

## **CHOSEN 1881**

### Chapter 1881

Though they had seen much of life's harsh realities, the children at the local orphanage couldn't fathom the depths

of darkness that might dwell in the heart of a seven-year-old girl who had just lost her parents.

Serana kept to herself, a solitary figure in the corner, quiet and well-behaved in class, and equally so during recess,

watching the others play with an expressionless demeanor, like a still pond devoid of life.

Perhaps they sensed a kindred spirit in her, or maybe it was pity, or a thick slather of curiosity, but from that point

on, Boyd had someone else woven into the tapestry of his childhood.

From then until now, Serana had become a thread running through the narrative of his life.

In their daily interactions, Serana was the picture of innocence, speaking in gentle whispers, looking at people with

sincerity and care. Even as the years passed and she grew, she never changed – tender and fragile, yet brave and

stubborn.

Outwardly, she seemed as delicate as a glass figurine, always needing protection, yet she fiercely tried to prove her

strength, insisting she didn't need anyone's care and could even protect others.d2

Such a girl was irresistibly endearing – tender and attentive, pure and kind, brave, stubborn, and resilient.

Like her long, dark hair, the number of people drawn to her grew day by day. And it was true what they said – girls

should have long hair.

Yasmine was beautiful but frosty by nature. Others kept their distance. From start to finish, Boyd was her only

constant, and she never felt lonely. At least, not until she suddenly realized what loneliness was and found that

certain things had become inevitable.

Boyd's time was no longer solely dedicated to her as he began to learn deeper subjects beyond the basic curriculum.

Companion? She had never considered Boyd's presence as companionship before.

But when did it start? It wasn't when Boyd's time began to scatter, leaving more for Serana.

Was it from the moments they shared meals together, or those occasional breaks when they sat beside the flower

beds?

Or when they planted a lily bulb together, one digging a hole, the other tenderly placing the bulb inside?

She never felt it then.

But somehow, Serana began to irk her. And in their routine, she'd find herself unintentionally showing indifference

or even hostility towards Serana.

The other kids at Angel's Haven Orphanage noticed too, whispering behind their backs, but she never bothered to

refute them.

Because she knew it was true.

When did it start, exactly?

Perhaps it was when the lilies in the garden bloomed exceptionally beautiful, and the two silhouettes sitting together

appeared so harmonious.

And then, a few days later, she found the desecrated lilies, and realized something had changed.

The garden's vibrant lilies had been a captivating sight at Angel's Haven Orphanage. Now, they were mostly dead,

their petals scattered, leaves shredded, and stems snapped. Such an act was a significant event in the otherwise

tranquil orphanage, and the investigation began.

"It was Yasmine. Just days after planting, I saw her by the garden, holding a trowel and looking pensive," said one.

"I saw her too, uprooting the seedlings with that trowel," added another.

"Recently, her gaze towards the garden was frightening, like... like when she looks at Serana," a third chimed in.

"She doesn't like Serana. We all know that. The lilies were planted by Serana, so it must've been her," concluded

another.

The accusations piled up, but Yasmine just smiled.

She had merely added extra seeds after Serana planted, knowing the germination rate was low. And when the

seedlings grew too dense, she thinned them out so the others could flourish.

They didn't understand these simple gardening concepts and blamed her out of ignorance, which she found both

frustrating and laughable.

Serana said nothing, just knelt by the ruined garden, picking up petals with tears streaming down her face. Her

tears drew even more displeasure at Yasmine, but the children's naive and ignorant gazes didn't warrant her

concern.

"I don't have any particular feelings about Serana. There's no motive. It wasn't me," she stated plainly.

The head of the orphanage didn't jump to conclusions based on the children's words, agreeing with Yasmine's

simple statement. After all, the lilies thrived mainly because of Yasmine's care.

The matter was dropped for the time being, and the investigation continued quietly, possibly leading to a private

reprimand for the culprit.

Boyd, who hadn't visited the scene of the "crime," seemed indifferent to the whole ordeal.

The following afternoon, during a rare appearance in craft class, he paired up with Yasmine, who had been working

alone at a long table, as Serana was already working with someone else.

Yasmine, playing with colorful paper, greeted him casually. "Rare sight," she remarked.

Boyd set down the heavy finance books he'd been carrying – a surprising choice for someone his age that she'd

grown accustomed to.

Without a word, he shook the books, and out fluttered colorful petals. One book after another, until Yasmine saw

the table covered in the petals of lilies, pressed flat and still vibrant.

Her heart felt inexplicably heavy.

She looked up at him, his eyes serene but his lips curved in a casual smile. "I recall Serana was the one who

gathered up all those flower petals."

Boyd regarded her with a detached gaze, standing by the table, not much taller than the piece of furniture itself.

However, those eyes seemed to hold a universe of secrets, now veiled with a frosty film.

"You don't seem to care much about them," he observed.

Yasmine glanced at the petals and let out a light chuckle. "And what, pray tell, should I feel about them?"

He stared at her for a long moment. "Indeed, Serana picked them up. She cried over them for an entire day."

She paused, tearing off excess edges from the colored paper in her hands. "So, you think I should have a good cry

over them too?"

“You look rather happy as it is.”

Yasmine was all too accustomed to Boyd’s way of conversation. Always skirting full disclosure, they nevertheless

understood each other’s unspoken words with ease.

Her heart continued to sink, a suffocating weight. “Don’t I have the right to be happy?”

She hesitated for a second before continuing, “Do you think I had something to do with this mess?”

Boyd ran his finger over the petals. “Didn’t you say you had no motive?”

Suddenly, Yasmine froze, her heart laced with an inexplicable guilt.

Motive. Perhaps there was one, shadowy and blurred. She had no particular fondness for Serana, and those lilies

had indeed been an eyesore.

The reason was rooted deep within her, yet she took a deep breath and brushed past the issue.

“Yeah, I have no motive. What makes you suspect me?”

Boyd sneered. “Since when does disliking someone need a reason?”

Yasmine laughed in spite of herself, but his words rang true. Dislike was reason enough.

“Why would I have a problem with her?”

Boyd watched her for a while before responding. "You're asking me?"

Yasmine pursed her lips. "Even so, it's just a matter of probability. There are plenty who don't like her. Why are you

so convinced I'm the culprit?"

Boyd took a piece of green paper and began gluing petals onto it, clearly reconstructing the lilies.

Yasmine watched coldly.

After a while, he muttered, "Yasmine, in the entire orphanage, you are the most cunning and unpredictable one."

That craft class, Yasmine hadn't managed to create anything, her desk littered with scraps.

Boyd patiently pieced together the petals into a vibrant bouquet of lilies, carefully wrapped in colored paper, which

he then handed to Serana.

"Put them in an airtight jar, and they'll last as long as you want." His tone was still cool, but tempered with an

unusual gentleness.

Serana's eyes sparkled with joy and gratitude. "So beautiful, thank you."

Boyd nodded, with a hint of a smile on his lips.



Too young to understand, Yasmine didn't know why her heart ached. She thought it was just unfair.

Boyd didn't trust her. She was too scheming for anyone's comfort.

Hmph.

Chapter 1882

Boyd idly pushed around the green beans on his plate and said coolly, "Compared to before."

"Yeah. With all those books you read, you should grasp the concept of self-awareness. I know I'm not the most

straightforward person, and someday I might do something that'll make y'all cringe. But what bugs me most is,

even if what they say is true, I can't stand people bad-mouthing me. I won't give them the satisfaction of calling me

shameless behind my back. I don't need that kind of gossip in my life."

Boyd watched as she flicked the onions from her salad to the side, her face twisted in disgust. He smirked slightly, "I

thought you didn't care about such things?"

"So I should just let everyone nitpick at me?" Yasmine's appetite vanished as she shoveled a few more forkfuls of

mashed potatoes into her mouth. "I am also a human being. I don't care, so does that mean anyone can freely slap

a label on me?"

Boyd just looked at her, "You can always set the record straight." He slowly took another bite, "But this is because

of what I said to you in art class, isn't it? If it isn't you, you could explain, or prove your innocence."

