

Arielle unhurriedly fished out a photograph from her pocket and turned it to Susanne.

Susanne glanced at it impatiently. Upon recognizing the face in the photograph, however, her gaze lingered on it.

Depicted in the photograph was none other than her very good friend—Maureen.

Susanne gaped at Arielle, her eyes widening in disbelief.

*This vixen looks just like her! She gives off the same air too. Besides, she was able to produce a photograph...* Thoughts raced wildly through Susanne's head.

*It can't be!*

After a moment, Arielle commented coolly, "It looks like you do know my mom."

Dumbfounded, Susanne continued staring at Arielle wordlessly. She raised a trembling finger and pointed at Arielle. Her lips parted as if she were about to speak but only managed to croak out a single syllable, "You..."

Arielle nodded calmly. "Yes. I'm Arielle

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Moore, Maureen's daughter."

Susanne felt her head spinning.

She had interrogated the butler for every detail about Arielle except for her name.

If Susanne had known that this woman shared the same last name as Maureen, she would have been able to deduce her identity more accurately.

It took Susanne a long while to recover from the shock. Gulping, she asked doubtfully, "Weren't you kidnapped ten years ago by those traffickers?"

Susanne felt a wave of regret wash over her. When Maureen died and her only daughter had vanished, Susanne had done her best to look for the daughter. However, the chaos in Susanne's own home fully absorbed her attention for a long while. The missing person's case had grown cold since then.

Arielle nodded slightly. "I was, but a kind soul rescued me. I had a high fever then and lost my memory, so I never came home. I only reunited with the Southalls recently. There were too many things to

deal with, so I was only able to meet with you now.”

Thoughts clamored in Susanne's mind.

She felt ashamed for having cursed Arielle privately just moments before. However, Susanne had never expected that Arielle, her dear friend's long-lost daughter, would ever appear before her eyes again.

From the troubled expression on Susanne's face, Arielle guessed at what she was thinking and said earnestly, “Please don't feel bad. You had no idea who I was, so I understand why you reacted the way you did. Besides, you thought that I was Vinson's one-night stand. Let me explain everything. That night was a complete accident, and nothing happened between Vinson and me. We're just friends that intend to stay that way. Please don't think that I'm trying to marry into the Nightshire family to improve my social status.”

Susanne felt her face grow hot with embarrassment.

She felt thoroughly put to shame by Arielle's maturity. As an older woman,

Susanne could not be certain that she had behaved with equal magnanimity.

Susanne bit her lip, then said, "I'm sorry for being rude to you earlier. You mentioned that you had three questions you wanted to ask me. What were they? Go ahead with them."

The tone with which Susanne addressed Arielle had transformed completely into a meeker, kinder one.

Arielle twisted her hands together nervously. "Was my mom's death really due to suicide?"

Susanne stared at Arielle, her eyes darkening.

She examined Arielle, then said cautiously, "Are you suspecting that your dad...?"

Arielle nodded firmly. "That's right."

Susanne sighed heavily. "At first, I suspected that as well, so I conducted a private investigation of my own. I didn't manage to uncover anything. They either managed to cover up their tracks completely, or it wasn't done by them at

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all.”

Arielle's brow furrowed. “If it wasn't them, I can't think of anyone else who would hurt my mom. I can tell that you know this, just as well as I do. Mom's not the sort who would kill herself.”



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Susanne fixed a steady gaze on Arielle. "Focus on living the best life now that you're back. Stop meddling with the dark shadows of the past! Sometimes ignorance is bliss. So what if you manage to find out the truth? You can't bring your mother back to life."

Arielle, however, looked defiant. "I'll be able to deliver some justice to Mom, at least!"

Susanne softened her tone. "If she were watching you from heaven right now, she'd want you to live a good life too."

Arielle shook her head vehemently. "The only reason I came back here was to seek revenge for my mother. If I can't even do that for her, what's the point in coming back?"

To Arielle's surprise, the expression that flitted across Susanne's face was one of approval.

However, it quickly faded and was replaced with a look of helplessness. "I'm sorry, but I can't help. I couldn't uncover anything ten years ago, and it's definitely more difficult now. If there was any proof then, it would most probably have been

destroyed by now."

Arielle had not expected to get anything out of Susanne. It was sufficient that her suspicions regarding Maureen's suicide were confirmed.

"The second question," Arielle prompted, taking out two pieces of paper from her pocket. She held them out towards Susanne.

