

## Chapter 2 Family

Sierra lifted her head, watching Bradley's retreating back with a hint of coldness in her eyes.

*Good...* It was a good thing she had long stopped expecting anything from them. Otherwise, she might have felt hurt again.

She followed behind Bradley into the house. Just as he said, everyone except Franklin Xander was there.

Her brothers, Evan and Sean, were sitting on the couch, chatting with Denise.

"Sean, this outfit looks so good. Give it to me."

"Sure, no problem. I'll call the brand and have them send over their entire seasonal collection," Sean Xander said generously.

"Evan, I can't finish my thesis. Can you take a look at it later? Please, Evan?"

"Of course," Evan Xander replied indulgently.

Sierra's mother, Eleanor, sat beside them, watching the three siblings with gentle affection.

What a warm and loving scene.

This place was never Sierra's home.

Just like six years ago when she was first brought back, she was still an outsider, always out of place.

Back then, Denise had cried her eyes out, and the entire family had gathered around her, comforting her.

No one had even acknowledged Sierra, leaving her standing alone for over an hour.

This time, at least she didn't have to wait that long.

Eleanor soon noticed them and stood up with excitement.

"Sierra, you're back!" She grabbed Sierra's hand with visible emotion. "Come, let me take a good look at you. You've lost weight! But your skin is so much fairer now."

Sierra gently pulled her hand away and said politely, "Madam Eleanor, thank you for your concern."

"Enough!" Bradley had been holding back his frustration all the way home, but now he snapped.

"The whole family has been waiting for you, welcoming you home, and you're putting on this attitude for what? Who are you trying to act all cold and distant for?"

Eleanor's face fell, looking hurt. "Sierra, are you blaming us?"

The moment Eleanor looked upset, the entire family rushed to comfort her. Denise's eyes turned red with worry.

"Mom, don't be sad."

"Sierra, it's all my fault! Blame me if you want, but don't be like this. Mom missed you so much these past three years. She thought about you all the time. If you act like this, she'll be heartbroken."

Sierra coldly watched the scene in front of her.

How utterly ridiculous.

She was the one who had been locked away for three years.

Yet now, they were acting like she was some ungrateful criminal.

"Enough already. You've barely stepped foot in the house, and you're already ruining the mood. Can you stop?" Sean snapped impatiently. "Hurry up and apologize to Mom."

Sierra curled her lips into a slight smile and looked at Sean. "Didn't Mr. Xander already announce to the public that he had severed ties with me when I was sentenced? Why should I apologize?"

So, what was wrong with calling her Madam Eleanor?

The moment Sierra finished speaking, the entire room fell into dead silence.

Eleanor looked at Sierra, seeming like she wanted to say something, but she didn't know how to start.

In the end, it was Bradley who spoke.

"The company's stocks were plummeting at the time. Dad had no choice but to make a temporary decision. We'll restore everything later, don't worry."

He continued, "Alright, you must be tired. Go upstairs, take a shower, and then come down for dinner."

Compared to earlier, Bradley's tone had softened significantly. If Sierra hadn't brought it up, he might have forgotten about it altogether.

Back then, when news broke about their family being involved in an unlicensed hit-and-run, the company's stocks took a nosedive.

Franklin had issued a public statement to cut ties with Sierra, a move Bradley had come up with himself.

The plan had been to reinstate her once things settled down.

But in the end, they simply forgot.

Bradley glanced at Sierra with an unfamiliar feeling of guilt.

But what unsettled him more was her expression.

The familiar admiration, the longing in her eyes—both were gone.

Now, she looked at them with nothing.

That emptiness in her gaze made him feel an odd sense of unease.

Sierra ignored them and followed a servant upstairs to her room.

She couldn't wait to wash off the dust and grime.

But when she saw the clothes prepared for her, she fell silent.

They were exactly Denise's style. Frilly, lacy, cute—things she had never liked.

Since coming to this house, her wardrobe had always been like this.

At first, she foolishly thought it was her mother's way of showing affection.

So even though she didn't like them, she still wore them.

Later, she found out the truth.

These were just Denise's leftovers.

Every season, the latest collections were bought for Denise first.

Whatever Denise didn't want was handed down to Sierra.

This time, she wasn't going to wear secondhand clothes anymore.

After her shower, Sierra changed back into the clothes she had worn before.

When she went downstairs, the Xander family was already seated at the dining table.

They had called this a welcome dinner for her.

Yet, none of them had waited.

Instead, they were all busy serving food onto Denise's plate.

It wasn't until Sierra sat down that Eleanor finally realized they had completely forgotten about her.

For once, there was a flicker of guilt in Eleanor's eyes. When she saw Sierra still wearing her old clothes, she quickly asked, "Why didn't you change? Was the size wrong?"

"Yeah," Sierra replied simply, not bothering to explain.

"Oh, that's my fault! I figured you and Denny were about the same size, so I thought they would fit."

*About the same size?*

Sierra was half a head taller than Denise.

Had Eleanor never noticed that the clothes were always too short on her?

Sierra couldn't help but let out a light scoff. "Madam Eleanor, it's not your fault. I ate and slept well in prison. I must have grown taller. It's understandable that you wouldn't know."

The dining room instantly fell into silence.

Clang.

Denise's fork slipped from her hand and clattered onto the floor. Her face went pale, fear filling her eyes.

Eleanor immediately comforted her. "It's okay, Denny."

Bradley's voice turned cold. "Don't talk about that place. Denny gets scared."

Just mentioning prison made Denise anxious.

They were all worried about her.

But had they ever thought about how Sierra survived those three years?

Sierra curled her lips into a mocking smile.

So this is how biased a heart could be.

She looked at the Xander family, all focused on comforting Denise.

A wave of irony flashed through her eyes.

Without saying anything more, she picked up her fork and began eating.

The food wasn't at fault.

It had been a long time since she had eaten a proper meal.

By the time the Xander family snapped out of their daze, this was the sight they saw—Sierra eating at full speed, completely unbothered, as if none of their neglect had affected her at all.

This version of Sierra felt unfamiliar to them.

In the past, she had always been hyper-aware of their moods.

If they so much as frowned, she would panic, constantly trying to please them.

She wouldn't relax until she saw them smile.

This change in her felt unsettling.

Bradley was about to say something when his eyes fell on her wrist.

A long, ugly scar ran across her skin.

Without thinking, he blurted out, "What happened to your hand?"