

Chapter 20

Inside Arielle's room.

Arielle felt neither unhappy nor unsettled in any way as she surveyed the modestly decorated interior of the hotel room.

Never mind that she had temporarily fallen out of favor with Henrick, her very presence had already thrown this family into disarray, and amidst the ensuing chaos, she reckoned that she would surely find the truth which she sought!

The ceremony would begin in half-an-hour.

Before leaving the room behind, Arielle went before the mirror to straighten out her disheveled hair.

The girl staring back at her in the reflection looked unbelievably fetching, coltish and acquiescent, but only she herself knew this to be a mere facade.

A wolf masquerading in sheep skin bit faster, more incisively and viciously, and left no chances for its enemies.

The venue for the ceremony was extravagantly luxurious, with the aroma of coffee from the sampling stations of the various sponsoring roasters saturating the air inside.

Shandie picked up a cuppa the moment she entered and took a whiff from it before tilting

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her head toward Henrick. "This is pretty good, smells full-bodied. And judging from its form, I reckon that it should be from... Corleon."

The sponsor at the side approached appreciatively when he incidentally overheard her. "You've a good eye, Miss. Our beans are indeed sourced from Corleon."

The man's effusive praise for Shandie made Henrick's heart swell with joy as he looked proudly at her.

While Shandie was basking in her moment of glory, she lifted her head to see that sponsor looking absolutely mesmerized by Arielle.

Shandie had no doubt that the man would start drooling were he to carry on ogling, and that irked her to no end.

Although Shandie was a little over twenty just as Arielle was, the former still came across as a young lass who had yet to shake off her own girlishness.

In a few more years, there would be no telling whether Shandie herself would even be fit enough to be a complementary leaf to the ravishing rose that Arielle could become.

The very thought of that had Shandie gnashing her teeth and wishing for Arielle to disappear.

She thought that a country girl like Arielle

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should not show up and mess up her life like this!

Shandie took two steps to her left to block off the man's line of sight, and harbored deviousness in her eyes when she picked up a cup of coffee in the same motion.

She shoved the beverage into Arielle's hands and said, "Have a taste of their coffee too, Arielle. I thought it's rather decent."

Before Arielle could respond, Shandie pressed a hand to her own mouth as if she had hit upon a realization. "I forgot that you've always stayed in the countryside... so you must not have taken coffee before, haven't you?"

The sparkle vanished from the sponsor's eyes behind her. He was looking for an ambassador for his company and had thought Arielle's outwardly appearance fit the bill.

It did not occur to him that she was from the countryside and had not even drank coffee before.

As lovely as the girl was, he deemed her unsuitable, or even undesirable, as a brand ambassador since such an appointment would likely be received negatively by netizens.

Arielle paid little heed toward Shandie's comments and only wished to taste it for herself.

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The result of her sampling drew a frown from her. "Too bitter."

As fragrant as the coffee smelled, it was too acrid to the taste-buds and apart from the bitterness, there was little complexity to the aftertaste - The quality was not all that Shandie made it out to be.

Shandie snatched the cup back from Arielle, adamant in the view that it was Arielle who did not understand coffee.

What does a country bumpkin like her know about coffee?

Arielle's response was exactly as Shandie anticipated, and that greatly pleased her. The latter then turned to the sponsor apologetically. "I'm sorry, mister. It's not that your coffee isn't good, but my sister here doesn't know how to appreciate it."

The man became more certain than ever that Arielle, who did not understand his product at all, should not be up for consideration.

Once again, he regarded Shandie smilingly. "That's okay, since not everyone is a coffee lover. In that case, I'll be taking my leave. Good day, ladies."

The sponsor nodded at Shandie before turning away.

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Henrick was thoughtful as he watched the man depart, believing his younger daughter to be far more capable than his elder girl.

Afraid that Henrick might be upset, Cindy purposefully chided, "Really, Shannie. Why did you have to let your sister drink coffee in front of so many people?"

Shandie's appeared quite indignant. "It just slipped my mind..."

Henrick waved it off. "The girl had always been forgetful, but Arielle, how could you tell the sponsor in his face that his coffee was bitter? You've really embarrassed me back there!"

