

Carter nodded promptly as whatever misgivings he had against Arielle from before had become a thing of the past. "I'm going over there myself to expedite it, but no matter the level of urgency, processing will still take up to a day. I believe that if I were to head down personally, we should be able to get the results before tomorrow morning."

"Thank you."

"You've been a great help to us, so that's the least I could do," Carter said while he looked to the man in the bed. "When will we be able to remove the needles?"

Jordan pouted at Carter for stealing all the lines.

Who was it who ordered to have the needles removed in the first place?

Arielle glanced at the man. "If he's already conscious and you don't need me to complete the treatment, then you can remove them now. I'll..."

"Stay put!" Vinson held her down by the shoulder. "Allow me."

Jordan warily eyed the hand Vinson placed on Arielle, feeling a little jealous inside.

He very much wanted to say something, but lost his courage to do so when he recalled how he distrusted Arielle just as Carter did. Thus, he decidedly slinked away quietly to the sidelines.

Just then, Harvey led a few bodyguards through

the door. "I heard that the man has been cured?"

In the next second, his attention was caught by the sight of Arielle on the bed and the mess in the room, and that prompted him to glare at Carter. "What the hell did you do?"

"I..." Carter scratched his nose uncomfortably.

Vinson had just finished removing the needles. "Go out, all of you. Arielle needs to rest."

Harvey asked with a grimace, "What actually happened here?"

"It's nothing. Carter's going to have nowhere to hide himself if you keep asking. Come on. Let's get him out of here. His head's fixed, so we should get down to business," Jordan said as he nudged Harvey along.

Soon, it was just Vinson and Arielle left inside the ward.

Looking at the drip bag hanging above her head, Arielle said weakly, "It's getting late, so you should go back and rest. I can watch it myself."

Vinson remained poker-faced. "I don't like owing anyone favors, so don't mind me. Go to sleep."

Arielle seemed to have wanted to say something but ultimately did not do so as she was far too weary, and so instead, she quietly closed her eyes to get rested.

It did not take long before her breath steadied and she fell into a deep sleep.

Initially seated with his back to Arielle, Vinson slowly turned around when he heard her breathing settled. His gaze then fell upon her face.

The slumbering woman was completely unguarded, and as docile as a snoozing Persian cat.

It was as though Arielle's face had some sort of magnetic draw to it, because by the time he came to his senses, his hand was already almost upon her cheeks.

Bemused, Vinson quickly withdrew it, feeling quite annoyed with himself.

Had deprivation made him that desperate for a woman?

Come to think of it, Arielle was really more outstanding than those lame socialites and heiresses that his mother had been introducing to him. If it was her, he would not have been so averse to spending the rest of his life with a woman.

The way Arielle occupied his every thought made him shake his own noggin in frustration. He did not want to continue being alone in Arielle's company, lest he needed to take another cold shower.

Hence, Vinson got up and walked to the window

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for a smoke.

He pushed the window wide open to prevent the fumes from drifting inside, but this let in the chilling night air which gave him quite a headache.

Just as Vinson was wrapping up his smoke break, a call from his mother Susanne came through.



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A quick glance at the time showed that it was already three in the morning, so he wondered why she might be calling at this ungodly hour.

Vinson answered blandly wearing a frown on his face. "What is it?"

Susanne's displeasure seeped through the receiver from the other end. "Didn't I tell you to come home earlier tonight? I have Mrs. Greene over for cards and have held her back until now, so why aren't you back yet?"

Vinson replied with indifference, "I was at a dinner and had a little too much to drink, so I'll be putting up at a hotel tonight."

Susanne's voice elevated several notches. "Dinner? Don't you start bringing some loose woman back from there! The Greenes' young lady seems to be of good breeding and is highly educated, and not bad looking as well. Their whole family would be returning to Horington tomorrow so you must come have a look at her right away!"

Vinson sounded a little impatient. "I've no plans to get married these few years, so don't bother introducing women to me."

That got Susanne vastly worried. "My dear boy, why are you talking like that? What do you mean you have no plans to get married? It's not like I'm asking you to do so right away. I'm only suggesting for you to keep an eye out for prospective partners, that's all, cause you're always either working or hanging out with those

three friends of yours. What about yourself, seeing how they've been swapping one girlfriend after the other?"

"I've my own plans," he stated plainly.