Susanne took them with considerably less impatience than before and peered at them closely.

When she finally read the last line, Susanne froze. She then raised her head and looked at Arielle in bewilderment.

The shock on Susanne's face was even more obvious than it had been compared to the revelation of Arielle's identity.

In a quivering voice, Susanne stammered, "You... You're not Henrick's daughter?"

"That's right," Arielle said soberly, lifting her head to meet Susanne's gaze levelly.

"Henrick's not my father at all. I looked at my mother's diary but could get no

answers out of it. I know that you were her good friend. You must know something!"

The blood had drained from Susanne's face entirely. She looked at Arielle with a gaze of mute horror.

Susanne nodded instinctively, then shook her head violently when she recollected herself. "I don't know. I don't know anything. Your mom kept most things to herself. She didn't tell me about anything like that."

Arielle wrinkled her brow, then insisted, "Ms. Stone, I think you know more than you're choosing to say. What do you know? Why are you so afraid?"

Susanne's eyes darted nervously from side to side. She then hastily leaned forward and whispered, "Shh! Stop talking! If you want to stay alive, don't ever mention that ever again!"

Susanne picked up the two pieces of paper that contained proof of Arielle's kinship and ripped them into a million tiny pieces.

Arielle was too taken aback to stop



Susanne in time. When she had regained her composure, she immediately raged at Susanne, "Ms. Stone! What on earth are you doing?"

Susanne grabbed Arielle's slender arm tightly. With a grave look on her face, she said emphatically, "I'm doing this for your own good. Listen to me! Stop pursuing this matter any further!"

Arielle looked cynical. Seeing that she was about to launch into another tirade, Susanne swiftly clamped her hand over Arielle's mouth.

Susanne shook her head vigorously with unmistakable terror in her eyes.

Arielle realized then that she would get nothing out of Susanne on this front.

She made eye contact with Susanne and nodded in agreement. Susanne then relaxed her hold on Arielle and lowered her hand.

The entire affair, however, had left Susanne immensely wary. Evidently in a hurry, she picked up her bag and said briskly, "If there's nothing else, I'll head

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home now."

"Wait, Ms. Stone! I haven't asked my third question yet!" Arielle said, tugging at Susanne's sleeve relentlessly.

Susanne, however, cupped her hands over her ears and cried, "I don't know! I don't know anything!"

Bemused at Susanne's childish response, Arielle said, "Don't worry. This question has nothing to do with the previous two."

That was sufficient to cause Susanne to lower her hands tentatively.



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Arielle then asked, "The third question is this: Do you think choosing Vinson's future wife for him will make him happy? Do you think that's fair to him?"

The abrupt shift in conversation startled Susanne, who was left speechless. By the time Susanne could comprehend what was happening, Arielle had already strode over to the door and opened it.

It was vividly clear to Susanne that the third question was meant to be a rhetorical one.

Susanne stood rooted at the spot, staring after Arielle's departing figure. Her dark gaze was clouded and unfathomable.

Wendy, who had been waiting at the door throughout the entire exchange, burst in upon seeing Arielle left.

Wendy immediately bolted over to Susanne and probed inquisitively, "Ms. Stone, did she take the money?"

Susanne snorted. She shook her head, then said scornfully, "No."

The money had been the least of her

worries just then.

Wendy then noticed the odd expression on Susanne's face. Anxiously, she asked, "Ms. Stone, what did that woman say to you? Don't take it to heart! If she doesn't want to leave, I'll chase her out of here myself."

"There's no need for that," Susanne said, exhaling slowly. "I misunderstood her. Besides, she's not interested in Vin in that way. Don't worry."

Wendy stared at Susanne in astonishment.

"What do you mean, she's not interested? He rejected me because of her!" Wendy argued passionately.

Vexed, Susanne replied shortly, "Vin has never liked girls who were too forthcoming. It's normal for him to reject you at first. He'll get used to you after further interaction." She massaged her temples, then continued wearily, "It's getting late. I'm going back to rest now. You can stay as long as you like, but I'll take my leave first."

Susanne made no delay in making her exit, not even turning to give Wendy a second

glance.

Wendy felt disturbed by the encounter.

*Why is she suddenly treating me so coldly? Wendy reflected. Is it because of that vixen?*

Wendy gnashed her teeth, determined not to allow Arielle to get the better of her. She whirled around and dashed out after Susanne.

Inside the car, Susanne remained silent for the entire journey while she looked grim.