With her head bowed, Arielle lowered her gaze apologetically. "I'm sorry, Dad. Don't be mad..."

"Bah, forget it!" Henrick looked away in annoyance before he regarded Shandie. "It's almost time, so you should go prepare yourself backstage. Dad and Mom would be waiting out there for you to receive your prize."

"Okay, Dad." Shandie smiled pleasantly and waved to Cindy before she took her pass backstage, while Arielle followed Henrick and Cindy to the gallery.

Whether by accident or intent, Arielle found herself left far behind by a Henrick who looked like he was trying to keep his distance from something repugnant, acting as if they did not

arrive together.

Well, that was her dad. A good father who would happily toss her aside once she no longer proved useful!

Arielle's eyes darkened in wistfulness, albeit for a second, but she kept her own emotions in check and continued walking pliantly behind Henrick.

The ceremony commenced shortly after they were seated.

The number of visitors on the day was more than usual, primarily because of the presence of Vinson Nightshire as one of the guest-of-honors this year.

Many had fought tooth and nail to secure a slot at the event just for the opportunity to get close to him.

Finally, the guests emerged after the introduction by the host; starting with one of the founders of Crown Coffee Academy; followed by a renowned barista in the industry; and then Rain Evans, who Arielle ran into earlier on the plane.

Last but not least, the host welcomed in the final guest. "Please put your hands together for the CEO of Nightshire Group, Vinson Nightshire!"

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The rapturous reception at the mention of his name ignited went far to illustrate that more than half of the crowd were here for him.

Those mounted video cameras were promptly directed toward the door leading backstage. At the end of the ceremony, the technicians would edit the footage and post it onto Crown Coffee Academy's official blog.

The documentation of the ceremony each year would receive extra attention largely because of Vinson's expected appearance.

When Vinson strolled unhurriedly to the front of the stage to greet the audience, he suddenly caught sight of a familiar face.

Is that... Arielle?

His gaze lingered upon her for awhile before pulling away. He then extended a bow to the people gathered in the seats. "Hello everyone, I'm Vinson Nightshire."

The applause from the audience grew ever more fervent.

Seeing the positive response from the audience, the host called after him while he was about to take his place amongst the other guests. "Look at the crowd, Mr. Nightshire. Why don't you share a few more words with us?"

Vinson considered turning down the invitation,

but could not help but agree when his thoughts came to that someone seated in the gallery.

He cleared his throat and unprecedentedly added, "It's an honor to be able to attend the awards ceremony at the invitation of Crown Coffee Academy. Today, I shall be announcing the brand ambassador for Soir Coffee after the prize-giving."

These words which were amplified by the sound system reached the ears of Shandie backstage and sent her heart racing. Her eyes lighted up as though she would be accelerating to the highest point in her life within the next second.

Becoming an ambassador for Soir Coffee meant that she would be able to meet with Vinson in-person quite often, and that could only help her secure a role in Sam's new film and catapult her into the upper echelons of society—pure icing on the cake.

The very notion of that made Shandie grip her fists tightly. Being the champion meant that the role of brand ambassador was surely hers for the taking!

Meanwhile, at the front of the stage.

The host warmed up the crowd and saw Vinson to his seat before inviting the presiding judge Rain onstage.

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Rain was all smiles and glanced ambiguously in Arielle's direction before he turned to regard the audience. "Thank you, everyone, for taking time away from your busy schedules to attend the awards ceremony..."

After some opening statements, he went on straight to the matter at hand. "Now, we shall announce the results of this round of competition, starting with the second runner-up..."

With the second and third placed prizes handed out, Rain took a pause before he declared, "Congratulations to our champion, Shandie Southall!"

Backstage, Shandie held her breath before she elatedly walked onstage amidst thunderous applause.

A blushing Shandie then received the winner's trophy from Rain.

Made of pure gold, the trophy was quite hefty inside her hands, but she felt like she was riding on cloud nine.

"Thanks, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Evans. And I'd also like to extend my gratitude to my parents for their continued support. I'll promise to keep working hard!" Shandie was almost choking up with emotions.