"Tsk! Your plans are exactly what I left you to the last two years, and what happened after that? I've organized so many banquets for you, and yet you've shown no interest in anyone. So, how do you expect me not to worry? You should know for yourself that things have not been dandy inside the company, and it's only by bearing me a grandson could we stabilize things."

"You can rest assured that I won't allow things to go sideways there."

"I... Ah, there are some things that I can't share with you right now, but you absolutely have to bear this in mind—get married as soon as you can."

Amidst his own vexation, Vinson found his gaze falling upon Arielle.

"Don't think you could wriggle yourself out of this by staying silent. If you won't find a partner for yourself, then I will..." Before Susanne could finish speaking, someone else was heard urging her along over the other end. "Are you done inside yet, Mrs. Southall? It's your turn to deal."

"I'll be right there..." Susanne then continued in a hushed tone, "Are you listening? Hurry up and get yourself back here!"

"I won't be coming home today."

"What? Not coming home? I'm doing my best to stall them, so you better get yourself in no matter what!"

"Like I said, I'm not coming home cause I'm outside with your future daughter-in-law."

"What!" Susanne howled in horror.

He could not be bothered to continue prattling, Vinson hit the end-call button, and looked quite dour when he walked over to Arielle's side.

Since it was Arielle's wish for him to repay her by virtue of marriage, and with his own family also piling on the pressure, he thought he might as well choose Arielle in spite of his own reluctance.

He figured that since the whole point was to get married, why should he not just settle for someone who was easier on the eyes?

.....
As the hours whiled away, dawn had crept up upon them.

Arielle was awoken by a knocking at the door.

The moment she opened her eyes, she was greeted by the sight of Vinson hunched over the side of the bed with his face laid on the inside of her palm. He appeared to be fast asleep.

He flinched, perhaps because he heard the knocks too. Arielle took the opportunity to withdraw her hand and whisper, "Someone's out there."

"Okay..."

The man's half-sober voice was languid yet alluring. He stood up nonchalantly to answer the door.

"Vin..."

In came Carter with two set of reports in hand.



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Arielle's drowsiness dissipated. She jumped right off the bed and approached Carter. "Are the results out yet?"

"Yeah." Carter nodded as he regarded Arielle with mixed feelings. "Don't mind me asking, but apart from your own hair, does the other sample... belong to your father Henrick Southall?"

Arielle nodded. "Yes. That's right."

Carter looked troubled. "The results... I'm not sure how to put this, but you should take a look at it for yourself."

Arielle was quite mystified when she received the report, and appeared flummoxed when she finished scrutinizing it.

It said that her genetic type did not match that of the other report, which meant to say that Henrick was not her biological father.

"This... How..." The rosiness that returned to Arielle's face after her rest seemed to have turned ashen again.

One reason why she did a paternity test was because Vinson had asked about it twice. Another stemmed from a vengeful impulse which arisen from her disappointment with Henrick.

In her own heart, she had never doubted that he was her birth father, so the contents of the report came to her as a bolt out of the blue.

She had thought Henrick to be her only remaining blood relation but unexpectedly, even he was not.

Who exactly am I then?

If not for the grains of childhood memories she had retained, she was almost beginning to believe that she might not even be Arielle Moore.

At the side, Vinson, who also saw what was written on the report, felt it unexpected. Nevertheless, he thought it logical as well.

It seemed inconceivable to him how a flaw-riddled man like Henrick who bore not one sliver of virtue could have had an almost perfect daughter like Arielle.

Not that he thought Arielle was actually perfect. It was just an impartial appraisal.

Moreover, when Maureen was around, rumors were abound within the Jadeborough circle...

Vinson scrutinized Arielle's expression before he spoke, "Don't be so upset, as this may not necessarily be a bad thing."

An anemic looking Arielle bit her lip. "I'm not upset... It's just that I don't know how I should feel about this. If I'm not his biological daughter, then could my mother still be my own birth mother?"

Carter followed up right after Arielle. "Would you like to see the other report?"

Arielle looked up at Carter, a little surprised. "The other report?"

He then passed along the paternity report he had in his hand.

Arielle read the header and discovered that it had her mother's and her own name written on it.

"A paternity test report for my mother and myself?"

