

## Extraordinary 791

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That reality and realization had Mary gritting her teeth in bitterness. Such resentment inundated her that waves of agonizing pain swept over her.

Lucas gazed at Ashlyn, who was a near distance away. She had her eyes lowered; her eyelashes beautifully curved. Her crystalline eyes reflected a myriad of colors.

The woman seemed radiant yet incredibly alluring, just like a bottle of fine wine during winter, cold yet intoxicating.

This is precisely how my woman should be!

Bianca looked at Ashlyn in excitement. "You're so talented, Sweetie! I was just asking you who embroidered this handkerchief earlier, but from the look of things now, the answer is obvious. You were the one who embroidered it as well, no?"

It was only then that Seraphina noticed the handkerchief in Bianca's hand. She chortled. "This is naturally Ashlyn's embroidery. She's probably the only person in this world who can embroider such a delicate yet unique centenary icon!"

At her resolute answer, the crowd went into an uproar once more.

Meanwhile, Nicholas grew increasingly emotional upon hearing that.

There's no mistake about it! She must be that woman's daughter! This is definitely it! I must get to the bottom of this matter!

"I'm glad you like it, Old Mrs. Yates." Ashlyn remained as calm as ever, unaffected by all the praises.

She was not arrogant because of her exceptional embroidery skills, nor was she worked up over Bianca's and Seraphina's compliments.

It was as though it was merely an ordinary occurrence, as typical as eating and drinking.

Standing beside Bianca, Ryan gazed at Ashlyn with a complicated look in his eyes.

His heart raced wildly.

After all, such an outstanding woman naturally had men falling in love with her.

Regretfully, his gaze then fell on the imposing and handsome man behind her.

The two men locked gazes.

He could distinctly sense the possessiveness and domination in the man's eyes.

Lucas, on the other hand, instantly sensed Ryan's gaze.

This is the man who sat next to my woman during the piano competition. The look in his eyes whenever he gazes at her is downright irritating. Hah! Another one of her admirers, huh? Just wait and see how I'm going to break him!

He went over to Ashlyn possessively and tried his best to remind her of his presence. "Honey, how would you like to deal with Mary and Penelope?"

Hearing that, Ashlyn lowered her gaze and looked at the two women on the ground.

"They're part of the Yates family, and since Old Mrs. Yates has promised to introduce me to the person I desire to meet, I'll leave them to her discretion."

"How magnanimous of you, Sweetie!" Bianca nodded approvingly. Then, she ordered, "Lock them in the dark room. They're not allowed to eat anything for three days and are to kneel for the whole three days!"

The dark room was usually used to punish the help who committed mistakes.

At once, Mary burst into tears. "Mom! I don't want to go there, Mom!"

Not only is it dark and damp in the dark room, but rumor even has it that there are rats and bugs. Penelope and I have always been living the high life, so how could we stay at such a place?

Bianca stared right into her teary eyes with a chilly countenance. "Going to the dark room is already the most lenient punishment. I'll kick both of you out if you protest further!"

Several bodyguards came over and dragged both Mary and Penelope away.

That punishment was indeed pretty light, for they merely had to kneel without being allowed any food.

However, their heinous behaviors were scorned and ridiculed by everyone present.

Thus, it would be nigh impossible for Mary to blend into the aristocratic circle henceforth.

Bianca was in an awfully foul mood. If it were not for the embroidered handkerchief and shawl, her mood would probably be even worse.

She was advanced in age, so she could not take such an intense blow.

After being angered by Mary for so long, she had already grown tired. Hence, she took her leave of the guests and went to the lounge.

No sooner had she settled down in the lounge than Ashlyn came over as well.

She sat down beside Bianca. "Are you having a headache? Let me give you a massage."

With that, she stretched out her long, slender fingers, placing them on Bianca's temples. Then, she started kneading gently.

In a flash, Bianca felt her body relaxing.

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Ashlyn's force when massaging was neither too hard nor soft but perfectly moderate. She also controlled her rhythm well, neither too fast nor slow.

Shortly after, Bianca slumped onto the sofa and fell into slumber without realizing it.

Keanu came over and scooped Bianca up. Although he was over seventy years old, he was still strong and robust without looking old at all.

In fact, he appeared inexplicably cool as he carried Bianca in a bridal carry like a domineering president.

"While I have no idea who you'd like my wife to introduce to you, Ms. Berry, I hope you don't do anything that hurts her. Otherwise..."

The instant she appeared at the birthday banquet, she caused an uproar. Undeniably, she's beautiful and exceedingly outstanding. Not only do Mary and Penelope pale in comparison to her, but even many of the wealthy heiresses in Maredania can't compare to her. But... I can't shake off the feeling that she's too forceful and is no easy prey. Thus, it's best to keep a distance from someone like her.