At that moment, Rain said, "Now, let's invite Mr.

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Nightshire onstage to announce his choice for brand ambassador.”

Watching Vinson step up only made Shandie even more antsy, so much so that she nearly forgot to hand the microphone over to him in the process.

Vinson began when he took over, “I’m going to keep this brief and get right to the announcement.”

Eagerness as well as nerves consumed Shandie. Looking inside her open palm, she found that there was already a veneer of sweat on it.

Here it comes. Here it comes!

The pivotal moment of her life!

Without even glimpsing at Shandie, Vinson’s eyes hovered over Arielle for a second before he said, “And the brand ambassador is... Arielle. Ms. Areille Moore.”



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Shandie's lips curled up into a smile as wide as that of some socialite and froze in place while her brain thawed.

What... Arielle?

Did I hear that right?

There was a flurry of discussion within the crowd as well.

"Who's Arielle Moore?"

"Isn't Shandie Southall the champion? Why isn't she made the brand ambassador? Is Soir Coffee breaking the convention this year and opting for someone else apart from the competition winner?"

"Even if they are not picking the champion, should they not select a candidate amongst the top three finalists? I don't see this Arielle Moore amongst any of them."

In the gallery, the unsettled Cindy turned and glared furiously at the equally stunned Arielle in the row behind, who wondered why Vinson would make her the ambassador of the coffee chain.

"Arielle!" Cindy snarled. "What have you done? Why did you pull something like that on your sister?"

Cindy's eyes looked like they were about to pop,

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and were they not in a public space, Arielle was sure that the woman would have skinned her alive.

Henrick, too, had a look of surprise on him, but it quickly evolved into a smile.

As both the girls were his daughters, it made no difference to him who got the job since he was going to get paid either way.

Henrick set aside some of his biases toward Arielle and regarded her warmly. "How could you not share this great news with me earlier, Sannie?"

Arielle was quite impassive inside.

How did he manage to forget that he was her father when he upgraded himself to first class seats and left her all by herself in the economic class?

As disgusted as she felt, she did not show her emotions as she shrugged nonchalantly. "I only got to know about this too, Dad."

"Liar!" Cindy seethed through gritted teeth. "You clearly did this on purpose!"

She was in the opinion that Arielle held back in a bid to see Shandie and herself sorely disappointed.

The vicious girl!

"Cindy!" Henrick bristled at her. "What are you doing? There's no need to differentiate because Sannie and Shandie are both our children. So stop this."

Cindy raged until she was heaving, but had to rein herself in in the presence of Henrick.

Arielle only smiled wryly when she looked at Cindy.

She had no desire to become some ambassador as she thought it was too much of a hassle and an impediment to the advancement of her plans. Seeing the hatred in Cindy's eyes, however, made her feel that this was one possible way by which she could get back at them—pissing Cindy off and dashing Shandie's hopes would surely rend this family apart.

So long as there was disharmony between them, fault-lines which she could exploit would surely surface, and that suited her just fine.

Upon seeing the sliver of a smile upon Arielle's lips, Cindy became even more unwavering in her belief that it was all intended on Arielle's part, and was determined to not let the girl clinch that role which she felt rightfully belonged to her own precious daughter.

At that moment, the host took center-stage after conferring with Vinson. "Could we have you on stage, Ms. Moore?"

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Arielle's eyes coincidentally met Vinson's when she looked toward the platform, and though she could not tell what sort of mood he was in through his dark gaze, she could only comply at the host's behest.

As Arielle placed one foot before the other in the direction of the stage, all everyone else could see was a slender silhouette from the rear.

Nevertheless, that was enough to impress upon them her gracefulness. Her poise was like a butterfly in flight, and the majestic air she exuded was not to be understated.


Arielle's unadorned face did little to diminish her ability to dazzle. Her visage, as radiant as the sun and as pristine as the crescent moon, left the observing Shandie gnashing her own teeth onstage.


She slowly turned herself around after she stepped into the spotlight while the audience enthralled by her back-view continued to be transfixed in anticipation.


Gorgeous!

She is simply gorgeous!

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