Wendy had racked her brains to think of an appropriate topic of conversation but failed miserably. At last, when they arrived back at the residence, Wendy managed feebly, "Ms. Stone, what on earth did that woman say to you? You've been looking disquieted since she left. Was she rude to you?"

Susanne shook her head but said nothing.

Wendy mistook Susanne's silence for agreement and declared, "She's a nobody! How dare she show you no respect? I'll get all of my friends in Jadeborough to teach

her a lesson! That'll make her think twice about ever being rude to you again!"

"Enough!" Susanne suddenly erupted with a flash of wrath. "Don't interfere with any of Arielle's matters anymore. It ends here today. I don't want to hear her name mentioned ever again!"

There was a note of warning in Susanne's outburst. Wendy gazed at Susanne wretchedly.

Susanne had raised her voice on Wendy.

*That vixen must have said something to her! She's bewitched Ms. Stone!* Wendy thought bitterly.

Wendy's heart was full of resentment but she dared not reveal it. She could only nod obediently, concealing the hatred she had for Arielle.

However, Wendy vowed privately that she would seek Arielle out and destroy her.

Arielle, in the meantime, had just returned to the Southall residence when she received a text message from Vinson.

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*Don't forget that you promised to come with me to the banquet tomorrow.* The reminder flashed across the screen in luminous words.

Arielle suddenly recalled with a start the agreement she had made with Vinson back then.

*But...*

Arielle's gaze shifted to the invitation beside her. It was an invitation to Yvette's birthday party.



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Cindy had dropped off the invitation earlier, and the butler had reminded Arielle several times about the party after that. It was utterly coincidental that Yvette's birthday party fell on the following day.

Arielle was sure that it was a trap laid for her.

She had resolved to not only avoid it but to retaliate instead.

If Arielle missed this opportunity, she did not know when the next one would arise or if she would even be able to come by one. This was her best shot to clear the obstacles in her way.

Arielle thought about it and immediately dialed Vinson's number on her phone.

Vinson answered almost immediately.  
"What's up?"

Arielle replied frankly, "I have a birthday party to attend tomorrow, so I don't think I can join you at the banquet. I'm sorry."

Vinson contemplated this for a moment, then asked, "What time is the birthday party?"



Arielle glanced down at the invitation in her hand. "Seven."

Unfazed, Vinson replied, "That's perfect. The banquet I want to bring you along for is at four in the afternoon. I can accompany you to the birthday party after that."

"Wouldn't that be too much of a rush? Why don't you find another girl to go with you?" Arielle stammered.

Vinson replied persuasively, "I've already gotten someone to tailor the gown to your measurements. It'll be too late to ask someone else. Why don't you come with me, and then I'll keep you company at the birthday party after that?"

Vinson was afraid that Arielle would refuse, so he hastily added, "You did promise me, after all. Take it as repayment for what I did to get the diary for you."

At the thought of how Vinson had risked his life for the diary, Arielle felt it was impossible to reject Vinson. Clenching her jaw, Arielle agreed reluctantly, "All right."

"I'll send a car over to pick you up at three

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in the afternoon tomorrow then," Vinson said cheerfully.

"OK," Arielle replied. She suddenly remembered her conversation with Susanne a few hours ago, and began, "Tonight..."

Arielle abruptly trailed off, deciding that it was of no further use to recount the conversation to Vinson. They had clarified matters between them, after all.

At the other end of the line, Vinson sensed Arielle's hesitation. "What happened tonight?" he asked.

Arielle shook her head instinctively, then realized that Vinson could not see her. "It's nothing. I'm a little tired tonight, so I'll hang up first. Try to get an early night as well."

"Sure, goodnight," Vinson said tenderly. There was more like a note of affection in his voice.

Arielle found herself panicking slightly but steadied herself and grunted a reply. She then hung up immediately.

Arielle sat down on a chair, feeling upset.

The image of Susanne leading that girl into the private room to have a cup of coffee together stirred up a vague feeling of discontent in Arielle.

"Forget it!" Arielle told herself firmly, forcing her mind not to dwell on the meeting that had happened that night. After washing up, she lay in her bed, anticipating the trap that Cindy must have designed for her.

Since Arielle believed that the trap lying ahead of her was at Yvette's birthday party, Cindy and Yvette must naturally be conspiring with each other.

*Yvette...She didn't even hesitate to command her dog to bite me! It looks like she's still looking to draw blood.*

Arielle shut her eyes. As she let her thoughts wander, a clever plan suddenly struck Arielle like a bolt out of the blue.

