

A Beauty With Multiple Masks Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Immediately, Arielle prepared to lash out. However, her movements came to a screeching halt when she caught sight of the man's face.

"Mr. Nightshire? Y-you..." She stared at him and blinked in utter disbelief.

Vinson interjected before Arielle could finish speaking. "Why did you pretend not to recognize me?"

Arielle looked at Vinson with a gaze full of puzzlement. On the other hand, Vinson's stare resembled the look of a ferocious and enraged lion.

Is he angry because I didn't greet him when I walked past him earlier? Doesn't that mean he recognized me? Then why did he act like we were strangers in the airport? He even ignored me when we were on the plane!

"You were the one who ignored me first! Besides, how would I dare disturb such a busy man like you?" Arielle replied in bafflement.

What on earth is he thinking? He clearly recognized me. Yet, he pretended like he didn't. He should have continued the act. Why is he cornering and berating me for doing the same thing?

Arielle tried to push Vinson away to put some distance between them. "No matter what... you should let me go first. People will misunderstand if they see us like this."

Arielle's words seemed to go in one ear and out the other. Vinson's gaze remained fixated intently on hers.

He found that her bright eyes were like pools of clear water. At the same time, her gaze was as deep as the bottomless ocean.

There wasn't a trace of fear nor flattery present in her brilliant gaze. The only thing Vinson saw was suspicion. She treated him like he was an ordinary person.

An ordinary person... How long has it been since someone treated me this way?

"Are you angry because I couldn't recognize you at the airport?"

"I did not get angry," Arielle said and jutted out her bottom lip. *Why would I get mad?*

Vinson fell silent after he heard her answer.

He could not express the complicated feelings within his heart.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Vinson released her from his grasps and stepped back all of a sudden. "Why did you come to Norham? Are you following me because I haven't given you an answer?"

"Following you? I'm not as free as you think; I certainly don't have the time to be following you. Besides, what answer do I need from you?" Arielle replied with a confused look.

All of a sudden, she recalled the last words Vinson had said during the birthday dinner.

Her eyes widened as round as saucers as she crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Are you still thinking about the joke I made the other day?"

"As I said, the truth is hidden within your joke. You don't have to worry; I'm still thinking about it."

"Haha!" Arielle burst out in laughter as she tilted her head. "I wish I could peer inside that head of yours to find out if your brain is made out of cotton!"

"That is something I should say to you instead," Vinson replied impassively.

"What on earth are you talking about..." Right at that moment, Arielle's phone began to ring.

The moment she answered the call, Henrick's voice echoed through the phone. "Arielle, where did you go? Why did you keep your sister waiting for so long?"

Waiting? I haven't even seen Shandie's shadow.

Immediately, Arielle acted as if she had been wronged. "This was the first time I took the plane... I must admit that I was totally clueless. Dad, I'm sorry. Where are you? I'll try to look for you." Arielle murmured softly.

"Look for the airport staff. We are at the information desk."

"Alright, I'll head over right now!" The moment Arielle ended the call, her image of a

prim and proper woman vanished into thin air.

"My Dad is looking for me. I'll take my leave first. Also, let me repeat myself. I was joking the other day! You can forget about it!" Arielle called out as she waved her phone in Vinson's direction.

With that, Arielle turned on her heel to leave.

She only managed to take two steps before Vinson's suspicious tone echoed behind her. "What is your relationship with your family?"

His question left her confused. "We are just family." Arielle whirled around to face him again.

"Yet, I think that they don't see you like family," Vinson replied in a monotonous voice.

"Why do you say that?"

"My assistant told me that you were the only one who did not sit in the first-class cabin when we boarded the plane."

"Oh, that's what you are referring to; I have a complicated relationship with my family. Ten years ago, I went missing. Now that we are reunited, these trivial issues don't matter to me anymore." Arielle grinned as she said this.

Vinson opened his mouth as if to say something. A look of hesitancy painted his face. In the end, he handed her a gold business card. "Call me if you need anything. You can also bring this card to the Nightshire Group if you want to meet me."

"It's alright..." Arielle raised her hands to decline him. Yet, Vinson merely shoved the card into her palm before he left the lounge.

