

"If I had known she'd make those mistakes, I'd have been stricter on her from young!" Cindy lamented.

"You shouldn't blame yourself, Aunt Cindy," Arielle replied. "After all, she's only your adopted daughter. From what I've heard, adoptees usually have personality issues. If you find her to be a handful, we can always disown her, can't we?"

Cindy stared wide-eyed at Arielle as her face turned pale with rage.

If she didn't have a plan to follow, Cindy would've blown her top at Arielle. Regaining her composure, she forced a smile and nodded her head. "You're right. But I can't bear to let her go, especially since she's been with me for so long. You, on the other hand, have suffered so much while you were overseas. Even though you're finally home, you haven't been able to enjoy much peace, have you? I'm sorry. I've truly let you down."

Arielle shook her head. "You're not to blame, Aunt Cindy."

"You're a good kid..." Cindy whimpered as she pretended to wipe a tear away. "The thing is, there's a party I was supposed to attend with Shannie. Many socialites from Jadeborough will be there, and getting invitations to it wasn't easy at all. But, with Shannie being such a letdown, there's no way I can bring her with me now. I was thinking of bringing you along instead and use the chance to introduce you to everyone. What do you think?"

Arielle's eyes lit up immediately, unable to hide the excitement on her face. "Really? Come to think of it, Dad hasn't formally introduced me to the other socialites, so this would be the perfect chance. I shall go along with you then, Aunt Cindy. I'd still need your guidance when I'm there, though, in case I make a fool of myself."

Arielle was so quick to agree that Cindy heaved a sigh of relief.

*She may be scheming, but deep down, this slut is just like any other girl. All they want is to mingle with and be a part of Jadeborough's high society.*

"Don't worry. I'll guide you along," Cindy assured. Her smile radiated warmth on the outside, but inside, she was cold as ice.

*She was ready to destroy Arielle's reputation and make her the laughing stock amongst Jadeborough's most famous socialites. Let's see how much disdain Henrick would have for his precious daughter when that happens!*

Arielle's lips curled upward as she studied Cindy's every move.

*A party? I can't wait to see what Cindy has in store for me then.*

It was almost ten when Henrick finally got home and called Arielle to his study.

Henrick had been under so much stress and fatigue that Arielle could see his bloodshot eyes

and graying hairs. Seeing him in such a state made her heart sink.

If her mother's death had nothing to do with Henrick, Arielle would be more than happy to help him grow Southall Group.

Her wish would be to let Henrick enjoy his twilight years without having to worry about anything.

After all, despite Henrick's character flaws, he was still Arielle's father and her only blood relative.

"Dad, don't push yourself too hard. No matter what, your health should always come first," Arielle said, her voice gentle and filled with concern.

Henrick merely sighed in response. "I can't afford to slack when this household depends solely on me. What would all of you do without me?"

Hearing that, Arielle's heart sank even more.

She had always found Henrick to be a terrible father, only to realize that she hadn't been a good daughter either since coming back.

The more she thought about it, the more she was overcome by guilt.

Arielle was about to come clean to Henrick about her having money to help him when he held her hand.

"The truth is, our company is in distress. So many of our projects have fallen through, including the

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major partnership project with Nightshire Group. I had hedged my bets on that partnership to get the company back on track, but then your sister had to do what she did..."

Before Arielle could blurt out her true identity, Henrick continued, "As such, I don't have a choice but to place all my hopes on you. Here, this is Mr. Nightshire's room key. Take it."



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Chapter 103

Arielle was perplexed as she looked down at the room key Henrick had shoved into her hand

All the pity and sadness she had felt earlier disappeared in an instant, leaving her in stunned silence.

When Arielle still didn't say anything, Henrick thought she had gone into shock. "Sannie, being innocent and naive isn't a bad thing, but that'd only work if you were still living in the countryside. Now that you're in Jadeborough, you have to learn our ways, no matter how underhanded they might seem. There are times when making sacrifices is necessary."

Arielle's face had gone pale as she mumbled, "Are you telling me to use this room key to get into Vinson's bed?"