Yasmine's movements quickened, and soon her plate was empty, save for the pile of onions in the corner.d2

"No need." She slammed her fork down a bit too hard, "If I'm already so despicable in everyone's eyes, what's the

point? Proving myself once means I might have to do it again. Who am I proving my innocence for? Them? Or you?

Who among you is worthy of my explanation?"

A shadow fell across Boyd's usually clear-cut gaze. "It seems you feel quite wronged indeed."

Yasmine stared at him for a moment before standing up abruptly. "You're right, I'm no saint. To suffer baseless

accusations is indeed a grievance."

Boyd finished his last bite of food, "So, isn't that also one of the reasons to clear your name?"

"Not good enough." Yasmine raised her voice, her chin up, her eyes looking down at Boyd with a chilly smile,

"They've wronged me for no reason, and you think proving my innocence is that simple?"

She picked up her plate and pushed back her chair, "They made me suffer, and I intend to make them suffer more.

Today, thanks to you, Boyd, I realized I still have a twisted sense of humor. An eye for an eye makes life more

interesting. So everyone had better watch out. Don't think I'm just talking. I'm full of cunning plans, and not using

them would be a disservice."

The whole cafeteria fell silent.

All the kids were looking at Yasmine, with confusion, disgust, and fear in their eyes. There were few people around

Yasmine, and fear of her was definitely a part of the reason.

Boyd glanced up at her, "You don't care about the suspicions of others, but my words stir up such a reaction?"

Yasmine paused, her grip on the plate tightening. She was silent for a moment before looking straight into his eyes

and said frankly, "Because I think no amount of reading can make up for your useless brain, and it's just sad. After

all, we go way back, and now to realize I've been wrong about you from the start, it feels like a waste of time."

Boyd looked up at her, and for the first time, his usually expressionless face showed a hint of anger. An immature

face filled with the force of fury.

Yasmine felt a sudden sense of satisfaction. Nothing pleased her more than hitting Boyd's sore spot.

Serana got up with a worried look and approached them. "Yasmine..."

"Cut it."

Yasmine cut her off coldly, giving her a cool glance and walked away with her plate towards the tray return area.

She left the cafeteria without looking back. Her demeanor was clearly that of someone about to do something

drastic.

Boyd frowned and stood up, his face set as he followed her out. The rest of the cafeteria exchanged puzzled

glances before they too followed.

When they stepped outside, Yasmine was by the flowerbed, yanking out the lilies that had survived the recent cold

snap, one handful after another, in front of everyone, including Boyd and Serana.

She even tossed the uprooted flowers at Serana's feet. Staring at Serana, who had tears in her eyes and was

trembling, Yasmine said coldly, "You like them, don't you? Take them. They're a gift. Keep them as long as you like."

The surrounding kids couldn't help but murmur disapprovingly.

Yasmine still looked at Serana with cold eyes, "You are ignorant and stupid. I do despise you."

Ignoring the surrounding chatter, she continued, "I can't understand why you'd hide your dislike for someone. I

despise you, and I want you to know it. Otherwise, what's the point of my dislike?"

She gestured with her chin towards the flowers at Serana's feet, "I despise you, I pulled up the flowers, and there's

no need to be sneaky about it."

She turned to look at Boyd, her face sarcastic, "I'm not into playing your subversive games. Not interested, not

worth it. I act openly, and if people decide it's me, I don't feel wronged by a bit of slander. But if I were to do it

secretly and still get blamed, then I end up with the reputation of a cowardly schemer. Why go the longest way

round to suffer the biggest insult? What for?"

The others didn't quite grasp the meaning of Yasmine's words, but Boyd's face suddenly turned ashen.

Why indeed? Yasmine was never naive or foolish. She wouldn't bother with thankless tasks.

Serana picked up the flowers, and the students crowded around her. Yasmine watched the throng with the same

biting sarcasm, unaffected.

The matter escalated, and the director arrived. The students babbled the story, but the director was visibly upset, "I

never said Yasmine was responsible for this. Without evidence, it's irresponsible to blame her. Do you understand?

How would you feel if you were falsely accused of something you didn't do?"

After a moment of silence, the director's words hung in the air, leaving much to be considered.

"But I swear, we saw her always hanging around the garden. If it wasn't her, who else could it be? Those beautiful

flowers, how could anyone be so heartless."

The director sighed heavily, "Those flowers weren't willfully destroyed by Yasmine. The reason they blossomed so

beautifully was largely due to her care. She's been tending to them all along. So, it couldn't have been her. No one

destroys what they cherish so easily."

The room erupted in murmurs of disbelief.

“How is that possible? Those flowers were clearly Serena’s little project.”

“True, Serena did plant the seeds, but without Yasmine, that garden wouldn’t have thrived the way it did.”

The children were relentless, “But she just uprooted all of them, even if it wasn’t her, even if she had contributed,

she destroyed what she loved.”

The director shook his head in resignation, “If she decided to destroy them, then she must have felt that those

things were no longer worth her love, or perhaps, they didn’t deserve her love anymore.”

Standing quietly to the side was Boyd, whose eyes suddenly flashed. He looked up at Yasmine, but she avoided his

gaze.

The director paused, then turned to the teachers nearby, “This afternoon’s class, let’s teach the kids about

cultivating lilies.”

The teachers nodded in agreement and accepted the task.

“I’d like to take a leave,” Yasmine spoke up, dusting the soil off her hands, “director, Bryson is taking me out this

afternoon.”

The director looked at her for a moment before responding, “Alright, you already know plenty about cultivating

lilies.”

Yasmine forced a smile, “May I borrow your phone?”

“Use the one in my office.”

“Thank you.”

With that, Yasmine thanked him and walked towards the office, passing by Boyd with an expressionless face.

Boyd’s fingers twitched slightly, but by the time he raised his hand, Yasmine was already far way.

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Compared to the other orphans, Yasmine’s life was relatively decent. Over the past few years, Bryson had started a

small business in P City. It wasn’t a big enterprise, but aside from annual donations to the orphanage, he showed

particular favoritism towards Yasmine.

Although the director often wondered why Bryson didn’t just take her out of the orphanage, he never mentioned it.



Secretly, the director thought it might be best to keep it that way, as it meant additional funding for them each

year.

On Yasmine's birthday, Bryson sometimes didn't show up, but the month after her birthday, he would make it a

point to visit the orphanage and improve the meals for everyone, providing a delicate cupcake for each child.

No words were needed. The joy of a delicious treat was enough to make the kids happy and boisterous. That was

enough.

A few days later, during the orphanage's celebration for Yasmine's birthday, Boyd made an appearance.

After dinner, they played in the yard, a time for post-meal activity. Yasmine sat beside the flowerbed, with a shovel

in hand. Her uniform, though washed to a faded white, was spotless. Her sleeves rolled up to her elbows revealed

slender arms that moved with the rhythm of the shovel.

Bored, idle, and listless.

Boyd sat down beside her, handing her a wrapped package. Yasmine, with her hands behind her back and chin

propped on her wrist, glanced at him but didn't accept it.

"Happy Birthday."

Yasmine tugged at the corner of her mouth, slightly turning her head to look at him, "Looking for a shortcut, Boyd?

Trying to curry favor by timing your gift with my birthday? Should I consider this an apology or a birthday present?"

Boyd's lips curved up slightly, "If it was a gift to appease you, would you accept it? If not, then it's just a birthday

present."

Yasmine scoffed and grasped the shovel tighter, casually turning the soil in the flowerbed. "I'm not accepting it."

Boyd stood, squatting beside her, "I'm sorry for the misunderstanding, and I feel really guilty. I think a sincere

apology is in order."

"Don't talk to me about how you feel," Yasmine said indifferently, her shovel patting the clumps of earth. "It's

irrelevant to me how guilty you feel. In fact, knowing you're uncomfortable makes me quite happy."

Boyd pursed his lips, "Yes, I feel bad. It is good to know that you're happy. Maybe if you accepted my apology, I'd

feel even more guilty for doubting such a kind and generous person.”

Chapter 1883

Boyd’s expression was one of pure distaste. “I reckon Bryson isn’t strapped for cash to buy some scallions.”