He could tell that his son had feelings for her, and Bianca liked her beyond words.

Therefore, he was apprehensive that the Yates family would plunge into chaos because of her.

In response, Ashlyn merely flashed him an airy smile.

"Don't worry, Old Mr. Yates. It's nothing to Old Mrs. Yates, but it will possibly save someone's life."

Pausing for a moment, she cast her gaze at Bianca's countenance in sleep. "Besides, she's also very nice to me. There's no reason for me to hurt her."

"I hope you'll remember the words you said to me today, Ms. Berry!" Keanu then turned around and left

with Bianca in his arms.

“What did he say to you?” An alluring voice rang out behind her out of the blue.

Ashlyn knew it was Lucas without even needing to glance over her shoulder.

She let out a helpless sigh. “Why are you here?”

“How was I to gift the Yates family a huge gift if I didn't come?” Arching a brow, Lucas reached out and hugged her waist from behind.

Ashlyn snuggled into his arms wearily. “That's the Yates family's scandal, yet you brought it out into the open. Fortunately, the Yates family is an upright family. If they're petty, you would've made yourself another enemy. You don't need to offend a family because of me.”

“Yet, you had no qualms offending my parents because of me. So, you deserve everything I do for you.”

The man's voice was almost a whisper. As his hoarse voice drifted into her ear, his warm exhale brushed against the sensitive organ.

That had her shuddering inexorably.

“What a sensitive little one.” Chuckling lowly, Lucas released his hold on her.

Ashlyn shot him a hard glare. “Shut up!”

Alas, it only resulted in a burst of even heartier laughter from the man.

“May we speak to you in private, Mr. Nolan?” Just then, a voice interrupted them without warning.

Lucas lifted his eyes and cast his gaze over, only to see a few Maredanian business moguls heading toward him.

Ashlyn quirked a brow tactfully. “I'll go and have a bite.”

After saying that, she walked toward the buffet area.

No sooner had she taken a plate and moved to take some fruits than Greg hurried over to her, wiping the sweat off his forehead. “Ms. Berry, a slew of beauties handed me their business cards, all clamoring to act in my movie! But they don't even have any experience. Why on earth are they so enthusiastic?”

Hearing that, Ashlyn burst into giggles. “It proves that you're popular among the ladies!”

Greg darted his eyes around. Finally, Ashlyn was free, so they both went to a bar nearby.

As soon as they had taken their seats, Greg exhaled deeply and took out a photo from his suit pocket.

Just when he was about to ask Ashlyn whether she was Alice's daughter, he saw the renowned president of the International Piano Association, Caleb, and his brother, Nicholas, heading their way.

They came over and sat down beside them.

Words eluded Greg.

He clutched the photo in his hand tightly, sighing inwardly. Why is it that someone always comes and interrupts me whenever I want to ask about this matter? Ugh! How frustrating!

“Lynnie, let me do the introductions. This is my brother, Nicholas Powell. He's also a fan of embroidery.” Caleb's voice was as booming as ever.

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Ashlyn turned to Nicholas and immediately noticed how tall and squarely built he was. Despite being middle-aged, he was poised, and his figure was not less charming than the other younger men in the crowd.

His sharp eyes contained a sense of indifference from having been able to see through all worldly matters. Yet, there was a composed and noble air about him—qualities exclusive to people in his age group—along with an innate sense of a businessman's decisiveness and dominance.

It was not hard to understand why the young girls would have butterflies in their stomachs, the young women would go gaga over him, and the older women would be sent into a frenzy.

Unlike Caleb, who was gentle and insouciant, Nicholas was a charismatic alpha male whose presence was always imposing. Although he was already in his forties, his well-kept appearance made him a league above the rest. In fact, his good looks were comparable to those of the young male idols, if not better.

“I'm pleased to meet you, Ms. Berry.” Nicholas stared at the lady before him. Undoubtedly, Ashlyn was the most gorgeous and attractive one in the crowd.

With her exquisite features and porcelain skin, she looked elegant and regal, but her almond-shaped eyes carried a tinge of coldness as if she was trying to keep a distance from all people.

In spite of the chilliness that she exuded, she was captivating. Yet, not a sign of arrogance could be seen.

He was impressed to see that she remained humble and courteous even though she possessed impressive talent.

If someone else has attained exceptional achievements in a particular field at a young age, I bet that person would swagger everywhere they go. Take the previous lady who shares the same surname as her, for example; they were of similar age but were total opposites.

Nicholas stopped mulling over it. Upon sensing that it was quite rude to keep staring at Ashlyn, he withdrew his gaze and looked elsewhere.

All of a sudden, he caught a glimpse of the photo Greg was holding.

