella replied icily, "Last time, Grandma hadn't even fully recovered, and you insisted on taking her out into the cold. The staff

warned you, but you did as you pleased. Now, with the temperature below zero, you suggest Grandpa go for a walk outside. And in non-slip-resistant slippers. What were you thinking?"

"I didn't think it through. I just wanted to relive the old days, walking with Grandpa, that's all."

"Did the adults really let you walk in a blizzard when you were a child?"

Serena fell silent, unable to respond.

"You should be grateful Grandpa didn't get as hurt as Grandma did. Last time, she fell face-first from her wheelchair, rolled over twice, and hit a decorative rock. She was covered in bruises. Though not life-threatening, those injuries meant days of suffering for someone her age. Thank goodness that slope wasn't longer, or the consequences could have been dire!"

"I've said it wasn't intentional! Why do you speak to me with such accusation? As if I deliberately harmed Grandma and Grandpa!"

"Because you act without thinking. You're just trying to close the gap between yourself and our grandparents, aren't you? Afraid that with me back, all their love will shift to me, leaving you out in the cold, right? You could have spent time with them indoors, had a cup of coffee, chatted, and they would have been happy. Instead, you dragged them outside into the cold to get hurt."

Serena retorted angrily, "I told you it wasn't on purpose! When it suddenly began to snow, I just wanted to hurry Grandpa back inside."

"On a snowy day, you rush an elderly man? Really smart."

“Arabella!” Serena clenched her teeth in fury, ‘Don't think just because you are my sister, you can lord over me.

You're not in charge here!”

"Don't forget who allowed you to stay in this house! I finally help heal someone, and you manage to get them hurt twice."

"I said it wasn't on purpose!" Serena was seething, wondering if Arabella was incapable of understanding her.

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“Even if you hadn't bent over backwards to get close to them, just based on the love of the past eighteen years, you're still the apple of their eyes. Take a good look at yourself. Since I've returned to this family, have your living expenses been cut back at all?”

“No, but I've had less than you, Arabella” Serena shot back angrily, “Mom, Dad, my brother and sister-in-law, grandparents, do they treat you the same as they treat me?”

“Isn't what they've given you over these eighteen years enough?” Arabella's gaze turned icy as she suddenly realized this person was too greedy.

“Let's put it this way, if they bought you a purse, and they got me the same one, I wouldn't have any complaints.

But they order you hundreds of limited edition pieces! They give you a credit card with no spending limit! They hand over the company for you to manage, let you call the shots on everything, and even when there's a gala, I'm not invited! How can you say they treat me like family with such blatant favoritism?”

Arabella knew exactly which event Serena was referring to. “Not taking you is for your own good.”

Serena scoffed, "Then why are you always included? Are they not good to you?"

"IL serve my purpose."

"So what you're saying is, I'm useless and just drag them down?"

"If that's how you want to interpret it."

Serena nearly laughed out of sheer frustration.

"Arabella, do you know what I hate about you? I hate that holier-than-thou

attitude of yours! As if you're the only one capable of handling things, while I'm just trash in comparison!"

Arabella didn't say anything.

"All I want is to stay in this family, not to be cast aside." Serena's voice broke, her distress palpable,

"Why is that so hard? Why does it have to be so difficult?"

Arabella watched her unravel, unable to help but ask, "What's so hard about it? Is someone driving you away?"

Has anyone treated you like trash?"

Serena lifted her eyes to meet Arabella's steady gaze.

"Does anyone look down on you because I understand medicine and you don't? Has anyone stopped you from going to school because you're not a straight-A student? When the family visited me at school, did they not visit you too? Isn't what they've done

so far enough? What more do you want? Should I have a Romeo, and you should have one too?"

Serena's tears halted, stunned.

"Even if I hadn't come back, Romeo wouldn't have fallen for you. That night, he came to the Collins family to call off your engagement."

Serena's expression froze. Call off the engagement?

"He told me himself." Arabella locked eyes with Serena, enunciating each word, "It wasn't me who stole your man or your things.

What's yours can never be taken by anyone else, and what's not meant for you will leave you eventually.

Serena couldn't believe it. That night, Romeo brought so many gifts to the Collins family to break off the engagement with her.

Then why did he later change his story, claiming it was to visit his fiancée?

Could it be that by then, he had already fallen for Arabella at first sight?

With that thought, Serena's heart twisted in unwillingness as she scrutinized Arabella. What was so great about her that

everyone, including Romeo, her parents, and grandparents, even her brother and sister-in-law, favored her?

Was it just because of blood ties and those few skills she possessed?

Just then, Arabella's phone buzzed. It was Romeo calling.

She tapped to answer, hearing Romeo's charming voice on the other end, "How's your grandpa feeling?"

"There's been a bit of a mishap."

Hearing this, Serena's face shifted hues, anxious that Arabella might sully her image in Romeo's eyes.

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Chapter 1379

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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“Something wrong? I'm just outside. I could take him to the hospital to get checked out,” Romeo offered with concern.

"No need, I'll have Uncle Bard drive him later. Have you arrived?" Arabella whispered back, ‘Wait for me a moment.’"

“Alright.

Arabella hung up the phone and glanced at Serena, preparing to leave.

“Arabella!” Serena suddenly called out, unable to hold back her question, "If Romeo wasn't in the picture, would you be friends with me?"

Arabella stopped in her tracks and gave her a cold look, "You should ask yourself, from the first day I returned to this house, did you ever consider being friends with me?"

Initially, Serena was full of hostility towards her.

And as time went on, her animosity only intensified.