“There’s something different about growing them yourself. Besides, they grow fast. I can harvest them at least

twice in a month.”

“I noticed the director has a pot on his office windowsill. You’re awfully young to have such quirky tastes.”

Yasmine ignored him.

Two hours later, they both wrapped up their tasks.

After that, Boyd, who was usually a ghost around the place, seemed to be popping up everywhere. He was often

spotted fiddling around in the garden.d2

Occasionally, Yasmine’s figure would appear at the opposite flower bed, but her appearances were few and far

between.

Boyd’s lilies received no care from Yasmine, not even a passing glance. Yet Boyd found himself watching those

scallions grow with an odd sense of unease.

After half a month, Yasmine snipped the scallions and took them to the cafeteria, which meant two whole days of

scallion cuisine on the menu.

Boyd wasn't fond of them.

Watching Yasmine shovel them into her mouth, Boyd couldn't mask his aversion. "I always thought you didn't care

for strong flavors."

Yasmine, poised and unhurried, continued to eat, "That's just your assumption. Though you're not wrong, I

generally don't like intense flavors. But I find this quite nice. Nothing in this world is absolute, you know. Tastes,

habits—they can change. You never know when something will just change."

At her words, Boyd reluctantly took another bite.

Yasmine offered a small smile, "If you don't like it, that is totally fine. No point in forcing yourself."

"Maybe I'll come to like it if I get used to it."

She gave him a fleeting look, her smile light, "Pointless."

Boyd kept his eyes on her, "But it's all for the sake of liking them."

Silence fell between them.

"Those lilies need special care, especially since it's not the ideal planting season."

Yasmine nodded nonchalantly, "I know. I'm not that naive."

Perhaps Boyd had his own stubborn streak, "A little extra effort might do the trick."

Yasmine finished her last bite, glanced at the lingering gaze beside her, and with a half-smile, stood up with her tray.

"You should eat more."

Boyd watched her leave, unaccustomed to hearing such things from her.

Not long after Yasmine's departure, Serana slid into the seat across from him with her tray. She offered Boyd a

bread roll, "Want to eat a bit more?"

Boyd looked at his empty bowl and accepted the bread. "Who are you avoiding?"

Serana nibbled on her vegetables and mumbled a vague, "Hmm. you know, Yasmine doesn't like me much."

Boyd took a bite of the roll, "She's just got a foul temper."

Serana ate in small bites, “Anyway, I’m kind of scared of her. I thought she ruined the lilies last time. Even though

nothing was said, I feel like it was because of me that she ended up so humiliated.”

“It’s over now.”

Boyd, not the most well-versed in comforting others, felt a twinge of guilt himself for having wronged her.

As for Yasmine, holding grudges was not her style—she neither had the patience nor the inclination to waste time

on such meaningless things.

Yet Serana shook her head softly, still uncertain, “Is it really over?”

Boyd looked at her, “What else could there be?”

Serana shook her head again, “I don’t know. I just feel like Yasmine was really angry back then. She’s usually so

cool, but I’ve never seen her explode like that. If it’s truly okay now, that would be great.”

Her words stayed with Boyd, unsettling him. He couldn’t put his finger on what was wrong, but his unease grew.

Serana’s perceptiveness was spot-on. Half a month later, the day after Yasmine’s birthday, everything clicked.

The second batch of scallions made its way to the cafeteria, and there was another unavoidable round of scallion

dishes for lunch. Only this time, there were a few extra dishes.

After the meal, everyone received a slice of exquisite cake. The cafeteria buzzed with chatter, and Ava was there

too.

Yasmine held her cake while Boyd sat beside her, his face contorted as if he were eating onions.

Few girls disliked sweets. Yasmine was no exception.

Ava sat beside her, her expression distant, not uttering a word to Yasmine.

“Happy Birthday.”

Yasmine paused and turned to Boyd. “What?”

Boyd chuckled, “Today’s your actual birthday, right?”

Ava looked on in surprise.

Boyd handed Yasmine a clear glass jar. “I can’t give you anything fancy right now, and probably won’t for a few

years. So, write down whatever you wish for and put it in this jar. When I can stand on my own two feet, I’ll make

them all come true without conditions.”

Yasmine held the empty jar, momentarily lost in thought.

“Can I only put wishes in on my birthday, or any time?”

Boyd looked resigned, “Whenever you want, for anything you want.”

Yasmine raised an eyebrow and hugged the jar. “Well, I’d better think hard. Mansions, sports cars... looks like I

won’t need to lift a finger for the rest of my life.”

Ava chuckled nervously beside them, her tone treading lightly, “You know, this kind of talk usually leads to

marriage, right?”

Yasmine and Boyd froze, then turned to her in unison. “Marriage?”

Ava shrank under their identical looks of confusion, unsure of what to say next. After a tense moment, she

mustered the courage, “Isn’t that how it goes on TV? These promises from boys to girls, and they’re usually with

the expectation of marriage.”

Yasmine’s face took on a pensive look, and she turned to Boyd, “So...”



Boyd snapped back to reality, but his gaze lingered on her. "You know, I didn't really think too much into it."

His eyes were a picture of honesty.

Yasmine couldn't help but find it a bit amusing. What was she even thinking about?

She was still wet behind the ears, and already her mind was racing ahead to the future. "I wouldn't have thought of

it myself if Ava hadn't mentioned it. So since that's the case, I'll gladly accept this gift with a clear conscience."

"Sure."

Yasmine pulled out her backpack and carefully placed the bottle inside.

Boyd glanced at her nearly empty backpack, a tiny frown creasing his brow. Once the bottle was secure, Yasmine

returned to her cupcake, a soft smile playing on her lips. Even when Serena approached, Yasmine's smile didn't

completely fade.

Resting her chin on her hand, with the fork still at her lips, she looked up at Serena with a half-smirk, though she

didn't initiate conversation.

Serena felt a tingle of unease under her stare and handed over a glass jar to Yasmine.

Yasmine glanced at it, her eyes momentarily darkening. "Um... Boyd told me that today's actually your birthday."

Yasmine lowered her gaze to the glass jar in her hands. Serena paused, her expression awkward. "I know I made

things difficult for you last time, and I'm aware that destroying your lilies upset you. I've kept these dried ones.

Hopefully, they can serve as a keepsake."

Yasmine scooped another bite of her cupcake, "Did you tell anyone else about my birthday?"

Clearly, Boyd had let it slip.

Serena's eyes also found Boyd, tinged with concern. Yasmine could be icy and unpredictable, and no one knew

which word might inadvertently cross her. And with her current demeanor, the premonition was far from positive.

Boyd's face remained impassive. "Just her. She's been wanting to apologize, and I thought this would be a good

opportunity. I'm not foolish. If Bryson intended to keep your real birthday under wraps, I certainly wouldn't go

blabbing about it."

Suddenly, Yasmine let out a cold laugh, her fork twirling a strawberry in the frosting.

“You’re not foolish, so you decided to confide in Serena. What? Did she give you some kind of guarantee that made

you trust her not to spread the word?”

Serena, catching on, quickly interjected: “Yasmine, I swear I haven’t told anyone, and I won’t, ever.”

“Did I ask you?” Yasmine’s tone was ice-cold, and for the first time, she looked directly at Serena, her gaze sharp as

a blade, causing Serena to shrink back involuntarily.

Boyd frowned. “She won’t tell anyone.”

Yasmine fell silent for a few seconds. “So she didn’t even promise you, and you just unilaterally trust her?”

Boyd’s expression darkened slightly, his frown deepening as he looked at her, as though Yasmine was being

unreasonably difficult. “I told you, she wants to apologize.”

“And I told you, I loathe her. What are you thinking, assuming I would forgive someone I despise?”

Chapter 1884

“You see, this is just how bad of a person I am. Isn’t it really awful to trample on your sincerity like that? So, do you

still need to apologize to me?”

Serana bit her lip, defiance etched across her face, but tears betrayed her, streaming down her cheeks.  
“I didn’t

mean to,” she whimpered.