Henrick wrinkled his nose as if Arielle had offended him. "It's not as bad as it sounds, Sannie. Once you've gotten together with Mr. Nightshire, you'd officially be part of their family and the Nightshire Group. Imagine the fame and fortune you'd have! Not only is this for our family, but it's also for your future. Marrying into the Nightshires is something many people won't even dare to think about, and now, you have the chance to that life!"

Arielle felt nothing but a lump in her throat.

No matter how nicely Henrick put it, his intention was still for her to sleep with Vinson.

Arielle laughed bitterly at the whole idea. "Dad, if

word got out about what I had done, I'd be mocked and looked down upon by everyone."

Henrick immediately retorted, "No, you won't! Those cowards only bully people who have a lower status than them. Once you become Vinson's wife, nobody would dare criticize you!"

Even with his reasoning, Arielle's gaze turned even colder.

"Then, what happens if Vinson doesn't marry me and tosses me aside?"

Henrick shook his head with a smile. "Don't worry. I can tell that Vinson has feelings for you. You ought to have more confidence in yourself, Sannie. Seize this opportunity, and you'll have a bright future ahead!"

Henrick might not have said it out loud, but he was very confident in Arielle's looks.

Even as a father, he had been blown away by Arielle's beauty the first time he saw her all dolled up. There was no doubt that other men would also feel the same.

Alas, the determination on Henrick's face only hurt Arielle even more.

She thought she had learned enough about Henrick, yet he never failed to surprise her with something new.

Regardless of how his daughter felt, Henrick could

send her to another man's bed as long as he could benefit from it.

Arielle tightened her grip around the room key so much that it was cutting into her palm. Even so, she was numb to the pain.

After all, the physical pain could never compare to the heartbreak she felt.

It was painfully clear to her that Henrick had never treated her as his daughter or as a person. In his eyes, Arielle was nothing but a pawn.

*To think I had almost told him my truth and even wanted to help him.*

Arielle chuckled bitterly, tears welling in her eyes.


"Sannie..." Henrick said, a little flustered at her reaction. "My good girl, our family can't end like this. If not for yourself, do it for the rest of us! I know you're the kindest and most obedient. You'll do what I say, won't you?"


Arielle pursed her lips and suddenly asked, "What if I don't want to go?"


A deep-set frown immediately formed on Henrick's face, and Arielle could feel the anger emanating off of him.

After a moment's hesitation, he coldly replied, "If you don't want to, then I won't be able to keep you here!"

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"Dad... you've really surprised me."

Henrick continued to fix his icy gaze on Arielle.  
"Are you saying you don't want to go?"

Arielle looked deeply into her father's eyes before finally shaking her head. "No. I'll go."

Those words were like music to his ears as Henrick's expression instantly brightened up.

"Sannie, are you serious?"

Arielle merely nodded in response, once again looking like the well-behaved daughter Henrick had always thought her to be.

Except her eyes no longer held the same warmth and sincerity she once had, thanks to Henrick single-handedly destroying what little affection she had left for him.

However, Henrick was utterly clueless to Arielle's change in heart as he continued to beam in joy. "I knew you'd agree to it. You're my best daughter, completely different from that useless Shannie. I'll only dote on you in the future!"

No matter how much he praised her, Arielle felt nothing.

Instead, she asked plainly, "Time and place?"

"It's the suite on the top floor of Jadeborough Hotel. I spent the whole night getting that room key, so you'd better not lose it. Mr. Nightshire is

currently at a banquet in the hotel, and I've also talked it through with the banquet organizer. All you have to do is to wait patiently in his room."

Just then, Henrick thought of something else and quickly added, "By the way, you should change your clothes too. Your usual get-up is too plain, and that won't work. However, there's not much time left. Just pick any clothes to wear to the hotel, and I'll get someone to send a different outfit to the suite."

It was only then that Arielle realized the real reason for Henrick to get home that late. It wasn't because he was busy with work, but rather, he was running himself ragged getting a key to Vinson's room.

*So that's how it is...*

Just when Arielle thought she couldn't feel any more disappointed with Henrick, his words once again felt like a stab to her heart.