"Yes," Carter said. "We've kept your mother's blood samples like we do with the rest of our hospital's VIP clientele, in case of emergencies. I was just as surprised at the results of the test between Henrick and yourself, so I took the liberty of having my guys do one for your mother and you."

Arielle could feel her own heart-rate pick up.

If it turned out that even her mother was not her own, then she would have lost all purpose returning here. Even her existence would become devoid of meaning.

She was apprehensive about reading the conclusion of this report, and took a deep drawl before she mustered the courage to do so.

The statement of results was as follows: *The alleged mother cannot be excluded as the biological parent of the tested child. Based on the analysis as listed above, the probability of paternity is ninety-nine point nine percent.*



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Maureen was indeed her biological mother.

As Arielle heaved a long sigh, a scary thought suddenly dawned on her. *Mom's only been married to Henrick, who's been recognizing me as his biological daughter. In this case, wouldn't it mean that Mom has... committed adultery? Henrick found out about it and killed her? Then again, he's not the type who would allow someone who's not his blood and flesh to enter the family.*

It was then that Arielle realized she had a big mystery to solve.

She had returned to investigate her mother's death but to no avail. In addition, she now was confused about who her actual father was.

Her mind was in a total mess.

Carter broke the silence. "It's still early. Why don't you two have a chat while I check if they've gotten any useful information from that guy?"

With that suggestion, Carter went out and shut the door behind him, leaving Arielle and Vinson alone in the ward.

With a wry smile, she looked at Vinson. "You must be thinking that I'm a joke. Neither am I the glamorous Ms. Moore nor Ms. Southhall. I'm just... an illegitimate child."

He frowned at her words. Putting on a stern face, he tried to correct her understanding. "I don't know if you're an illegitimate child. So what if you're

one? To me, you are who you are."

Though he appeared to be icy-cold, his gaze was unexpectedly warm.

Arielle moved her stiffened fingers.

His unswerving attitude and that one firm sentence uttered had effectively cleared the doubts she had and given her the courage needed to sail through these trying times.

Vinson had once again reminded her that she would always be Arielle, regardless of whose daughter she was.

He continued, "We can't choose our parents and family background, so that's no fault of yours. It's the adults who've made a mistake."

Biting her lips, Arielle shared, "From what I can remember, Mom wasn't that kind of a person... I don't know why... why would she do that."

Vinson paused for two seconds. "Actually, there's something about your mom that I think you should know. I didn't tell you this earlier because I thought it'd be rude for me to say this."

Stunned, she lifted her head immediately. "About my mom? What's it about? I've looked up a lot of information about her before going back to the Southalls. I believe I know everything about her."

He shook his head lightly. "There's something not recorded in those files you read."

"What is it?"

"Gossips shared amongst the socialites in Jadeborough. It didn't cross my mind until I saw your DNA paternity report. Maybe you should hear this."

Clenching her fists, Arielle fretted. "Go on..."

He looked her in the eyes and articulated all the tittle-tattles about Maureen within the Jadeborough social circles.

"You should know that your mom and Henrick got married in a flash. Based on her backgrounds, it would've deemed inappropriate for her to be married into the Southall family. The Southalls made a fortune from coal mines and then purchased properties in Jadeborough. He got married with your mom not long after settling down here. Don't you think that this is so strange?"

"Yup," she acknowledged.

"Rumor has it that your mom lost her virginity to a thug when she went hiking one day. As soon as she found out that she was pregnant, she looked for the Southalls anxiously..."

Arielle's brows were knitted together. "You're saying that my mom was rape... that's why she had me? She married my dad in order to give me a legitimate identity?"



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"That's right, but compared to this one, I think another rumor is probably more realistic. Given that your mom is a smart, capable, and agile woman, I doubt she would end up getting assaulted."

"There's another piece of gossip?"

"Yes, the other version says that your mom dating a guy with an exceptional family background. He dumped your mom after facing rejection from his family to marry her. Your mom did not want to abort the baby, so she chose the Southalls and made a decision to marry Henrick."

Hearing these, Arielle was even more perplexed.

She questioned, "The Moores were at its prime because of how capable my mom was. In fact, the Moores could be regarded as an equal to the four big prominent families in Jadeborough, joining all of you to be the fifth distinguished family. What kind was man was that who would disregard her?"