“Yeah, I know. So you don’t have to beat yourself up over it,” Yasmine retorted, her voice was cold as steel, yet

somehow, it sounded almost like comfort.

But how could Yasmine offer comfort? That was simply impossible.

Yasmine hooked the corner of her lip up in a smirk, stepped back, and glanced at the crushed petals on the ground,

letting out a soft, mocking chuckle. “Still, you really should think about it. Sometimes, your guilt trips, they’re

nothing but a hassle for everyone else.”

In response to her words, Serana, amidst the sadness and grievance, felt more perplexed than anything else.<sup>d2</sup>

Yasmine’s impatience flickered across her eyes. Talking to Serana was like talking to a brick wall.

Boyd stepped closer, “Before you go around playing the blame game, maybe you should take a good, hard look at

yourself. People are scared of you, and avoid you. When something goes wrong, you’re the first suspect.  
Ever

wondered why?”

Yasmine’s gaze lifted from the trampled remnants to Boyd’s face, her eyes twinkling with mirth but not a trace of

warmth.

“Why indeed? Maybe because I fancy myself a lone wolf, too proud to see any flaws in myself,” She said, the smile

on her lips growing more pronounced. “And yeah, everyone’s afraid of me, they push me away, and when trouble

strikes, I’m the scapegoat. Sounds to me like it’s all my fault.”

Her words left Boyd realizing he’d misspoken. He pursed his lips, ready to try again.

“I’m just saying, it wouldn’t hurt to be aware of this stuff sooner rather than later. I’m worried if you keep this up—”

“Oh? And how long has this ‘condition’ of mine been around? If I needed a wake-up call, what were you doing

before? Why wait until today, when I’ve made your darling cry to enlighten me?”

She glanced at Serana with a cold sneer inside, “So, I guess I should be thanking Miss Serana here, huh? Without

her stepping into the line of fire, I wouldn’t have had the pleasure of your heartfelt concern and advice.”

As Yasmine stepped toward Serana, Boyd blocked her path. Yasmine paused, tilting her chin up to meet his gaze.

They were the same age, but he had the height advantage.

Boyd, all defensive, said, "Yasmine, you're too cynical. Serana's just a kid."

"And what, I'm old enough to be her mother?"

He took a deep breath, struggling for calm. "Can't you stop being so aggressive? I get that you're sharp, and you

see through a lot, but Serana is not like you."

"She's not as cunning, you mean." Yasmine interrupted, her laugh chilling. "Same speech, different day. As you

said, I'm pretty clear on some things."

"Yasmine."

"Relax, with you here, what could I possibly do to your precious? You think I could take you in a fight? I know my

limits."

Boyd frowned, "I would never hit you."

Yasmine watched him quietly for a moment, "Who knows? Maybe one day, if Serana really got hurt by me, you'd

want to kill me.”

His face turned sour. But Yasmine just took a deep breath, dispassionately broke the gaze, and walked over to the

table to grab her backpack.

“Anyway, rest assured, I don’t have the twisted pleasure of coming back just to torment her.”

Slinging her backpack over one shoulder, Yasmine stood next to Boyd, her eyes shifting between him and Serana.

After a moment, Yasmine forced a smile.

“So, you probably won’t get the chance to kill me after all.” With those words, Yasmine headed for the dining hall

door.

The room fell silent, and Bryson, standing at the entrance, waited respectfully for Yasmine.

The director seemed to snap back to reality and hastily announced:

“I forgot to mention, today is Yasmine’s last day here at Angel’s Haven Orphanage. Let’s all congratulate her as she

leaves our care and starts a new life with a family of her own. We hope she grows up healthy, happy, and becomes

a productive member of society.”

Except for a few teachers, no one else had realized what happened. The sparse applause sounded rather dismal.

Yasmine couldn’t care less, her slim figure passing through the doorway with Bryson following, his demeanor

exuding deference.

“Yasmine’s leaving?”

“Yeah, the director just said. And the way she’s acting, it looks like she’s really leaving.”

“Today’s her birthday, right? Was she waiting for us to finish celebrating before she left?”

“Well, she is pretty nice when you think about it. We wouldn’t have had such a nice cake otherwise.”

“Good riddance, though. No more walking on eggshells around her.”

“But no more delicious cake either.”

“Did she decide to leave because she’s upset, or was it planned?”

“Uh. Not sure.”

Ava caught up to Yasmine, clutching at her backpack. “Yasmine, will I ever see you again?”

“It will be best for both of us if we do not see each other again.”



Ava's lip quivered. "You're just going to leave like that? You always said Boyd was the closest thing you had to a

friend here. To leave under these circumstances..."

Yasmine yanked her backpack away without looking back. "I think he'll be relieved. Finally, no one to misunderstand

his kindness, and more importantly, no one to pick on his little darling."

Ava's heart filled with admiration for Yasmine as she watched her retreating figure. From start to finish, she was in

awe. She liked the inexplicable, cool, and elegant aura that Yasmine exuded.

Every word, every gesture, she admired everything about Yasmine, or more precisely, she worshipped her. She

wanted to be that kind of person.

Boyd stood frozen in place for what seemed like an eternity before it finally clicked, and he hurried after her.

Bryson leaned against the car door, watching as Yasmine got inside.

"Yasmine!" Boyd's voice rang out, tinged with a rage—or perhaps some other emotion—that he had never known

before.

Yasmine buckled her seatbelt and cast him a cold glance.

Bryson moved to close the door, but Boyd grabbed it with force.

Yasmine turned to him, "What's wrong? Feeling all riled up because your little darling got wronged and you want to

settle scores with me?"

Boyd stared back at her, "Why are you leaving? Is it because I told Serana about your birthday, or is it about last

time when I misunderstood you?"

Taking a deep breath, Yasmine leaned back in her seat and looked at him for a moment before shrugging. "Both, I

guess. I find it quite dull around here."

She paused, a self-mocking smile tugging at her lips, "You'd think after spending years in this orphanage, I wouldn't

be so full of myself. But the moment I feel slighted, the indignity floods in and I can't shake it off. And seeing you

with Serana, it just makes me sick."

Boyd's grip on the car door tightened, then clenched even harder. "Have you been planning to leave since last

month?"

Yasmine's smile faded as she met his gaze, unflinching. "Maybe. What's the point of asking? If you're happy, just

show it. No one's here to bully your precious Serana and play dirty tricks in front of you anymore. Isn't that great?"

"You..."

"If you're standing up for Serana, then do something about it. If not, step aside." Yasmine's expression turned icy,

her voice devoid of warmth as she refused to look at him again.

"I told you, I won't hit you."

Why did she always assume he would raise a hand to her for Serana's sake?

"If you won't, then you'll never get the chance again. Bryson, close the door."

At her command, Bryson nodded and bent down to pry Boyd's hand away, but it wouldn't budge.

"Yasmine, I apologized to you days ago, and you accepted it."

"It wasn't acceptance. I just stopped caring. I couldn't see any benefit in not forgiving you. Mainly, I just realized

how pointless it all was. I don't know why I've been clinging to this place for so long."

Boyd's eyes flickered.

After a silence, Yasmine turned her head again, her gaze landing on Serana who stood behind Boyd,  
“That pot of

lilies in the yard is Boyd’s apology gift to me. You should like them more. I’m not that interested in them.  
They’re

yours now.”

Serana opened her mouth, but before she could speak, Yasmine had already looked away.

Suddenly, Yasmine kicked Boyd’s wrist, and as he winced in pain, she quickly shut the car door with a  
loud “thud.”

By the time Boyd realized what happened and tried to pull the door open again, he heard the sound of  
the locks

clicking inside.

Gritting his teeth, he pounded on the window, “Yasmine!”

Bryson gave him a helpless look and shook his head before getting into the car.

Chapter 1885

Serana bit her lip, hands clenched so tight her knuckles were white. “I never did

anything to her. Why does she hate me so much?”

Boyd shut his eyes, a heavy sigh escaping him. “There’s no reason. She never

thinks about ‘why’. She does not need reasons to do things.”

And if there was a reason, it was all in her head.

Serana shook her head.