As she had found out the hard way, one could never get used to the pain of being hurt, regardless of how many times it had happened.

Arielle found her mind wandering when the white hairs on Henrick's head suddenly caught her attention.

Recalling what Vinson had told her before, she said, "Dad, you have a strand of white hair on your head. Let me help you pluck it."

Henrick had wanted to turn her down, but seeing as how she had agreed to go with his plan, he decided to return the favor. As such, he lowered his head and bore with the pain as she plucked the strand of hair off.

Henrick chuckled afterward. "You didn't have to pluck it, you know? White hair is common when I'm getting old. However, if you do succeed tonight, I reckon it'll help shave a few years off my age."

Unbeknownst to Henrick, Arielle had stealthily pocketed his strand of hair as she pretended to not hear understanding. "Don't worry, Dad. I won't let you down. How can I not repay you when you've treated me so well?"

Touched beyond words, Henrick felt like he was on the verge of tears.

He pulled Arielle into a tight embrace and muttered, "My darling daughter, I'm sorry to have to put you through this. You've done well for the family!"

Even though she had returned the hug, Arielle felt nothing but utter disgust toward her father.

"Dad, if we don't hurry, Mr. Nightshire is going to return to his room before me."

"Oh, gosh! You're right!" Henrick exclaimed before rushing off to bark orders at his staff. He got the housekeepers to get a set of clothes and the driver to prepare to send Arielle to the hotel.

Even Cindy was startled by the commotion as she walked into the living room in her pajamas. "It's already so late. Where are you going?" she queried, alternating glances between Arielle and Henrick.

Cindy's appearance reminded Henrick of the mess Shandie had made, and he became visibly annoyed.

"It's none of your business, so go back to your room! Also, you're no longer allowed to visit Shandie. You'll only be a distraction to her. After all the mess she has created, it's time she reflects on herself!"

Cindy had planned on going to Louisa's the next day to visit Shandie, but now that Henrick had dropped the bomb on her, her face immediately fell.

"Dear, Shandie's our..."



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"Shut up!" Henrick interrupted and gave Cindy a death stare. "You'd better learn what can be said and what can't! I'll sleep in the study room these few nights. And don't go out as you please. I'll have you followed, so you won't go looking for that willful child!"

Cindy was so enraged that she clenched her fists tight.

*It looks like I have to speed up my plan of taking over Southall Group. I've had enough of you, Henrick Southall!*

Arielle smirked when she saw how Cindy's face had contorted in a bid to suppress her rage.

*Cindy sure can tolerate and put on an act. If Shandie had half of her mother's tolerance level, she wouldn't have been chased out that easily by Henrick.*

It was Arielle's turn to put on an act as she gently urged Henrick, "Dad, when do I leave?"

Henrick recovered from his anger and looked at Arielle. "Go now. The driver's already waiting for you. I won't see you off, but please be careful. If it doesn't work out, then come straight home. I won't blame you."

Making her daughter sleep with another man was something Henrick never wanted to do. If Vinson didn't fall for it and word got out about what Arielle had done, he would only end up losing her.

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However, with the dire state that his company was currently in, he had no choice but to go with that last-ditch effort.

Arielle waved Henrick goodbye and walked out of the house, disappearing into the night.

As he watched her leave, Henrick was overwhelmed by an inexplicable feeling of having lost something important.

He soon shook off that feeling with a self-deprecating chuckle.

*What is this? Am I getting more sentimental with age?*

Henrick was aware that one couldn't make an omelet without breaking eggs. He had to make that painful decision for the sake of the company. Thankfully, Arielle was sensible enough to understand his plight and not blame him.

Satisfied that he had done the right thing, Henrick headed up to his study to await Arielle's good news.

Cindy, on the other hand, had gotten busy investigating Arielle.

Soon, she found out the long and the short of it from Matthias.

"I always thought Henrick truly loved Arielle as his daughter. But now, I know he sees her as just a pawn and a means for him to grow his business,"

Cindy said mockingly.

"Why are you still thinking about that?" Matthias replied, his voice laced with concern. "Haven't you always seen that b\*tch as your obstacle? If she gets together with Vinson, wouldn't that be worse? She might even become a threat to us..."