"How many times have you schemed behind my back? I can't be bothered with you. First, I think it's a waste of time and

unnecessary. Second, I look down on your petty tactics. Third, my life is more than just these trivial matters. Why waste your

years on me? Find something you're passionate about, love someone who truly loves you, and strive to better yourself. Isn't that

much more worthwhile than sitting here, wracking your brain with jealousy and envy?"

Serena stood rooted to the spot, watching Arabella's retreating figure, perhaps understanding why everyone liked her.

It was like a moment ago, she despised Arabella so fiercely, but now, the hatred seemed to have lessened.

After Arabella left the parlor, Eunice stepped out from the corner where she had overheard the entire conversation crystal clear.

She hadn't expected Serena, who always appeared so sunny and upbeat, to have so many cunning thoughts behind her back.

It seemed she was just afraid of not being able to stay in this family, causing her to make mistakes.

As for Arabella's magnanimity and vision, it made Eunice see her in a new light, improving her impression significantly.

Eunice walked to the doorway of the parlor, leaning casually against the frame, and called out, "Serena." Serena, still in a daze from the earlier conversation, was startled to see her aunt and quickly said, "Aunt Eunice, what are you doing here?"

"Just passing by, and I overheard you and your sister." Eunice began.

Serena's face instantly paled, "Aunt Eunice, let me explain."

"I'll understand the situation well enough. Bella is right. Nobody in this family sees you as an outsider, but you're not allowed to pull any more tricks behind people's backs."

Even though Eunice didn't know the specifics of what Serena had done, Arabella's words were proof enough that Serena had been up to no good in the past.

"Aunt Eunice, I was foolish before. It won't happen again." Serena was worried about leaving a bad impression on her aunt.

"Can you promise me you'll change?" Eunice looked into her eyes seriously, "Look me in the eyes and tell me."

Serena bit her lip and nodded, "I can."

"Then I'll trust you this time," Eunice declared confidently, "You should count yourself lucky to have a generous sister like Bella. If you had to deal with someone more conniving, you'd really suffer."

Serena's gaze fell slightly.

"You're not uncomfortable with me praising her, right?"

Serena shook her head quickly.

“People like her because she's honest, brave, kind, unpretentious, intelligent, composed, capable, and she doesn't show off.”

Eunice continued, then turned to Serena, “But you, when did you become so sensitive?”

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Chapter 1380

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Serena hung her head low, "It's all my fault. I promise I'll change."

"Serena, I've watched you grow up, and I know you're a good kid at heart," Eunice said, looking at the girl before her and offering

guidance. "I won't bore you with a sermon, but now that Bella has come back to this family, I hope you two can live in harmony.

Be polite when you speak to her. She is your elder sister after all."

Serena nodded, "I understand. I'll try."

"There's another thing I need to criticize you for" Eunice continued.

Serena, who had just started to relax, tensed up once more.

"I saw you, dragging your grandpa out for a walk and having the staff take pictures. If I'm not mistaken, you started running with

him to make the pictures look better, didn't you?"

Fear flashed across Serena's face. "Aunt Eunice, please, let me explain. I know it was wrong. I just wanted to take more photos with grandpa as keepsakes."

"Your grandpa just had surgery. Bella just saved his life, and here you are, playing around. What if something dangerous had happened? It wouldn't just be on you. How would your uncle and I explain this to the rest of the family? After all, he fell while he was in our care."

Eunice was known for her straightforwardness. 'I know kids your age love to post on Facebook, but you can't disregard your

grandpa's health for some online likes. It was so cold, even from a distance, I could see him hunched over from the chill."

In truth, Serena had also noticed her grandpa shivering from the cold, but she had hoped he could endure a little longer for the sake of the pictures, even though she herself was shivering.

"Also, about the birthday party last night, I didn't take you because it was a setup, a trap. You have no idea what Bella and I went

through. It's not something you could have handled"

Upon hearing this, Serena suddenly felt there was more to last night's party than she had known. Why did her aunt think she

couldn't handle it, yet Arabella could?

"Bella has been through a lot and has made many sacrifices for our family. You don't have to be best friends, but at the very

least, you should treat each other with respect. If you can't even manage basic courtesy, then why bother living under the same roof?"

Serena lifted her eyes, looking at her aunt in astonishment.

"I won't say anymore. Bella has finally come back to this family, and like everyone else, I don't want her to be mistreated again.

Think about what I've said."

With that, Eunice turned and left, bumping into Bard as she exited the tea room.

Bard had just finished applying medicine to his father, who had fallen asleep. Remembering his wife was waiting outside, he went to find her.

He hadn't expected to walk into the middle of a conversation between his wife and his niece, having overheard everything from the tea room.

He motioned for his wife to talk somewhere more private, away from the tea room. Once they were alone, Bard asked in a low voice, "What's going on?"

Eunice succinctly recounted the events, leaving Bard in disbelief. When had Serena become so evil? Was it her dragging Darren out for a walk in sub-zero weather just for a Facebook photo? Was it her causing both of them to fall and then instructing the staff to keep quiet about it? Was it her disrespect towards Arabella, the underhanded tactics?

Bard suddenly felt as if his niece had become a stranger.

Was it because they hadn't been in touch for so long, or was this who she truly was deep down?

"We'll have to keep a closer watch," Eunice said. "Even though we're just her aunt and uncle and shouldn't interfere too much, if Serena refuses to mend her ways, her presence is not good for Bella. It might be better to set her up in her own place. She's eighteen now, an adult." Bard nodded, seeing the sense in his wife's words. Kenneth and Louisa had cherished Serena like their own daughter for eighteen years, and the love and effort they had invested was not something that could be easily dismissed with a few words.

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