

A Beauty With Multiple Masks Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Neither Shandie nor Cindy did anything. Likewise, Cindy no longer begged Henrick to shorten Shandie's punishment. Cindy even took increasingly good care of Arielle, which Henrick approved. That incident with the venomous snake was explicitly banned. No one was allowed to utter a single word about it. Hence, the manor's inhabitants resumed their following days as if nothing happened. Likewise, Henrick returned to his and Cindy's bedroom after five days of sleeping in the study. By the sixth day, Henrick headed out with a bounce in his step; even Cindy had a glowing and cheery expression. It wasn't hard to guess what happened the night before. Things became so amiable that Cindy offered an entire drumstick to Arielle during dinnertime. At this, a delighted smile crept onto Arielle's face. She responded in a sweet tone, "Thank you, Aunt Cindy." "Call me Mom from now on." Cindy beamed back as she continued, "I'll look after you as my own child. Just like Shannie. She's not my biological daughter, but I've always cared for her like she is. So, don't hesitate to ask me if you ever need anything." Arielle scoffed inwardly. *Not your biological daughter? I don't believe it one bit. Shandie is only a couple of months younger than me, which means that Henrick had an affair with Cindy during my mother's pregnancy. Henrick obviously won't allow this scandal to leak. Cindy must be up to something. Why else would she suddenly suggest that I call her "Mom"? Still, she's got some nerve asking me to call her that. I only have two mothers: my biological mom and my adoptive mother. No one else is worthy of that title.* Skeptical, Arielle looked at Henrick for help. "Dad. I-it's too soon. I'm not used to calling her that..." She flashed a pair of puppy-dog eyes at him. Her eyes rounded and became slightly moist as she put on a pitiful act. If this were an award show, Arielle believed that she would have won the title of Most Convincing Actress. True enough, Henrick's features softened after glancing over at her. No man could resist Arielle's puppy dog eyes, not even her own dad. Henrick cleared his throat and consoled, "That's quite alright. Take it slow and go at your own pace. There's no need to rush into calling her Mom." "Thanks, Dad." Arielle then cast an apologetic look whilst saying, "And I'm really sorry, Aunt Cindy. I'm sure I'll eventually ease into your new title." Anger welled in Cindy's chest. *This wretched brat! How dare she refuse to call me Mom!* Even so, Cindy was better at tamping down her emotions compared to Shandie, so she feigned a kind smile. "I understand that this must be difficult for you. Please don't apologize. I should be sorry for pressuring you. Don't worry, dear, take all the time you need to adjust. After all, we've got the rest of our lives as a family for you to do so." "Thanks, Aunt Cindy." "It's nothing, child." The two played out a harmonious pretense as if they were happily getting along at the dining table. Henrick's spirits instantly improved; the exhaustion he felt from work faded away at the sight of this merry atmosphere. *As the saying goes, a family in harmony will prosper in everything; I'm content as long as they don't pull any more stunts against one another.* Just as Henrick thought so, Cindy parted her lips to speak. "There's something I have to tell you, dear. It's about Shannie." The mention of Shandie's name ruined Henrick's mood. He slammed his spoon onto the table and thundered, "Let me guess, you're trying to put in a good word for that brat? Considering how grave her actions were, I've been more than merciful by grounding her for only a month. So forget it! Don't bother defending her."

Arielle threw a suspicious glance at the woman. *How uncharacteristic of her to blurt out. She's normally good at gauging situations before speaking. Surely she knows that this isn't the best time to defend Shandie? What exactly is Cindy playing at?* At that moment, Cindy's face scrunched up in distress. "I'm not pleading on behalf of her, dear. It's about something else. I'm just not sure if I should tell you..." Henrick's frown lifted slightly at this. Regardless, he still growled at a dangerously low pitch, "What's the matter?" Cindy sighed dramatically, then pulled out a sheet of paper from her pocket. She stated, "I just received a notice letter today. Remember the Crown Coffee Academy's competition? Well, Shannie won it. She's the champion." "What!" Henrick exclaimed. He obviously knew about the competition. Its winner would obtain a brand ambassadorship contract with Soir Coffee—the internationally renowned coffee franchise. Henrick was overjoyed. He snatched the letter from Cindy and went through its contents thoroughly. When he noticed that Vinson would be an honorary guest, greed flitted across his eyes. He clutched the letter with trembling hands whilst his voice quaked with excitement. "That's great news. Well, why didn't you tell me earlier? The award ceremony is tomorrow afternoon!" At once, Cindy's shoulders slumped exaggeratedly in dejection. She explained, "It's because of that rash mistake that Shannie made. When I told her about the ceremony earlier today, she wasn't keen on attending. She wanted to stay home and reflect on her actions." "That's absurd!" Henrick protested. *This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to mingle with influential figures! How can she not go? Has she lost her mind?* When he finally broke out of his thoughts, he happened to meet Arielle's innocent gaze. It was as though she saw right through to his calculative schemes. Flustered, he cleared his throat and said, "Shandie seems like she's realized her mistakes and is taking responsibility for her actions now. So I don't think we have to ground her any longer. What do you think, Sannie?" Arielle sneered internally. *That's my biological dad for you. Truly a loving dad, isn't he?* Nevertheless, Arielle wasn't one to reveal her true feelings. She flashed a gentle smile and spoke in a considerate manner, "Dad, I meant to tell you a while ago; it will do no good to ground her for as long as a month. We should let her off early. Besides, she's not a kid anymore. She'll know how to discern right from wrong after making a mistake once. Plus, you can always enforce stricter punishments if she regresses to the making the same mistakes." Cindy, who sat opposite them, gnawed so hard on her lips that she almost drew blood. *Arielle, that brat! When she puts it that way, it means Henrick will never let Shandie off the hook if she messes up again!* It was just as Cindy predicted. Henrick's brows knitted taut as he declared, "That's right, there won't be a next time. Cindy! Pass the message to her: she'll be disowned from this manor if she pulls another stunt again!" Anger sizzled in Cindy's chest, yet she had to play along. "I'll relay it to her, don't worry. She knows that she's done wrong. Sannie, thank you so much for forgiving her." Arielle looked at her with a smug smile. "We're all family, after all. And compromise is a crucial part of being a family, even if Shandie wanted to kill me." Cindy's smile tensed. She couldn't handle Arielle's not-so-subtle jabs any longer. Shooting onto her feet, she then announced, "I'll go pack my things for the journey to Norham tomorrow." With that, she paced over to the stairs but quickly stopped halfway. Then she extended a friendly offer, "Tomorrow's a weekend, dear. You won't be going to the office. Why don't you and Sannie come along?" Henrick immediately nodded as he thought about Arielle and Vinson's relationship. "Absolutely! Could you pack Sannie's things as well? And get her some new clothes for the trip to Norham, if you can." "Yes, dear." Cindy finally let out a victorious smile. *Hmph! Just wait and see, Arielle. My daughter will become the star of the award ceremony. Then, you'll be left standing in her shadow.*