That's... His pupils shrank.

"Mr. Powell..." Before Ashlyn could properly greet Nicholas, he narrowed his eyes and stretched out his arm to grab Greg. No one could have expected the composed-looking man to make such an action all of a sudden.

Seeing so, Ashlyn instinctively reached for Greg's shoulder and swiftly pulled him backward, causing Nicholas to miss.

"What are you doing, Nicholas?" Caleb stared at his brother in shock.

He's usually very controlled, even in the face of calamity. Why did he behave out of character, especially in front of Lynnie? That won't leave a good impression on her.

Nicholas snapped out of it and gathered himself. "Please pardon me for my earlier behavior. Sir, may I take a look at your photo?" he said to Greg apologetically.

Greg was taken aback as well. Deep down, he tried to recall if he had done anything that offended the famous tycoon unknowingly.

All the world leaders are eager to network and do business with a high and lofty man like Nicholas. On the other hand, I'm just a small fry who has never met him, let alone socialized with him. It's impossible that I've stepped on his toes before.

Upon hearing Nicholas' explanation, he let out a sigh of relief. So, it's about the photo.

Then, he hesitated for a while before deciding to hand the picture over. "Here you go, Mr. Powell. This is an image of an old friend of mine. Is there anything special about it?"

Ashlyn looked at the photo as well. A stunned expression appeared on her face when she saw it was a childhood picture of her with her mother.

"Director Maxwell, why do you have this photo with you?"

Her mother looked graceful and poised when she was young, and her smile was as gentle as ever, exactly the way Ashlyn remembered it.

Instantly, her heart ached as though a sword had pierced through it. The agonizing pain was excruciating, to the point that it numbed all her senses.

She clenched her fists only to open them again. Repeatedly, she did the action several times. After what felt like an eternity, she said in a quavering voice, "That's... my mother."

A slight pause later, she added, "Mr. Powell, could you tell me why you were so worked up when you saw the photo?"

Her crystal-like eyes were directed at the man before her, whose lips were pale. Instead of replying, he stared at her intently for a long time.

Just when everyone thought Nicholas would not utter a word, the man broke the silence with a hoarse voice. "We met once. Has she really passed away?"

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They were probably not well acquainted with each other since they had only met once.

Ashlyn nodded and replied, "In a car accident."

Even after so many years, she had always believed that her mother was still alive, living in a different place somewhere out there.

She was sure that her mother had a reason for never coming back in search of her.

Just like the information she had gathered thus far, she went missing while Alice was sold.

Ashlyn was determined to find her mother.

I must locate her! I must resolve the mystery and discover the truth. I need to know what happened back then. Also, where is my sister? How is she after all these years? Is she alive or dead?

She refused to believe that two people could vanish into thin air without rhyme or reason.

Nicholas tried very hard to suppress his emotions. With trembling hands, he held the photo and shut his eyes.

It's her! It's really her! She was that woman in the past. Yes, she was! If that's the case, then this girl in front of me must be her daughter. It's been such a long time; her daughter's all grown up now. As for me... I've been waiting for her my entire life.

At that moment, an indescribable surge of sadness and distress welled up within him.

When he heard Ashlyn confirm Alice's death, his heart throbbed dully. An immense sorrow and grief washed over him, consuming him to the extent that he felt so suffocated.

This is so painful. I can't breathe...

His eyes reddened as a petrifying look crept up on his face. "Kiddo..."

He had a lot to say but uttered nothing in the end.

Holding the photo, he was devastated to the point of going through a mental breakdown.

That talented woman was just like how he remembered her: beautiful, stunning, and elegant.

However, she was no longer living in that world. Nicholas found it hard to believe the ending he obtained after all those years of waiting and searching.

Caleb scrutinized his expression. He had never seen his ever-so-composed brother reveal such an emotion.

This is far too strange! It's absolutely peculiar!

"What's the matter with you, Nicholas?"

"Nothing. I got all excited to see the daughter of an old friend," Nicholas answered with a hoarse voice. Then, he turned to Greg. "Sir, could you gift this photo to me?"

Greg was rather reluctant to part with it. "Mr. Powell, the lady in the picture was my former school physician. She took care of me really well, so I cherished this photo a lot."

Then, he turned to Ashlyn. "Ms. Berry, I rushed all the way to Maredania with only one objective in mind. I wanted to verify if you were the young girl in the photo."

Ashlyn nodded and answered, "Yes, it's me. So... Is this the reason why you looked for me? You did not come to me for nothing, right?"

Her expression was a little dazed. "Back then... when I found out that my mother had passed away, I was totally devastated. Horace never treated me well. It was you who helped me through the difficult times by giving me food and buying me clothes. For that, I'm extremely grateful. Therefore, I want to repay your kindness when I can stand on my own two feet."