"I've got no clue about that." Vinson was rather hesitant. "I heard about this from my mom, who was a close friend of your mom for a period of time. Though it might have sounded absurd, but there's probably some truth in it if it comes from my mom."

Arielle requested, "I want to meet your mom."

Vinson's heart skipped a beat as he was not prepared for that.

To him, it was quote a boring chore to bring a girl to see his parents. However, he actually felt delighted to do that albeit knowing Arielle wanted to see his mother for a different reason.

What's wrong with me?

Seeing that Vinson fell silent, Arielle faltered, "Is it a bad idea? If it's not convenient for you, I'll find a way to see her..."

Shaking his head, he returned to his senses. "No... it's fine. I just need to come up with an excuse."

"An excuse?"

"Yes," he explained, "My mom has all the pet peeves of the rich and famous that you can think of. She usually doesn't meet any stranger. Moreover, the Southalls is nothing like what the Moores used to be in the past. She won't be willing to see anyone from the Southall family. Anyhow, it's not impossible. I just need to create a reason for that."

"What would it be?"

"Be my girlfriend."

She gasped in disbelief. "What? What did you just say?"

He put on a poker face. "Frankly, my mom has been pushing me to go for blind dates recently, but I'm not interested at all. If you could pretend to be my girlfriend, it would save us a lot of trouble. She

will come looking for you naturally.”

Arielle was caught in a dilemma.

“Um... this is going to get very complicated. What if we can't find another lie to cover up the lies said? I'm referring to my dad... I mean, Henrick. Once he has the impression that we're an item, he will do everything to make me marry you.”

“There's nothing wrong with that,” Vinson replied casually, “Both our courtship and marriage could be a fake relationship. I don't plan to get married. So, if you don't plan to either, we can possibly collaborate and create a win-win situation for ourselves. After all, isn't a dream come true for you to marry me?”

Arielle almost puked and choked herself to death at the sound of that.

She clarified, “I've said this repeatedly, that was just a joke...”

He insisted, “You should seriously consider it even if it's a joke. With the title 'Mrs. Nightshire' bestowed upon you, you can easily uncover the truth about your mom's death or take any revenge. Things will definitely be so much smoother than now. As soon as your objective is achieved or once I've found the love of my life, we can get a divorce. I can see only pros and no cons in this ideal plan.”

“This...”

Carter walked in to them and interrupted the conversation.



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"It's about time we have to leave for the hotel." After reminding them, Carter asked curiously, "By the way, who are you putting up a show for?"

Averting his gaze, Arielle muttered, "My dad, or should I say... my so-called dad."

Carter shrugged his shoulders. "Fine, whoever it's for, let's go now. I've arranged for someone to check the surroundings. There's no one guarding the hotel at the moment. I'll hack into their systems, so that the surveillance cameras won't capture your images."

"Thank you very much," Arielle expressed her gratitude earnestly.

Feeling shy, Carter adjusted his spectacles. "Cut the formalities, we're a team. Let's go!"

Ever since the acupuncture incident, Carter had completely changed his views about Arielle. He had fully accepted her like one of his own.

Arielle nodded and followed suit.

When she walked past Vinson, she heard him say under his breath, "Please consider what we've discussed carefully."

She froze for a moment and then continued walking.

The inquisitive Carter asked, "What's that about?"

Seeing that Arielle ignored his statement, Vinson

smirked, and strode ahead.

Carter grumbled, "Whatever! I bet it must be something dreadful, judging from that cunning smile."

Moments later, both Vinson and Arielle had returned to the hotel without attracting any unnecessary attention.

As soon as the door was closed, Arielle let out a sigh of relief.

When she turned around and looked into the direction of the kitchen, a towering figure was rolling up his sleeves. Next, the man picked up a frying pan with the hand that would usually hold a tablet.

Interested, Arielle approached him. "Wow, Mr. Nightshire can cook?"

A proud smug settled upon his face. "Cooking is a piece of cake. Anyone with hands can do it. I'm just going to cook some noodles, do you want some?"

"Yes, please!" she responded right away. After an eventful night, she felt so hungry.

Ten minutes later, two bowls of lumpy noodles greeted Arielle. She tried to suppress her laughter. *I must have been out of my mind to believe that he who was born with a silver spoon knows how to cook. Are these noodles even edible?*

"No need to hold it. Go ahead and laugh as much as you like. Everyone's a master in their own field. It's my first time cooking a meal, so it's understandable that I didn't manage it well," Vinson said disapprovingly while placing the cutlery on the table.