Arielle glanced at the gold card in her hand. Emblazoned on the card were the words- Nightshire Group.

Is he trying to... show off?

Arielle owned a company located overseas. Although it wasn't as renowned as Nightshire Group, her company was quite famous too.

Just as she made a move to discard the card, she changed her mind and kept it instead.

Vinson is correct, what if I need his help? This card will be useful. After all, Jadeborough is a place I'm unfamiliar with.

Arielle placed the card in her pocket as she changed her mind and walked out of the lounge.

When she finally arrived at the information desk, Henrick looked like he was on the verge of exploding in anger. It was clear that he was impatient after waiting for her.

“There will be dire consequences if you delay your sister’s ceremony!” Henrick scowled.

In contrast, Cindy spoke in a very demure and gentle tone. “It’s still early. She won’t delay the ceremony. I was just scared that Arielle would have gotten lost in this foreign place. Arielle, look at your sister; she was so worried that she burst into tears when she couldn’t find you at the exit.”

Arielle turned to look at Shandie. True to Cindy’s words, Shandie’s eyes were red and swollen. There were even glistening tears around the corners of her eyes. “Arielle, it’s alright... I’m just glad that you are safe.” Shandie sniffled as she said this.

When Arielle shifted her gaze downwards, Arielle caught sight of several red gashes across Shandie’s thigh underneath her skirt. !

In order to make Hendrick scold Arielle, Shandie had resorted to such extreme tricks and schemes.

When Shandie noticed Arielle’s gaze, she quickly used her hand to cover her thigh.

Immediately, Arielle looked away under the pretense that she hadn’t noticed anything. She did not provide an excuse to Henrick. Instead, she apologized profusely. “Dad, I’m so sorry that I made everyone worry. I’ll make sure to sit next to everyone so that this incident won’t happen again.” Arielle’s face was pale as she murmured apologetically.

Upon hearing Arielle’s statement, Henrick finally remembered that they had booked first-class seats on the plane. On the other hand, Arielle sat in the economy class.

Henrick coughed awkwardly; it seemed like he couldn’t find it in himself to remain mad at her anymore. “It’s fine. Let’s go. We’ll be late if we don’t set off now.”

“Alright.” Arielle nodded her head obediently. She even reached out to help Cindy with her luggage.

In the blink of an eye, Henrick’s anger dissipated.

Yet, this experience seemed to show that his eldest daughter was someone compliant and weak-willed

Perhaps I should shift all of my attention to Shandie instead.

In a flash, Shandie garnered his love and attention again. Henrick went out of his way to book the hotel located closest to the ceremony. He even reserved a suite just for Shandie.

In the room, Shandie was utterly delighted. "Mom, isn't my plan brilliant?" She beamed and asked Cindy.

"I told you not to make any move behind my back!" Cindy did not seem to share Shandie's joy. Instead, a deep frown graced her forehead.

Seeing Cindy's anger, Shandie tugged on her arm in a coy manner. "Mom, don't be angry anymore... Wasn't the final result satisfactory?"

Cindy suddenly remembered that Henrick had arranged for Arielle to stay at the cheapest room in the hotel. Immediately, her mood brightened. "You rascal. The next time you try to do anything, you should let me know first," Cindy chastised Shandie and flicked her nose mischievously.

"Relax, Arielle isn't as strong as you claim to be. I bet she's throwing an enormous tantrum right now!"

On the other hand, Cindy was deep in thought.

Anyone who fell into Shandie's schemes would have lashed out or defended themselves. Yet, Arielle did not. She merely admitted her mistake and tried to improve her flaws.

This means that Arielle is someone who can endure hardships and stay calm despite

being blamed. She would be extremely dangerous if she decides to lash out.

"Darling, listen to me. I've thought about it. You should just receive your trophy obediently. Don't try to say anything else. We should try our best to understand her. There will be plenty of chances to deal with her in the future," Cindy said solemnly.

"Alright, Mom." Shandie nodded her head in agreement. Despite her actions, she didn't seem to share the same thoughts as Cindy.

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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 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 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 drunk 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.

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.

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!"

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. 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."