She paused before continuing, "Director Maxwell, you're a kindhearted man. A good person like you

shouldn't be oppressed or humiliated. Your talents should be seen by the world!"

"Thank you, Ms. Berry." No words could describe how touched Greg was as he gazed at her.

He never expected his little actions back then would lead to the biggest turning point in his life years later.

Meanwhile, Lucas was displeased. "How come you only remember Greg but not me?"

He was very annoyed that she had completely forgotten about the episode where she saved him in the countryside. It was as though that part of her memory was erased from her mind.

That was how we first met. Why did she forget about it?

Ashlyn shook her head and explained, "I have no idea as well. It seems like there are missing pieces in my memory."

She did find it very strange because she had an impressive memory. It was almost photographic.

Why is it that I just can't recall the part when Lucas and I met? Did I save him? I really don't know.

Nicholas had a graceful smile on his face as he looked at her benevolently and dotingly. "Kiddo, if you don't mind, could I hear you call me?"

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Ashlyn was stunned, but she quickly recollected herself and replied, "Mr. Powell."

Caleb could not hide his annoyance. "Lynnie, I'm your mentor. Yet, you've never addressed me properly, not even once."

Obviously, he was fighting for attention.

She glanced at him and snapped, "Stop messing around, Oldie."

"Oldie? I'm at my prime age. Do you know how many young girls chase after me and dream about marrying me?" he retorted.

"Kiddo, please remember to look for me whenever you need my help, okay?" Then, Nicholas looked at his watch and realized that he had spent a great amount of time there. "I shall take my leave now as I've got something else to take care of." As the tycoon of the crude oil industry, every second was precious to him.

Although he could tell that Greg treasured the photo a lot, he selfishly wanted to keep it for himself. "I'll have this photo. Mr. Maxwell, you're a director, aren't you?"

"Yes, my new movie Trashy Idol is now showing in H Nation. You can watch it at the cinema if you're interested, Mr. Powell." Greg's eyes were still fixated on the photo.

"Since you've given this photo to me as a gift, it goes unsaid that I should return the favor." Nicholas smiled and said, "My assistant will contact you to discuss this further. See you next time."

After leaving that remark, he left with Caleb.

At that time, Greg did not take his words seriously. A world-renowned businessman wants to give a nobody like me a present? How is that possible? Moreover, even though I refused to let him have the photo, he still took it away. How domineering!

In the future, something happened that turned his life upside down, something that all the directors in H Nation could only dream of. Never in a million years would Greg have thought such a thing would occur.

Meanwhile, there was not a single ray of light in the damp dark room, nor were there windows or ventilation.

Besides a metal gate that seemed to be permanently shut, there was also a pungent stench lingering in the air.

Mary was holding a shivering Penelope, who said, "Mom, I'm so scared."

Though it was pitch black, the former remained tough. "What is there to be afraid of? It's just a dark room. Why are you being a scaredy cat?"

Penelope was in tears. "Mom... I'm starving..." she said in between her sobs.

She barely ate anything at the banquet, and the dark and cold room made it worse. Her stomach was growling so loudly.

I wonder what time it is now. What is going to happen to me if I'm locked inside here for days? Oh, and my face? I just had a mesotherapy injection and masseter injection to make my skin youthful and my face skinnier. Am I going to stay in this awful place for a few days and let it ruin my perfect skin? Oh no, I don't want that...

Tears rolled down her cheeks profusely. "Mom, when will Granny be willing to let us out?"

"She's not your granny! She's a wicked witch!" Mary retorted fiercely, "We are related by blood, yet she'd rather treat Ashlyn, that b\*tch, better than us!"

Penelope wiped her tears away and sat upright. "Granny is only deceived by Ashlyn momentarily. As long as she can recall how good we've been to her, I'm sure she will let us out of here."

“Hah...” Mary sneered, but Penelope could not see her mother's vicious expression in the dark. “No matter what, we're the blood kin of a count. With that precious relationship as our trump card, she can't deny us our freedom.”

“Mom... Why does it feel like you loathe Granny?” The latter was taken by surprise.

“No way!” Mary quickly dismissed the claim.

Moments later, she stated, “If you feel tired, come lie down on my lap and take a rest. You're my only family in this world, and we only have each other to lean on. Why do we lead such a hard life?”

“Mom...” Penelope could not help it and bawled her eyes out. Her mother's words made her feel even more miserable.

It was already late at night, and Ashlyn was invited to Bianca's residence.

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Upon entering the living room, Ashlyn scanned her surroundings quietly and was quite surprised to see a vintage Chanaean interior rather than Rococo or Gothic styles and designs that were popular in Maredania.