It was hard for Arielle to acknowledge his viewpoint that cooking instant noodles required the same skills as making a full course meal. "I'm not laughing at you. Considering this is your first experience of 'making a meal', it's... not bad. However, let's forget about these two bowls of noodles. I saw that there's some flour and basic ingredients in your kitchen. I'll make some ravioli. Would you like some?"

"Sure."

Vinson nodded his head reluctantly and discarded the two bowls of noodles thereafter.

He knew that the food he cooked was not up to standard, but did not expect to receive disdainful feedback on his maiden dish.

He was looking forward to seeing what Arielle could come up with using the simple ingredients in the kitchen.

I might have a chance to tease her too! She looks like she only knows how to brew coffee. I doubt she's able to make a dish successfully.

Arielle went into the kitchen and checked on the ingredients, only to realize that they were very

fresh staples.

She picked a few types of vegetables then proceeded to wash and cut them into pieces. Subsequently, she mixed them together with some minced meat and added various seasonings.

Fascinated, Vinson watched her every move without blinking his eyes.



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It was Vinson's first time seeing how an oily and smoky affair in the kitchen could look like a work of art when Arielle did it.

Perhaps it is because she has slender fingers and her skin is as white as snow.

Arielle did not notice that Vinson had his gaze fixated on her. She was paying full attention on making the stuffing and getting the dough ready.

While she was preparing the stuffing, she let the dough rest. Thereafter, she flattened the dough into many thin discs, wrapped the stuffing, and skillfully shaped each ravioli.

He could not help but asked, "Do you do this often?"

"You can say so. When I was living in another country... um... countryside, I'd sometimes make ravioli on my own when I'm tired of ordering take-outs. Ravioli seem easy to make as it only involves a few steps. Once it's steamed, you can eat it right away."

"I see." Vinson pretended that he did not notice Arielle's slip of the tongue and took the initiative to make ravioli too.

He copied her actions and the outcome seemed to be quite favorable. Although he messed up a few times, he somehow managed to make some decent ones too.

Without another word uttered, the two of them

continued to shape the ravioli quietly. Surprisingly, Vinson did not feel that it was a bore to do such trivial things.

In fact, he really enjoyed the peaceful moments spent with Arielle.

Shortly after, all the ravioli were steamed and ready to be eaten.

"Let me try your masterpiece." He took one and stuffed it inside his mouth.

Even though Arielle appeared to be very skillful throughout the process and she even did it from scratch, Vinson had very high expectations because he had tasted an array of good food.

Moreover, one of the companies under Nightshire Group had produced a special type of premium frozen ravioli, which was very delicious yet expensive.

He had tried them all and took pride in his own products.

Hence, he did not expect much from Arielle and was actually ready to comment on her food.

However, the moment he ate one, he stared at Arielle with his eyes wide opened. He was so shocked to have such a rich burst of flavors inside his mouth. The combination of savory gravy, crunchy vegetables, and perfectly marinated minced meat was such a tease to his tastebuds.

It was his first time to have tasted something so delectable even though the ingredients that she used were just the basic ones provided by the hotel.

There was even a sparkle in his eyes.

Arielle had not had a bite yet, so she could not comprehend Vinson's reaction. "Is it not good?"

"No, that's not it." He continued speaking after swallowing a mouthful, "It tastes all right, especially when I made it myself."

Arielle was rendered speechless.

He was making them at a snail's pace. When I finished, he's only done six of them. The one he's eating might not even be his work.

Anyway, Vinson was not a man who would praise others easily. Thus, Arielle took his response as a compliment.

She did not ask him further. Instead, she lowered her head and continued eating.

After having only one, she realized that half of the thirty-odd pieces of ravioli on the plate were gone.

While chewing one in his mouth, Vinson kept serving himself albeit already having a full bowl in front of him.

His actions brought a smile to her face.

The following day, Arielle put on the clothes that Vinson had asked someone to prepare for her and walked out of the hotel in the scorching hot weather.

Right when she wanted to call a cab, a luxurious MPV, which belonged to the Southalls, stopped in front of her.

The driver came down to get the door for her. "Ms. Arielle, Mr. Southall has instructed me to wait for you here. This way, please."



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