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Blood trickled down my daughter's pale face. She crumpled to the floor, trembling.

The crimson drops stained her ragged dress - one of Grace's cast-offs that Sarah had deliberately torn further before forcing Mistake to wear it.

The jagged edges exposed bruises both old and new.

Grace stared wide-eyed at the scene, her cookie frozen halfway to her mouth. Her perfect party dress seemed to mock Mistake's rags.

Sarah just laughed. "Look at you, crying like the pathetic little mistake you are."

But my daughter stopped crying. She just pulled herself up shakily, like she'd done countless times before. Her thin arms trembled with the effort.

With practiced movements, she tried to wipe away the blood trickling down her face. Her fingers left scarlet smears across her pale cheeks.

Through trembling lips, she whispered, "I'm sorry, Madam. I'll do better. Please forgive me."

Apologizing after being hurt - it was a daily ritual for my daughter in this house. Every blow came with a required apology.

Sarah's eyes fell on Grace's half-eaten breakfast still on the table - fresh croissants, eggs benedict, imported jam. A cruel smile curved her lips.

"You want breakfast, little rat?" She grabbed my daughter by the hair. "Fine. Eat."

She forced Mistake's face down into the garbage can where Grace's previous meals lay rotting. "That's where trash belongs - eating trash."

I continued wiping the counter, my movements precise and mechanical. My face remained expressionless as I watched my daughter gag and choke.

Tom finally looked up from his newspaper at the commotion.

He sighed and reached for the first aid kit, as if this was just another minor inconvenience in his day.

"Sarah, dear," he said mildly while dabbing at our daughter's wound, "Maybe you shouldn't be quite so rough with the child. The neighbors might hear."

Sarah sneered, her perfectly painted lips curling in disgust. "Why not? She's nothing but a worthless mistake. Just like her mother."

"Look at her - wearing Grace's ruined clothes like the pathetic beggar she is. She's lucky I let her have anything at all."

Then Sarah turned back to Grace, her face instantly transforming into a loving smile, the switch so jarring it made my stomach turn:

"Sweetie, Mommy ordered that Disney princess castle cake you wanted for tomorrow's birthday! The one with the light-up towers and real sugar flowers! It cost a fortune, but only the best for my perfect angel!"

"Thank you, Mother," Grace replied politely, used to her mother's dramatic mood swings.

Seeing this, my daughter gathered what little courage she had left and spoke in a voice barely above a whisper:

"Madam... since it's my birthday too tomorrow... could I maybe have something fresh to eat? Just this once?"

I watched through dead eyes as Sarah's face contorted with rage.

"You ungrateful little bitch!" she screamed. "You think you deserve fresh food? After I generously let you eat what Grace doesn't want?"

"You ungrateful little bitch!" Sarah exploded, her face contorting with rage.

She grabbed my daughter by the hair and started hitting her, each slap punctuated with insults. Her rings left cuts across my daughter's cheeks.

"Worthless! Stupid! Just like your mother!"

Screams and sobs filled the kitchen. The sound of flesh hitting flesh echoed off the expensive tiles.

I watched silently, my face blank as stone. Inside, I imagined wrapping my hands around Sarah's throat.

Tom made a few weak attempts to intervene, more concerned about the noise than the violence. Even Grace tugged at her mother's sleeve, begging her to stop.

Finally, worried that Grace was getting upset, Sarah dragged my sobbing daughter out by the arm, leaving bloody fingerprints on the doorframe.

The next morning was Grace's birthday party. The house was decorated like a fairy tale castle.

Sarah got up early, laden with presents and the elaborate cake. Her designer dress probably cost more than I made in a year.

"Get on your knees," she ordered me. "You'll serve Grace's cake like the servant you are."

I knelt on the hard floor, holding the silver cake server, while Sarah cooed over Grace in her new party dress.

Tom frowned at the empty doorway behind her, finally noticing something was missing.

"Where's Mistake?" he asked, glancing up from his phone. "It's her birthday too, isn't it?"

Sarah waved her hand dismissively, adjusting Grace's silk bow.

"Oh, that little brat? I broke her leg last night. Taught her a lesson about asking for things she doesn't deserve."

She smiled brightly, straightening the cake's sugar flowers. "She's still unconscious in the basement!"

I held the cake server steady, my grip never wavering.