The mansion was very grand with a vintage design. Being there made her feel like she had time-traveled to an older era.

From the maroon lounge chair to the matching couch and coffee table, everything was very much antique looking. Even the fans casually placed on the bed were exactly the same as those from ancient times.

After a while, Bianca walked out slowly, assisted by Matilda.

She sat on the lounge chair, looking somewhat tired. Then, she glanced at Ashlyn and said, “Please have a seat, Ms. Berry.”

“I'm so sorry to disturb you at this hour, Old Mrs. Yates. I wouldn't have done so if not for this urgent matter that required me to look for Old Mr. Leno.”

“Old Mr. Leno?” Bianca was puzzled at first, but she recalled who he was the next minute. “Are you referring to Ian Leno? Because of Mr. Nolan?”

She came to know that Lucas had a mental illness. He might look handsome and cool, but he's not entirely well.

“Yes, that's right. Old Mr. Leno is a nomad, so not even the people closest to him have his contact

details. I heard that you have a close relationship with him. Thus, I'm here to ask for a favor," Ashlyn explained her intention sincerely.

"Lucas' illness cannot be delayed any further as his episodes are occurring more often than ever. Whether it's Nolan Group or South Star Airlines, they require his support and management. I dread to imagine the consequences that will follow if he were to collapse, especially the number of staff who would lose their jobs and eventually have a knock-on effect on their families. Thus... we can't afford to have anything bad happen to the most important man in the company."

Hearing so, Bianca sighed. "I'll do my best to help you, whether it's for the sake of your mother or Aureate Group. Ian hasn't had an easy life. In recent years, he has stopped treating people because he's practically on his last leg, struggling on whilst at death's door. Anyhow, let me try. The chance will be given to you, but you'll have to seize it."

Bianca cast a look at Matilda, who immediately went to get her the address book.

Ashlyn was once again dumbfounded by the fact that she could still see a physical copy of an address book in that time and era. Moreover, it had the size of a small notebook.

"This is his number. Copy it down. It all boils down to you now, whether you're able to convince him to treat Mr. Nolan. You know, he's known to be as stubborn as a mule for as long as I remember. So, you'd better be prepared." Bianca pointed at a string of numbers.

She then added, "Ms. Berry, life isn't a bed of roses. No one can luck out all the time. At this age, I've seen it all and can accept anything with an open mind."

Ashlyn smiled radiantly. "Despite what you say, I can tell there's one thing that's still quite unsettling for you."

"Oh? What is it?"

"Love."

Bianca heaved a long sigh. She knew what Ashlyn was implying—kinship. It was something she could never give up in her life.

After copying down that phone number, Ashlyn rose to her feet. "Thank you, Old Mrs. Yates. I promise to lend a helping hand if there's anything that the Yates family needs from me in the future."

"You can never allow yourself to owe others a favor, can't you? You don't need to repay me anything. This is in exchange for your exquisite embroidery."

As a clever woman, Bianca could read between the lines of Ashlyn's words.

"All right, I'm getting tired. You may go ahead."

She stood up and waved at Ashlyn.

The latter nodded and expressed her gratitude again, "Thank you so much."

With that, she left the quiet mansion, walking with her back ramrod straight.

Bianca did not go to bed as she said she would. Conversely, she remained standing at the same spot and stared blankly at the direction where Ashlyn had headed out.

It was not until after a while that Matilda reminded her about the time. "It's late."

"How nice would it be to have this girl as my granddaughter? Unfortunately, I'm not blessed with one. Say... Which family is this sweetie come from? Having a child like her is a tremendous blessing."

At that point, Bianca could not help but think about the two useless ones she had locked up in the dark room.

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Bianca shook her head to dismiss the unpleasant thought. Why did I think about them? It makes my blood boil in rage.

"Old Mrs. Yates, if you fancy, you can have her be your granddaughter. Alternatively, I think Mr. Yates... If that happens, she'll still be your child but in a different sense."

Matilda was not blind. She was so observant that she noticed how Ryan protected Ashlyn at the banquet.

Ryan had remained chaste for many years, never engaging in romantic relationships nor attending blind dates that Bianca had set up for him. All he ever did was spend time with his piano, which made Bianca very anxious.

It's almost time for Mr. Yates to return to the air force for his training. Once he's in the army, the chance of him meeting a suitable girl would be as good as none.

"Just take a look at how lovey-dovey she and Lucas are. Lucas taught Mary a lesson on Ashlyn's behalf, whereas Ashlyn went all out to help him locate Ian. Oh my, what has gotten into me? Lucas has humiliated the Yates, yet I'm only enraged by Mary. I just can't bring myself to be angry at Ashlyn and Lucas."