“I don’t know, but I can’t believe she doesn’t have a reason to hate me. Maybe...

maybe...”

Enter title...

Boyd looked up, watching her struggle to find the words, then paused. “Maybe

what?” d2

Serana finally found her voice, though it was tangled up with her anxiety.

“Maybe it’s because of you.”

Boyd was taken aback for a moment, and Serana quickly shook her head, “I...

I’m not blaming you, I mean...”

She stopped, taking a deep breath, “Boyd, are you... are you really upset about

Yasmine leaving? You two were the closest at the orphanage. You used to hang

out all the time, and then there was me, always causing trouble that you had to

fix. You even said some harsh things to Yasmine because of me.”

Boyd’s body stiffened, surprise written all over his face.

Serana was a bit scared by his reaction, “Yasmine only had you as a friend.

Maybe that’s why she resented you looking after me so much.”

Boyd’s expression grew serious, “So she’s holding a grudge against me.”

Serana pressed her lips together, not saying another word. That was probably it.

Boyd stood up, silently grabbing a shovel and replanted the young sprout that

had been uprooted.

Serana watched him, “Maybe when the flowers bloom, we can tell Yasmine to

come back and see.”

Boyd didn’t respond.

After transferring to a new school, Yasmine was still a loner.

Life droned on uneventfully, and the orphanage seemed to have become an

insignificant part of her past that she never mentioned.

When Bryson decided to take Yasmine out of the orphanage, he nearly drained

his savings to make the down payment on a house.

A little over two months after Yasmine left the orphanage, Bryson's company managed to sign a good deal for the time and got a little well off.

On a Friday night over dinner, Yasmine suddenly said she wanted to visit Angel's Haven Orphanage.

Bryson was taken aback. "Is there something you need to do there?"

Yasmine put down her fork, "I need to see Ava. Now that I have some money, I want to get my stuff back. I just feel like something bad will happen if she keeps them."

Not knowing that Yasmine had given Ava her bracelets, Bryson asked, "What stuff?"

Yasmine hopped off her chair and stayed silent. She didn't remember much from her past. Bryson had filled in some blanks. She only knew her background was complicated, and she was sternly instructed never to take out those

bracelets, let alone give them away.

Those bracelets were worth a fortune. She had given them to Ava out of necessity, to help with family troubles, and it had been weighing on her mind ever since. Now that she had some money, it was time to reclaim them.

—

Returning to the orphanage, the kids seemed surprisingly happy to see her, as if the cold and intimidating Yasmine they knew was just an illusion.

Standing by the garden bed she used to tend, the garlic sprouts were long gone, replaced by what looked like spinach.

Yasmine couldn't help but chuckle, "Really turned this place into a vegetable patch, huh?"

She glanced at the nearby lilies, noticing they were flourishing, buds ready to bloom any day.

Impressive, considering they were for Serana, and it made sense he'd put in the effort.



"I thought you'd never step foot here again."

Two months hadn't changed his voice much. It was unmistakably Boyd's.

Yasmine turned slightly to see him standing there, watching her. She raised an

eyebrow, "You really have a lot of prejudice against me, huh? What, you think

I'm so heartless that I wouldn't feel a thing for the orphanage that took me in?"

Boyd just looked at her, saying nothing.

After a pause, Yasmine shrugged, "Alright, I admit I can be heartless. I came to

see Ava. Stopping by here was just a side trip. Happy?"

Boyd wasn't sure how to react. He saw right through her, yet his mood soured

with her blunt honesty.

Just a side trip... He scoffed to himself.

"Cool off yet?" Boyd asked.

"I'm mad? Mad at who?"

"Me."

Yasmine turned fully toward him, her gaze serious. "Did you grow taller?"

Boyd let out a laugh, "You noticed I got taller after just a couple of months? But

yeah, I've been eating well and getting plenty of sleep, so growing a bit makes

sense."

Yasmine nodded, "That's it, then. You're doing well here, so why should I be

sulking alone for two months? I've been carefree on the outside, living happily.

Being angry is bad for your health, and I plan on living to a ripe old age."

Chapter 1886

Boyd glanced at Serana, looked away, and followed Yasmine.

"What are you following me for?" Yasmine threw a fleeting glance at him, her

emotions barely flickering.

"Can't we spend a little more time together since we rarely see each other?"

Yasmine let out a chuckle. "I'm in the middle of something pretty important, and

frankly, I don't think you're the kind of company I'm looking to keep right now."

"So I didn't ask your permission."

Yasmine came to a halt. "You've become quite bold in the two months we

haven't seen each other."d2

Enter title...

"What can I say? You're a tough nut to crack, and it doesn't leave me with many options."

Yasmine took a deep breath. "Look, Boyd, we used to be pretty tight, and I get that a rare meeting warrants more time together, but I'm really tied up with something crucial right now – and it's a private matter."

Her words couldn't be more tactful.

"So, you and Ava have private matters that outsiders shouldn't know about?"

The undertone of his question was clear: Are you and Ava hiding something from everyone else?

As if she wasn't entitled to her own secrets.

"Do you have a problem with that?"

Boyd watched her for a moment before speaking slowly, "I just think it's a shame

that our relationship has become so strained over someone else.”

Yasmine raised an eyebrow and glanced at Serana, who was still standing

there, and snorted. “You’re actually asking me to let go of my grudge against

Serana, aren’t you?”

Boyd frowned. “Why do you have to bring her into this?”

“It’s my business to dislike her, and what happens between us is our business.

You’re the one dragging her into it, not me. On one hand, she’s a thorn in my

side, and on the other, you expect me to be kind to her no matter what.”

“Boyd, I’m just here to take care of some affairs, not to stir any trouble or

threaten Serana. So quit trying to sell me on her like a door-to-door salesman.

So what you’re saying is, whether our friendship survives hinges on whether I

accept Serana?”

Boyd listened quietly until she finished venting. “Is it really that pleasant to hate

someone? You’re usually so clear-headed. Instead of holding onto hatred, why

not let go and feel better?”

"I am a bit irritated, sure. But it's just for the moment. After a good night's sleep,

I'll forget all about it. It's not like I'll be around all the time to make myself

miserable."

With that, Yasmine turned and strode away, but Boyd's voice followed her.

"Have you really never thought about why you hate Serana?"

"Do I need a reason to dislike someone?"

"Yes, you do."

Boyd blocked her path, looking at her intently. "The day you left, Serana said,

maybe you dislike her because of me. Because I was your only friend from the

start, and her arrival has divided my attention."

Yasmine clenched her fists in her pockets, her expression still indifferent.

"Whatever she says is fine, as long as you're happy."

"If I'm wrong, then give me a reason."

Yasmine took a deep breath, her impatience evident.

“I didn’t come here to be forced to give you a reason. It’s whatever you guys

want to think. Honestly, you and Serana are really annoying with all this drama.”

After pushing past Boyd, she left the orphanage.

In the director’s office.

Bryson’s expression was stern. “About Yasmine’s file, I want to confirm again.

There’s really no trace left, right?”

The director nodded. “It’s all gone from here.”

“And the children...” Bryson rubbed his temples, sighing with frustration.

The director quickly reassured him. “I’ll keep a close eye on them. They won’t

have any contact with outsiders for a while. Kids tend to forget, especially about

days that held no special significance to them.”

Bryson exhaled deeply and stood up. “Thanks for your help. I never thought that

my selfish desire to celebrate her birthday would lead to this. If someone starts

asking questions, our lady might be in real danger. I’m being upfront with you,

and I hope you...”

"I will, Mr. Winston, don't worry. I've looked after Yasmine for over three years.

Of course, I want her to be safe. How could I do anything to harm her?"

Bryson nodded. "Thank you. And no one has come by asking about her lately, right?"

The director shook his head. "No one asking about her, but Serana..." Realizing he'd said too much, the director paused.

"Is this child the one who leaked our lady's birthday?"

"She didn't mean any harm. Kids don't think that far ahead."

"I'm not about to attribute malice to a nine-year-old. I just don't want anyone tracing things back to Yasmine through her."

"I'll be vigilant on that front."

Bryson nodded gravely.