"Don't worry. That won't happen," Cindy said calmly. "Henrick may be smart, but there are times when he's a complete idiot. If he had bothered to check up on Vinson, he wouldn't have hatched this plan in the first place. Given Vinson's status, he could have any woman he wants, but have you heard of any scandals involving him?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Exactly. Vinson is a respectable and honest man. No matter how beautiful Arielle is, he wouldn't accept any woman who shamelessly throws herself at him. Besides, I had seen how coldly he treated Arielle previously when we were on the plane."

Despite Cindy's reassurance, Matthias still couldn't shake off the worry that was bothering him. "But you told me this afternoon that the b\*tch had worked with Vinson to set Shannie up. If it weren't for them, Henrick wouldn't have sent Shannie away to the monastery! Maybe Vinson does have feelings for the b\*tch?"

Cindy shrugged it off and chuckled. "You think Vinson willingly helped Arielle? He only did it because he didn't want to be exploited by Shannie. No man with his kind of power and status could stand being exploited by others. Trust me, Vinson's going to chase Arielle away! Maybe I wouldn't even need to carry out my plan. After tonight, she'd be the laughing stock of the entire city!"

"Okay, it better be like that..."

"Leave this be for now and find a suitable man as discussed. If Vinson forgives Arielle for having helped him before, then we'll just have set our plan in motion to destroy her reputation."

Cindy hadn't been in a good mood the whole day, but after the call with Matthias, she felt like she had finally caught a break.

It was deep night and the streets of Jadeborough remained as lively as ever.

Just like the streets outside, the banquet hall in the hotel was just as lively. A group of prominent socialites sat around Vinson as they dined and drank, each trying to flatter him so they could be a part of Nightshire Group's latest project.

Vinson sat at the head of the table, swirling his wine glass lazily.

He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he had barely spoken ever since the meal started.



The light that shone on his handsome face accentuated his features and made him even more dignified.

Despite his silence, he was still like the brightest star in the sky, one that people couldn't help but admire.

The people around Vinson started discussing amongst themselves in hushed tones as they watched Vinson warily.

"What's wrong with Mr. Nightshire today? He hasn't said anything at all. Is he unhappy with the meal?"

"Mr. Nightshire has always been a man of few words. Maybe he isn't in a good mood today."

"Has the person I arranged for been sent over?"

"I just received the call that she's at the hotel entrance."

"Are you sure this arrangement would be okay? There have been others with the same gift ideas before, only to have Vinson scream his head off at them..."

"Don't worry. This time around, the head of Southall Group has offered me his daughter."

"Shandie Southall? I know she looks all right and is quite a popular socialite too, but I don't think Vinson would take a liking to her."

"It's not Shandie but the other one. I've seen a picture of her, and I guarantee she'll do just fine!"

"Show me the picture! I'm curious to know who has gotten the approval from an experienced old man like you."

Before the man could fish his phone out, Vinson suddenly stood up, shocking everyone into silence.

The man with the phone laughed and stood up as well. "Are you tired, Mr. Nightshire? You've had so much to drink, so why don't you rest here in the hotel? We could set off together in the morning to view the land in the western suburbs."

Vinson was about to reject the man's offer when he felt his phone vibrate.

He checked his phone, only to find a text from his mother: *Come back earlier tonight. The Greenes are here, and I find their daughter rather delightful. I would like you to meet her too.*

Frustrated, Vinson knitted his brows. After a moment's hesitation, he turned to the man and asked curtly, "Which room?"

The man was happy to comply and handed over the room key to the suite on the top floor.

"I shall retire for the night first. Enjoy the rest of the night, everyone," Vinson said politely before making his way out of the banquet hall.

However, he had only taken a few steps when he felt a throbbing in his head.

He had been so preoccupied with Arielle that he inadvertently downed a lot of wine throughout the banquet.

If it were someone else, they would have been blackout drunk from all that alcohol.

Vinson rubbed his temples as he waited for the elevator, eager to get some much-needed rest so he could accompany Arielle on her shoot the next day.



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