Bianca sighed once more. Disappointment toward her own family members arose in her heart. At the same time, she was overwhelmed by her adoration and longing for Ashlyn.

The conflicting emotions came rushing at her like a flood, suffocating her and making her heart throb with pain.

"If only I had known the true colors of both the mother and the daughter, I... wouldn't..."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Yates. Blood is thicker than water, regardless. No matter how good Ashlyn is, she's still an outsider." Matilda consoled her, "Moreover, rumor has it that she's secretly married to Mr. Nolan, and then there are talks about them about getting a divorce. Should I get someone to investigate further? To find out if they're still married?"

"That sounds good. Please go ahead and investigate it. If she's still single... It won't be a bad idea to pair her up with Ryan."

The heaviness in Bianca's heart finally dispersed. "Hurry up and get it done."

"Noted."

After leaving the mansion, Matilda's servile attitude was replaced with a sneer as she disappeared into the night.

In the meantime, Ryan was a different person back at his mansion.

Gone was the high-spirited and vigorous man people saw at the banquet. On the contrary, he looked quite drained and worn out. Even the streak of blue hair covering his forehead exuded a hint of weariness.

His mansion was at the very far end of the Count's Mansion, the quietest unit yet the most luxurious one.

Because he liked playing the piano, he relished the silence.

It was already late at night, but all of Ashlyn's expressions kept playing in his head.

He managed to obtain a strand of Mary's hair from the hotel they both had stayed in. Then, he sent it to a DNA test center.

After waiting for several days, the test center informed him that they could not run a DNA test because the strand of hair he had submitted did not contain any hair follicles.

The best specimen to run the test with was blood samples. However, it was challenging for him to get that from Mary.

He could not shake off the feeling that Mary and Penelope did not belong to the count's family.

Another thing that had been bugging him was his inexplicable innate fondness toward Ashlyn.

Where does this special affection come from? I really want to find out so badly.

The man sighed as he switched on his laptop.

Lately, he was preparing to request Mysterious yet Majestic to help him check how did his older sister go missing in the past.

However, every single one of his requests was rejected by the underground group.

Feeling troubled and frustrated, he tried logging in to the page where the clients of Mysterious yet Majestic were supposed to submit their requests.

He had spent a lucrative sum to get access to the platform.

As usual, he performed a series of procedures to complete his entry.

At the end of the page where the amount of remuneration was expected, he selected the option which said two million.

The first time he did that, he indicated five hundred thousand, but the request was denied. He entered one million during his second attempt, and the result was still the same.

At his third try, he raised the amount to one and a half million, yet nothing changed.

Is the amount too little?

That time around, he chose two million without any hesitation.

Shortly after placing his request, he received an anonymous phone call.

"Hello." The hoarse voice of a man sounded at the other end of the line. "You want us to investigate the case where the daughter of the Yates family went missing? It's going to be tough because the incident happened too long ago."

"I can raise the amount." It took Ryan a while to realize who he was speaking to.

Someone from Mysterious yet Majestic has contacted me!

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"Sir, money is not the problem. I'll talk to my colleagues about this. If they agree to take the case, we'll launch the investigation." Then, he hung up.

Ryan stared at his dark phone screen thoughtfully. It's really not easy to investigate something that happened decades ago. But that was exactly the reason he thought of commissioning Mysterious yet Majestic to help him.

He had heard that the organization was capable of solving any case.

Can they really succeed where the Count's Mansion has failed?

At the same time, a typically inactive group chat that Ashlyn was in began pinging with a flurry of messages.

Quiet Forest: Someone is paying two million to investigate the case of Count's Mansion's missing heiress.

Flying Fish: Two million? Missing heiress from the Count's Mansion? Hasn't she returned?

Boss: Yeah. What's the point of launching an investigation when she's already back?

Lone Breeze: What's there to investigate? And two million? All these dumb rich people.

Helios: The Count's Mansion's heiress has been missing for so many years. How can they find any clues now? The case might be workable if it was less than ten years old.

Ashlyn could not help but frown as she read the message.

She was soon bombarded with a fresh wave of messages.

Lone Breeze: Hey, where's Zero? Why is he missing out on all the gossip?

Boss: He's probably asleep? It's pretty late.

Helios: Is Zero suddenly subscribing to a healthy sleep cycle? Haha.

Quiet Forest: Hey, back to the topic. Are we taking this case or not? We need to decide now. I gotta turn the client down if we're not taking the case.

Zero: I'm not asleep. The case sounds challenging. Let's take it!

Flying Fish: Fine. Let's follow Zero's lead. Who knows? We might actually shed some light on this cold case!

Quiet Forest sent an emoji followed by the message: Yup!

Lone Breeze: Fine!

Boss: I'm fine either way.