—

Boyd had his limits, and Yasmine's icy jabs did sting, but being called annoying,

that was a first. How much patience did he have left?

He was trying to salvage a friendship that she could dismiss so casually. She

used to be tactful, but now, even that was gone. Angered, he didn't chase after

her.

Serana watched him return with a troubled look, knowing they hadn't reconciled.

As he approached, she walked up to him. "Boyd, is Yasmine still mad?"

"I'm done with her. Not many can stand her foul temper."

With that, he walked off.

Serana bit her lip, looking towards the school gates. She set down her watering

can by the flowerbed and ran after Yasmine.

Ava lived halfway up the hillside in a privately built house.

As Yasmine headed in the opposite direction, Serana's voice called out from

Chapter 1887

The relentless prattle chasing after her quickened Yasmine's steps even more.

"Mmm...hmm..."

Serana's voice suddenly sounded strangled. Yasmine stopped dead in her



tracks, spun around, and saw Serana in a man's grip, her mouth covered,

struggling fiercely. The eyes that met hers were filled with terror.

Yasmine's brow furrowed deeply as she locked eyes with the assailant. He wore

a black baseball cap and a face mask, leaving only a pair of menacing eyes

visible, staring her down.

"Mind your own beeswax, or I'll snatch you up too," the man hissed.

Enter title...

"Mmm...help..."d2

All Serana could do was to flail, tears streaming from her eyes in fear. The terror

and helplessness in her eyes were palpable.

Yasmine understood all too well the fear and despair Serana was feeling.

Serana was begging for help, and she knew Jasmine despised her.

Serana's plea was clear, and she was fully aware that Yasmine might not even

bother to respond, perhaps even taking pleasure in her predicament, finally rid

of her.

The kidnapper seemed jittery, scanning towards the orphanage entrance,

fumbling to drag Serana away. But in the struggle, Serana managed to pull

down the man's mask. His face was briefly exposed before he quickly lowered

his head in panic.

Yasmine's gaze flickered. They were still a distance from the entrance, and they

were currently right behind Bryson's parked car. From the orphanage entrance,

it was a complete blind spot.

Even if she called for help, she knew she'd be silenced by the man before

making a sound. Other than Bryson's car, there were no other vehicles around.

Her expression darkened, and she clenched her fists in her pockets, looking

back at Serana's face. Most of it was covered by the man's large hand, leaving

only her pleading eyes visible.

After a moment, Yasmine began to laugh, looking straight into her eyes. "Serves

you right!"

Serana's eyes widened in shock, her struggles ceasing as she stared at

Yasmine's seemingly joyful expression, dumbfounded.

"Everyone knows I can't stand you. How stupid are you to think I'd help you. I

loathe you so much, and here you are, expecting my rescue."

She then turned to the man, "You better scoot. They'll do roll call in class, and

soon they will notice she's missing. I'll head back and cover for her, which will

give you a bit more time. Not sure how long I can stall since the teachers will

likely check on her, but I can buy you ten, maybe fifteen minutes."

The man, anxious at her words, seemed to hurry his actions.

Yasmine continued, "In return for my stalling, I hope you make her suffer. She's

a nasty piece of work. I've been ostracized because of her and I hate her guts. I

want her to feel what it's like to be abandoned, all alone. Especially at night, the

feeling must be intense."

"You're a cruel kid, but I'll do as you ask."

Yasmine smiled, "Thanks, sir. You're the best." Then she turned and ran towards the orphanage.

Serana watched her leave in terror, still struggling, her muffled cries falling on deaf ears.

Yasmine burst into the orphanage, barely crossing the threshold before her legs gave out, and she collapsed, knees and elbows hitting the ground hard, gasping from the pain. But she got up, dusted herself off, her face ghostly pale, her legs still trembling.

When she got to the director's office, Bryson emerged, and seeing Yasmine's pallor, he asked urgently, "What's wrong?"

Yasmine clutched his shirt tightly, her knuckles white.

"Call the cops."

Bryson paused, puzzled, "What?"

Shaking, Yasmine repeated, "Call the cops."

The director snapped to attention and asked, "What happened?"

“Serana was taken by a man at the school gates.”

The director’s eyes bulged. “What...what?!”

“What are you waiting for?! Want her to die?!” Yasmine’s voice spiked with fury, infuriated by the director’s sluggish reaction.

Shaken by her intensity, the director quickly pulled out his phone and dialed for help.

Yasmine let go of Bryson and moved to the director’s desk, grabbing paper and pencil, she began sketching.

—

By the time the police arrived, Yasmine had regained her composure, sitting in the director’s chair, still drawing.

“I don’t know the man. I have never seen him before,” she said.

The director was overwhelmed, “What’s he thinking, snatching her right at the orphanage? What ransom could we possibly pay.”

Yasmine's lips pursed, not looking up, "He was after Serana specifically. Not for ransom, but to kill her."

At that, the director wobbled, and Bryson, as if recalling something, glanced at the director, "Didn't you say someone was inquiring about that child a few days ago?"

The director nodded, visibly flustered, "I didn't expect something like this..."

Ignoring their exchange, Yasmine continued, "The guy had no car. Too secluded here for a walk or a getaway to another district. Dead end to the north, highway south, orphanage west, mountains opposite. No place to go but the mountains."

Her delivery was calm and methodical, her young face devoid of panic.

Chapter 1888

Yasmine narrowed her eyes, fixing him with a frosty stare before finally letting out a derisive chuckle. "Took you long enough to figure it out. Not easy, was it?"

Boyd watched her smirking, the kind of smirk you'd see on someone without a care in the world. It was chilling. "Didn't you ever stop to think that if something really happened to Serana, you wouldn't feel the slightest bit of unease or guilt?"

Serana felt a chill run through her body and glanced out the window. Dusk was approaching, and the temperature was dropping. No wonder she felt cold. She picked up her mug and took a couple of sips.

“Why would I feel uneasy or guilty? It’s not like I killed anyone. Is it my job to feel bad every time somebody bites the dust?” she said, laughing softly. “What do

Enter title...

you think I am, some kind of saint?”

“Because of your selfishness, you let them take her away. If something happens, isn’t your inaction just as bad as pulling the trigger?”

There was a loud “thud,” and the atmosphere in the director’s office instantly froze. Everyone present was stunned, unsure of how to react. Yasmine’s mug flew straight from her hand to smack Boyd squarely on the forehead.d2

The lukewarm water from the mug trickled down his face, mingling with a noticeable streak of red. Some papers on the desk got soaked, and the glass

mug shattered on the floor.

Yasmine remained seated, her expression icy. "So what? Anything that happens

to Serana is my fault? Looks like I don't even qualify as a stranger anymore,

huh?"

She pushed herself out of the chair, frowning as she felt the armrest, and then

hopped down.

She walked directly up to Boyd. She was still shorter than Boyd. Looking at him,

she could only tilt her chin up, but her eyes were colder than ever.

He never saw her as the naive, cheerful kid she was supposed to be, but now,

this was a side of her he couldn't have even imagined.

"So I just can't get away from you people, can I? No matter what I do, it's wrong,

right?"

Yasmine's gaze was unwavering. "Would you be completely satisfied if it was

me who was taken away today instead of her?"

Boyd furrowed his brows, "You're being ridiculous."



“So what’s the point of all this ranting? Just spouting nonsense at me?”

Boyd’s face twisted in anger, clearly more affected by her words than the gash on his forehead from the mug.

“Why don’t you tell me right now how to truly, completely shake you two off my back?” Her eyes tracked the blood dripping down Boyd’s face, void of any warmth.

Boyd was silent for a moment, and the director finally snapped out of his daze.

“Yasmine, this is not the time for arguing. Boyd needs to attend to that cut on his forehead.”

“He won’t die.” Yasmine cut in sharply, maintaining her gaze on Boyd. “Not talking, huh? Fine, I’ll speak. If Serana really died today, you’d probably chase me for life for retribution, right? Seems like even if Serana’s out of the picture, I still can’t shake you off, can I?”

She chuckled bitterly, “What kind of karma is this? Even if Serana dies, I can’t

live in peace because of her. It looks like I'll only have some peace if she stays alive."