Pleased with the ingenuity of the plan, Arielle fell asleep to the lullaby of the gentle breeze blowing in from the window.

The next day when she awoke, Arielle bumped into Henrick first thing in the

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morning.

Henrick had risen early in preparation to head to the office. Poring over the accounts last night had left Henrick satisfied with the returns, and he strode down the stairs with a beam on his face.

At the sight of Arielle, Henrick smiled fondly, then asked, "You're up early. Why not sleep in a little longer?"

Arielle flashed him a bright smile. "I had an early night, and I'm well-rested. Dad, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

Jovially, Henrick replied, "What is it? I'll do whatever I can help you with!"



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Arielle noted that Henrick was in high spirits and smiled demurely at him. "Actually, I received invitations for two events tonight. The first is for a banquet that Mr. Nightshire is also attending, and the other is for Yvette's birthday party. However, the timing between them is rather tight, so..."

Without a second thought, Henrick replied, "Of course you should go to the banquet with Mr. Nightshire! Sannie, Dad knows that you're still young and naive, but you should know how to differentiate important events from the less significant ones."

"I know," Arielle said, nodding. "Isn't Yvette engaged to Jordan, though? Besides, she sent the invitation to me, and if I don't show up, I'm afraid that the Bakers might say..."

At that moment, Henrick was still unaware that the Bakers had decided to withdraw from the marriage arrangement with the Actonwards. Henrick's expression thus looked rather uneasy.

The Actonwards were a large and distinguished family but were no match for

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Vinson. However, the matter took on a more delicate nature with the Bakers in the picture.

Henrick was torn between both choices.

Arielle pretended to weigh both options equally, then concluded, "I thought of a plan. We can get Shannie to come back and attend Yvette's birthday party instead! We'll avoid offending either party, then."

Henrick's face immediately turned dark when he heard the mention of Shandie's name. He vividly recalled that he had almost lost Nightshire Group as a client because of her.

Testily, Henrick retorted, "That foolish, incorrigible girl! She'll only embarrass herself and the rest of us if she represents us at the birthday party."

Arielle then innocently replied, "You can't leave Shandie at the monastery forever though. She'll have to get married eventually. Aunt Cindy might be able to reflect somewhat, but it'd be better if you bring Shandie home to keep a watchful eye on her. Who knows if Aunt Cindy is tainting her mind with all sorts of

irrepressible ideas over there?"

Henrick felt himself wavering.

During the process of purging the company, Henrick discovered that Cindy had bought over multiple directors. Indeed, she might corrupt Shandie instead of teaching her how to behave properly.

If Shandie took after Cindy's wicked ways, it would be an uphill task to find someone who would be willing to marry her.

Henrick soon became convinced that bringing Shandie back home was the most sensible solution.

Having thus made up his mind, Henrick nodded fervently. "All right, let her come home then! If she refuses to mend her stupid temper and behave accordingly, I'll ship her back to the monastery so she can spend the rest of her life there!"

Arielle immediately praised Henrick's decision, flattering him by saying, "Dad, I knew that you always had your children's best interests at heart. I'm sure that Shandie has turned over a new leaf. I'll go and bring her back home myself."

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Henrick looked at Arielle with pride. *I'm glad Arielle isn't petty. After all, family members shouldn't bear grudges against each other,* Henrick thought approvingly.

Henrick nodded, smiling affectionately at Arielle. "I'm glad that you're so mature, Arielle. Go on and fetch her. Don't tire yourself out on the journey!"

"Sure, Dad. I'll leave once I've gotten changed," Arielle replied, already turning to head back up the stairs.

"OK, I'll get the driver to wait for you at the door. I'll be off to work now," Henrick called, getting to his feet.

"See you, Dad!" Arielle chirped, waving at him. She watched as Henrick shut the door and got into his car before ascending the stairs.

Arielle did not truly want Shandie's return, of course.

However, Cindy and Yvette had already laid the trap, and Arielle needed a substitute to take the fall. Once Shandie returned, she would take up her position in Arielle's perfect scheme.



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Arielle had barely shut the door when the butler came rapping sharply on it.

She flung open the door and was unsurprised to see Alfred standing outside.

Larissa, the maid who Arielle had secretly bought over, had once given Arielle a list of Cindy's secret allies. Alfred's name had been right at the top of that list.

Arielle put up a naive face and asked, "Alfred, is there anything I can help you with?"



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