And so the next morning, Ryan received an investigation confirmation message from Mysterious yet Majestic.

He stared at the simple message on his phone as he sat on the bed.

Mysterious yet Majestic's case confirmation notice.

Ryan leaped off the bed and logged into the Mysterious yet Majestic's request page. Lo and behold, the precious confirmation notice was in his inbox.

They've accepted the case!

His heart suddenly and inexplicably burned with excitement.

He clearly remembered how gifted his elder sister was at playing the piano. In fact, she was a way more talented musician than him.

With the training they received back in the day, his elder sister had won first place at a children's piano competition.

How could she ever forget how to play the piano? Even if she had been adopted by another family and had gone years without training, she couldn't possibly forget everything she had ever learned. She would at least remember how to play a simple tune from our childhood. Yet, Mary claims she doesn't know how to play at all.

Her claim only fed Ryan's suspicions about her true identity.

As those thoughts crossed his mind, Ryan quickly freshened up and exited the mansion, heading straight for the dark room.

In the dark room, Mary and Penelope were almost on their last legs.

They could never adapt to the room's poor condition thanks to their pampered lifestyles.

Penelope groaned weakly, "Mom... I can't do this anymore. I'm so tired."

Mary hurriedly patted her daughter's cheek and muttered, "Don't scare me, Penelope."

She immediately shrieked after touching her daughter's face. "You're so warm, Penelope! Are you running a fever?"

Penelope began drifting in and out of consciousness as she mumbled, "I don't know... I'm so tired..."

Horried, Mary yelled, "Penelope! Don't sleep! You can't fall asleep!"

Then, she crawled to the door and banged desperately on the metal door. "Open the door! My daughter's sick! She's running a fever! If anything happens to her, I'm going to kill you! Don't think I'm weak just because I'm locked in here! I'm still the Yates family's heiress! Open the door!"

A long moment after her indignant screams, an old woman drawled outside the door, "Save your energy. Old Mrs. Yates hasn't given the orders to let you out."

Mary bit her lip in anger. This is all because of Ashlyn!

### [Chapter 799](#)

Mary and Penelope had grown accustomed to the lifestyle of socialites, yet Ashlyn's appearance had ruined their fairytale lives in an instant.

That b\*tch is an absolute jinx! She carries bad luck everywhere she goes!

Just then, Ryan arrived at the dark room and looked at the elderly woman guarding the door. "Open it!"

The woman hesitated briefly before following his orders.

Light suddenly illuminated the dark room, and Mary instinctively flinched and shielded her eyes from the glare.

"Have you come to get us, Ryan?" Upon recognizing Ryan, Mary hurriedly stood up and supported Penelope to her feet. She added, "Penelope's sick. She's running a fever. Take us away from this place."

"I'm here to ask you something," Ryan asked while looking down at Mary. His cold expression lacked any hint of brotherly affection.

Stunned, Mary asked, "About what?"

"Mary, we used to play in the backyard of the Count's Mansion all the time. You even made a flower crown for me out of the plants there. Do you remember?"

Awkwardly, Mary answered, "Ryan, I don't remember many things from our past. I went missing when I was so young, you see."

"Not really. If I can remember them, why can't you?" Frostily, Ryan continued, "I even remember you have a birthmark over your left waist. Can I look at it now?"

"Ah? Really? We may be siblings, but there should definitely be some propriety between us. How can I

bare such a spot for you?" At the same time, Mary stared at Ryan in shock.

What is he playing at, coming here so suddenly and accosting me with so many questions? Is he suspecting something? But that's impossible. I didn't give anything away. When did he start suspecting me? Have I not done enough to keep up my facade?

Ryan arched a brow and drawled, "We grew up together and were very close. I'm just asking to see your birthmark. I'm not going to look anywhere else."

Mary fumbled for an excuse. "Ah, why are we fixating on this? A birthmark can hardly represent our entire relationship, can it? It has always been there. How can it suddenly disappear? Why don't you head back first? I-I've been here for so long, and I'm absolutely filthy. After Mom lets Penelope and me out, I'll take a shower and show you the birthmark."

There was no such birthmark on her body, but if Ryan insisted she had one, by hook by crook, she would make sure there was one over her left waist.

In fact, Mary was already contemplating methods to create a fake birthmark.

Her best option was to buy herself as much time as she could to execute her plan.

Ryan nodded at her words and dropped the topic. "All right, then."

He promptly left the dark room, and the metal door slammed heavily behind him.

Mary was flabbergasted. He's leaving? What about Penelope and me? What was all that talk about being close siblings? Da\*n it!

Meanwhile, Ryan headed for his room with a grim expression.

His gaze was so cold it could freeze water.