The office remained silent, all eyes fixed on Yasmine's slender figure.

"Alright, Boyd, let's make a deal. If Serana comes out of this unscathed, you – and she – better stay out of my life forever. We'll be strangers from now on.

Whatever happens to you doesn't concern me one bit."

Boyd's lips were pressed into a thin line.

"No response? I'll take that as an agreement." Yasmine couldn't bear to look at him any longer and moved to sit on the couch by the window.

"Does this count as Boyd skipping class?"

Boyd shot Yasmine a glance and left the director's office with an icy expression.

Yasmine's palms were cold, and her nerves were still on edge.

Kidnapping. She cursed under her breath, her first ever encounter with such a crisis.

"Yasmine." Bryson glanced outside at the quickly darkening sky.

“Let’s wait it out. I came here to resolve this once and for all. I don’t plan on coming back.”

Bryson nodded.

Just moments ago, the sunset was still visible, but now the weather had turned and rain began to pour.

Bryson peered outside with a hint of concern, “Looks like the rain’s going to get heavier.”

Yasmine frowned and stood up from the couch, “I need to go up the hill.”

Bryson immediately objected, “No way. The police are up there, you won’t be of any help.”

“Who said I was going to help?” Yasmine turned to the director to borrow an umbrella. “I need to get something from Ava. The rain’s getting worse, and I refuse to spend the night here.”

“I’ll fetch it.”

If she let Bryson know she'd handed those bracelets over to someone else, he'd have a fit. She was annoyed enough as it was and didn't need Bryson's incessant nagging in the future.

"Only I can get it." She didn't elaborate, instead focusing on a nearby officer who looked ready to stop her. "I told that guy to give that kid a good scare, and he seemed to agree. He's taken a kid up the mountain, so it'll buy some time. The girl might get roughed up a bit, but there shouldn't be any life-threatening danger. Of course, if she has a bit of sense, or if you guys are quick enough, she should be alright by now."

At worst, she might be scared out of her wits.

"You have confidence in your team, so you probably won't stop me."

The officer was speechless. Staring at the girl who barely reached his waist, he couldn't quite grasp the situation.

She was nothing like a ten-year-old. From start to finish, her words, actions, even her thought processes – none of it resembled what one would expect from

a ten-year-old. And now, even when she was backing down, she did it with such flair.

Did he trust his team? Absolutely.

This girl was a little too sharp for her own good.

"I haven't received the go-ahead, so you can't go up the mountain just yet."

"Aren't you going to check out the situation yourself? You could drop me off on the way. Or are you worried you can't keep me safe?"

The officer chuckled, "Young lady, reverse psychology won't work on me."

"Suit yourself."

Yasmine brushed past him and stood at the doorway, popping open her umbrella.

Bryson knew Yasmine's temperament all too well. He shot the officer a helpless look before hurrying over to her side.

"Miss, for safety's sake, let's wait for the rain to ease up. Otherwise, I'll head up

and fetch her myself.”

Yasmine eyed the rain outside, a frown fleeting across her brow. She turned to look at the officer. “There’s a little girl up there, about my age, home alone. If she ran into that thug...”

The color drained from the officer’s face.

His radio crackled to life at that moment, and from his one-sided conversation,

Yasmine could gather that the criminal had been subdued. However, little

Serana had climbed to the top of a steep incline and was wedged in a narrow

crevice. The gap was too small for an adult, and from the sound of it, the

branches wouldn’t bear an adult’s weight either. With the rain and wind, the

branches were swaying fiercely. And knowing Serana’s timid nature, aside from

clinging to the branches and crying her heart out, she wouldn’t dare to move.

The officer confirmed there was still no foolproof way to reach her.

Yasmine glanced at the rain-shrouded mountain, and after a moment, she said

slowly, “I’ll go.”

“Don’t be reckless!” Bryson was genuinely upset. What a mess of a day this was turning out to be.

“I mainly want an excuse to go up the mountain. Saving Serana is the only way I’ll cut ties with all this mess once and for all.”

She should never have come here today, getting herself into this whole heap of bad luck.

—

Ava lived halfway up the mountain. When they got there, she was home alone.

Before Yasmine left, she mentioned reclaiming her bracelets. Ava seemed to want to say more, but Yasmine had no time to spare.

At the scene, Yasmine saw the thug with a gunshot wound in his leg. Seeing her, his eyes were vicious, even more so than when she had seen him down the mountain.

Yasmine’s body trembled slightly, and a faint smile stretched across her pale

face. Then, she turned her gaze to the continuous crying in the other direction.

She couldn't have imagined what the scene looked like when the officer

described it. The tree roots had grown out of a rock crevice and branched into

new limbs. The limbs stretched out from the rock gap, and below wasn't quite a

cliff, but the slope was steep.

Just like she had been told, the crevice was narrow, and the branches were

brittle.

The wind brought the rain against her face, stinging a bit.

Serana suddenly screamed, mixing with her sobs, giving Yasmine a headache.

They cobbled together some ropes they had found on the spot. Given Serana's

position, they could only manage a single line.

Chapter 1889

"Yasmine, what about you?"

Yasmine confirmed that the rope was tied tightly and wiped the rain off her face.

"Me? What about me? You have no idea how important you are around here. If

anything happened to you, Boyd would skin me alive. You can't die on my



watch.”

Saying these words, Yasmine couldn’t help but shiver all over, feeling an unexpected chill in her heart amidst such a situation.

“I’ll lead the way. You follow.”

Serana nodded vigorously, her earlier trepidation replaced by a semblance of relief. “Okay, okay.”

Enter title...

She glanced at the rope around her waist, then lifted her eyes to look towards the mountain through the rain. Confirming that her rope was in their hands, she finally breathed a sigh of relief. Compared to the earlier nervousness and caution, she now appeared much more relaxed.d2

A single rope brought about a profound psychological transformation in her. It was precisely this change that caught her off guard when the unexpected happened.

Serana's movements, once cautious, had grown careless.

Since she refused to climb by herself, Jasmine had to move closer, bringing them both near the precarious branch.

A sudden gust whipped through the trees, and the branch began to sway violently.

Jasmine's face turned a shade paler. Gripping the branch for dear life, she bellowed, "Don't move!"

The wind raged, the branch thrashing even more fiercely.

"Yasmine..."

Serana watched as Yasmine's body swayed violently, knowing there was a rope on herself, she freed one hand to grab onto Yasmine. In an instant, Serana also lost her balance and let out a scream.

Those holding the rope felt a sudden tug and, instinctively, they pulled with all their might. A resounding crack split the air as the branch snapped.

When they finally pulled the other end of the rope back, only a nearly catatonic

Serana remained.

The broken branch was still hanging there, but there was no figure upon it. A

buzzing filled Bryson's head, his body swaying as he screamed, heart-rending,

"Yasmine!!"

Serana jolted from Bryson's agonized cry, snapping back to reality only to find

nothing but the rain before her.

The fear of this very disaster had cast a shadow over the day's hopes. And as

fate would have it, their worst fears materialized.

"Quick! Get down the hill and find help!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Yes!"

Panic ensued among them.

Despite their best intentions and this being the most viable rescue method given

the circumstances, they had allowed a young girl to take a risk, and now

disaster had struck.

Unable to justify their actions to her family, their superiors, or the public

conscience, the weight of their failure was crushing.

Darkness had fully descended. The rain grew heavier, the sound of wind and

water ominously clear, echoing the emptiness of an abyss.

Serana was rooted to the spot, her face ashen, her body shaking uncontrollably.

A police officer, frustrated and furious, brushed back his hair and paced before

barking orders, "You take her down the mountain. The rest of you, get your

asses down there and find the missing girl!"

They sprang into action, Bryson dropping to the ground, supporting himself on

his hands and stretching out his legs, inching his way down the hill.

"Hey!"

"Don't worry about me. Please, I'm begging you, find Yasmine!"

His voice seemed to carry all his strength. With a heavy sigh, he leaned further

down the slope.

—

As Serana was escorted down the mountain, Ava, uneasy and clad in a raincoat with a flashlight in hand, was making her way up.