My sister doesn't have a birthmark at all! I was just testing Mary, and she actually claimed to have a birthmark!

Once he reached his room, he flung himself on the bed and closed his eyes.

At the same time, Bianca received a report from a housekeeper about Mary and Penelope's situation.

"A fever?" Bianca almost dropped her cup from shock. "Let them out. Quick. Get the family doctor to check on Penelope."

"Yes."

The housekeeper hurried to the dark room, trailed by Bianca, who muttered, "Matilda, we should check on them too. Oh, dear! No matter how angry I am at them, they're still my flesh and blood!"

"Yes, Old Mrs. Yates."

Someone supported Mary as she stumbled out of the dark room, while Penelope was so weak she had to be carried.

The haggard pair returned to their rooms. Penelope's body was burning, and her face was devoid of color.

Thankfully, the family doctor arrived quickly and gave her an injection to bring down the fever. He also prescribed some medicine for her.

### [Chapter 800](#)

Bianca anxiously asked the family doctor, "How is Penelope?"

"She has a fever, but she'll recover in a couple of days. Don't worry, Old Mrs. Yates." As he spoke, the doctor packed his bag and soon left.

Meanwhile, Mary fell to her knees and wailed, "I'm sorry, Mom! I'll never do such despicable things and disappoint you again! Please forgive me, Mom! I was too foolish in the past."

Bianca's anger melted as she stared at the disheveled and pallid Mary. It was such a pitiful sight that even a complete stranger would have felt sorry for Mary.

At last, the old woman shook her head and said, "Stop kneeling. I hope you've learned your lesson and will avoid any activities that could harm the Yates family's good name. Penelope is sick, so go and take care of her. And clean yourself up too."

"Yes, of course!" Mary agreed swiftly, yet her hatred for Bianca had soared to frightening levels.

Just wait and see, you old hat!

At the same time, in a small house in Maredania, a man in his sixties was busy removing weeds from a vegetable patch in his yard.

The variety of leafy greens and cucumbers in his yard made for a refreshing view.

Grapevines snaked along the arbor in the corridor, and under the natural shade of the tangled vines, he placed a wicker chair and table. The scene was as beautiful as a picture.

Someone knocked on the front door just then, and the elderly man answered the door after placing his hoe on the ground.

A devastatingly beautiful and fair-skinned young woman stood outside his house, exuding an incomparable sense of elegance.

The elderly man stared at her calmly and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

Ashlyn shot him a stunning smile and explained, "I heard you were living here, Old Mr. Leno, and I decided to visit you and try my luck."

Ian Leno's expression darkened, and he immediately moved to close the door. "Go away! I don't entertain strangers."

"Please don't reject me so hastily, Old Mr. Leno." Ashlyn presented a set of checkers to him and said, "This checkers set is made from the finest Cat's Eye Emerald. Are you sure you don't want it?"

Ian scoffed and retorted, "You may look young, but you're generous, I'll give you that. I've seen all sorts of excellent chest sets over the years. What makes you think I'm missing one made from Cat's Eye Emerald?"

Despite the nonchalance in his tone, his gaze had not moved an inch from the checkers set.

A checkers set made from Cat's Eye Emerald was undeniably tempting, but it was scarcely enough to convince him to forgo his principles.

As that thought crossed his mind, Ian retracted his gaze and replied firmly, "Are you going to stop me from closing the door? Fine! I won't close it then!"

He spun on his feet and stubbornly headed to his yard.

Ashlyn followed him, hugging the checkers set to herself. "Old Mr. Leno, I'm like to ask you to come out of isolation and treat a patient. Would you consider that?"

"I'll never treat another patient again. Now, leave." Ian's tone seemingly left no room for negotiation.

Ashlyn's hair billowed gently in the morning breeze before settling against her waist. Her long white hoodie covered her black shorts, and her legs seemed to stretch for miles in a pair of simple, black Doc Martens.

Ian's firm rejection did little to affect her mood, as evidenced by her small smile and the hint of amusement in her almond shaped eyes.

Instead, she suggested, "Before I leave, Old Mr. Leno, could we play a round of checkers?"

Surprised, Ian asked, "You know how to play checkers?"

"A little." Something flashed through Ashlyn's eyes as she added, "We can play with the set I've brought along."

Ian continued staring at her in shock. He rarely interacted with neighbors, having lived alone in the mountains for many years.

He spent his days tending to his vegetable garden, cooking simple meals, and taking long walks.

While he loved playing checkers, he did not have anyone to play with. When his boredom was too much to handle, he would play checkers alone, using one hand each to control opposing pieces.

Now, this young lady is boldly suggesting to play a checkers match with me?

He narrowed his eyes and replied, "Don't cry too hard when you lose and accuse me of bullying you."