Upon seeing Serana, Ava paused, stepping aside to let them pass. She had questions but was intimidated by the uniformed figure carrying Serana.

After they passed, she continued her ascent, following the faint noises to the scene of the incident. Her flashlight swept the area, landing on the rope on the ground and the broken branch. Ava froze, then took a few steps forward, hearing noises from below.

Serana's pale face flashed in her mind, and she gripped the flashlight tighter.

Something terrible had happened.

After a moment of hesitation, she turned and raced down the hill.

—

Back at the orphanage, Serana was settled in the infirmary when the director

came to check on her. Boyd was there too, with a bandage wrapped around his forehead.

Serana, still not fully composed, was curled up under the blankets, shivering with every breath. Now in dry clothes, with her hair dried and her wounds treated, she burst into tears at the sight of Boyd.

“Boyd...”

He approached, his brow furrowed at the sight of the bruises on her face. “Did he hit you?”

The floodgates of Serana’s fear and pain burst open as she recounted her ordeal to Boyd.

Boyd inhaled deeply, trying to keep his voice calm. “It’s over now. I saw the guy being taken away. The details will come out after the investigation, but you should be safe from now on. Stop crying, okay?”

As Serana reached up to wipe her tears, she winced in pain from her wounds.

The director comforted her gently, “Thank goodness nothing worse happened.

You're safe now. That's what matters."

Nodding weakly, Serana agreed.

The director continued, "Can you tell the police what happened? Start from how

you were taken. The more we know, the easier it'll be for them to help."

Serana cringed at the memory, her fear palpable.

Boyd intervened, "She's still shaken. Can't this wait until she's rested?"

The officer hesitated, then conceded, "Rest up, I'll wait outside. Whenever

you're ready."

Boyd was visibly irritated. "Does it have to be today?"

The officer gathered his notebook and pen, sighing, "It could be today,

tomorrow, or the day after. But that doesn't mean I can't wait outside now."

"You're burning the candle at both ends. Tough break."

"For this case, no matter how hard we slog, we're in for a scolding."

After all, letting a kid barely in her teens take a risk to save someone and then

things going south? They might as well kiss their badge goodbye.

Boyd didn't quite grasp the full weight of his words, nor did he care to. All that mattered was that Serana was safe now.

The director let out a weary sigh, looking at Serana with a mix of regret and pity,

"I dropped the ball, got too caught up in cooperating with the investigation.

Chapter 1890

The moment the branch snapped, Yasmine's heart skipped a beat as if she

were plummeting down a cliffside. But in that brief instant, she felt an odd sense of relief.

At last, she could shake off Boyd and Serana, those two thorns in her side. Now,

she could breathe easy, no longer needing to trouble her mind over their drama.

It had been quite the headache dealing with them both.

Boyd would be pleased. Serana, the apple of his eye, was safe and Yasmine,

the heartless one, wouldn't be a sore sight for him anymore.

She wasn't a fool though. She wouldn't gamble with her life just to play

matchmaker for them. In this moment, she was determined to survive at all



Enter title...

costs.

Thankfully, it wasn't a sheer cliff she was dealing with.

However, the fall from the tree to the mountain's side was significant, and when

she landed, the impact sent a jolt through her body as if every organ had been

shattered. The pain was so intense, she couldn't pinpoint where it hurt the

most.d2

As she slid down the mountain, the thick underbrush and brambles tore at her

clothes, now muddy and ripped. Instinctively, she reached for anything to steady

herself.

At first, her descent was too rapid, and each grasp at stability only led to more

sliding. After several attempts, she managed to slow down.

Finally, gripping a protruding rock, she steadied herself, but the rain had

loosened the stones, and before she could catch her breath, the rock split,

sending her sliding down once again.

Rain washed soil down the mountainside, forming streams of mud that

cascaded over her. Twigs snapped and pebbles pelted her from above. Thorns

scratched her face, and her clothes were a mess, revealing legs and arms

littered with cuts of all sizes.

Initially, she had the strength to struggle, to fight for her life, but as the cold rain

numbed her pain, her strength waned. Though her speed had lessened, even

grasping for a handhold became too much effort.

Yasmine sighed, a bitter laugh escaping her lips in the midst of the downpour.

The irony wasn't lost on her. Risking her life to save the very person she

despised, it sounded like a heroic tale of self-sacrifice.

But when had she ever been the saintly type?

Yasmine mused ruefully. Well, if this was to be her end, at least she'd leave

behind a noble reputation.

Darkness enveloped her, punctuated only by occasional flashes of lightning.

And then, just when she felt her body hanging in mid-air, she plummeted once more.

She braced for death's embrace, but it was only a moment before she hit the ground again, her body wracked with the same excruciating pain as before, her organs aching.

This time, a metallic taste filled her mouth.

A bolt of lightning illuminated her surroundings, revealing she had landed on a flat stretch of land—likely the base of the mountain. Exhausted and in pain, she lay there for a while, moving her limbs feebly before finally settling down.

Using the lightning's flash, she surveyed the area. The rain stung her face, and she could barely open her eyes.

She raised her hand to shield them, lying silently in the downpour, wondering if she'd ever walk or use her hands again.

She was drained, hurting, and struggling seemed futile.

Bryson wouldn't give up on her. Nor would the cops. They lived by the rule: no body, no case. The question was whether she'd live to see their rescue.

After what felt like an eternity, a light suddenly swept her way, followed by a voice she recognized. "Yasmine?!"

She weakly moved her arm, "I'm here..."

Her voice was faint, but the person heard her. Yasmine could sense someone closing in until the light finally settled on her.

"It's me, Ava!" Ava rushed over, shocked by Yasmine's battered state. The young girl was visibly shaken as she helped Yasmine to her feet. "Oh my God, did you really fall from the top?"

Yasmine slumped against her, "More like flew down."

Ava wiped the mud from her face, "You're one lucky lady."

"I didn't expect you to be the one to come."

Ava brushed Yasmine's hair back, "Did you forget? This mountain is my stomping ground. No one knows it better than me. If you fell from the top, this is

the worst place you could end up.”

Yasmine managed a weak smile, “Truly the worst.”

“Stop talking. Save your strength. The police and Bryson are looking for you.

And hey, there’s a cave nearby, hidden away. Let me take you there. This rain is

too heavy.”

“I can’t walk...”

Ava helped Yasmine sit up and handed her a flashlight. Then she turned,

kneeling in front of her, “Climb on my back.”

Yasmine looked at Ava’s slender, fragile silhouette, feeling a mix of pain,

vulnerability, and gratitude. Hot tears flowed down her rain-chilled cheeks. “You

can’t carry me.”

Ava turned, grabbing Yasmine’s arm and draping it over her shoulder. “I could

carry a sack of flour up the mountain when I was five. I bundle all the firewood

for my family. You’re lighter than a load of logs.”

As she spoke, she steadied Yasmine and slowly rose to her feet.

The cave wasn't far, and behind its vine-covered entrance lay a stockpile of firewood. Ava settled Yasmine next to some dry straw.

Then, seeing the wounds on Yasmine's body, Ava hesitated, not wanting to cause more pain. She tried to clean the mud without touching the injuries, eventually suggesting, "You should probably take off those clothes. You'd be warmer naked than in those wet rags."

Yasmine glanced at her soiled attire and frowned but shook her head. Ava, however, began helping her undress without another word.

"I shouldn't have asked you," she muttered while helping Yasmine out of her clothes. "I've got no fire in me. You hide in the haystack for a bit, and I'll go outside to look for them."

Right now, Yasmine was as helpless as a fish on a cutting board, barely able to do anything but let Ava strip her bare.

"Oh my God, Look at your injuries. You must hurt like hell."

Yasmine gave a slight shake of her head, "Doesn't hurt."

Ava rolled her eyes. "Why you gotta be so tough? It's clear as day you're

hurting, yet you won't admit it. You shouldn't be like that, you know. People can

get the wrong idea."

"It's really not painful," Yasmine insisted. "I just feel really cold."

Ava thought for a moment and nodded. "I guess that makes sense. I remember