

Chapter 6 The Kennel

At the cemetery in the suburban outskirts, Darren arrived carrying a bouquet of pristine white roses to pay his respects at his mother's grave.

The photograph adorning the tombstone had aged to a yellowish hue, capturing a woman with a luminous smile. She had departed the world before turning thirty.

His mother's life had been ruined by the Briggs family. Even in death, she had been denied a resting place among the Briggs family in their family cemetery.

Darren lingered in the cemetery till the afternoon waned into evening, reluctant to depart from his mother's side.

Henry had been waiting outside the cemetery gates for quite some time. It wasn't until Darren emerged that he approached, holding out his phone. "Boss, William's been trying to reach you. He's invited you for dinner tonight."

"Where?" Darren's tone held no warmth.

"At the Cloud Hotel," Henry replied. Knowing Darren's preferences well after years of being by his side, he already had everything figured out.

"I won't be going. Tell William if he wants my attendance, he best arranges it at the Briggs family's residence," Darren declared.

The Briggs family's members had gathered at the gates, waiting anxiously. Verena stood among them at the back of the crowd.

The Briggs family's estate loomed imposingly, masking the shadows of human nature beneath its grand facade, suffocating all who entered its confines.

Though the appointment was set for eight, Darren's arrival was delayed until ten o'clock.

Having waited in the chilly winds for two long hours, the Briggs family's patience wore thin.

William personally greeted Darren as the latter stepped out of the car. "Darren, please, come in."

Verena's gaze lingered on Darren in the night. Had she known he would be here, she could have found a way to excuse herself.

Darren, standing 6.2 feet tall, stood out. There was an undeniable air of distinction setting him apart from the rest.

This marked Darren's first return to the Briggs family's residence since he left at the tender age of fourteen.

During his childhood return to the Briggs family's estate, Darren had been labelled a bastard son by all. His nephews subjected him to degrading tasks, making him crawl and bark like a dog, relegating him to live in a kennel.

During one particularly cruel episode, Eric had taken him out and confined him to a strange yard, chaining him up without food for an entire week, claiming that dogs belonged in the yard to guard the house.

In that dire time, a chance encounter with a young girl had been his saving grace.

Beyond the towering walls, there existed a small hole just large enough for passing food through. For an entire week, that mysterious girl had brought him sustenance without fail.

Though her face remained a mystery, Darren knew she must have been a beauty.

In return, he had placed his mother's sole legacy, carefully tucked within the food container, and gave it to her.

Upon returning to Fledo, in addition to honouring his mother's memory and holding the Briggs family accountable for their years of disdain, Darren sought to find that elusive girl.

As Darren's thoughts drifted, he caught sight of Verena outside the throng, her gaze fixed firmly upon him.

Verena possessed an ordinary appearance, but her eyes sparkled with a rare beauty.

"Verena, come here." Darren called out, his hand gesturing toward her.

In an instant, all eyes turned to Verena.

With a polite smile, Verena approached Darren's side. "Darren."

Darren motioned for Henry, who promptly brought forth a precious golden box, its contents resembling a scroll painting.

"A gift for you, my future niece-in-law," Darren said.

William was taken aback. Wasn't this the authentic masterpiece by Spencer Ricardo that fetched a staggering two billion at auction, secured by a mysterious bidder?

He had missed out on acquiring it then, and now Darren possessed it?!

William swiftly sent his son to retrieve it. "Go and thank your uncle for this gift."

Eric reached out to accept it, but Henry deftly avoided his grasp. "Boss said this is for Miss Fowler."

Verena hesitated. She understood the value of the contents within and comprehended Darren's intent behind the gesture.

It implied to the events of the previous night; he sought to resolve matters through material means.

"Verena, why haven't you taken it?" William prompted, a note of impatience creeping into his voice.

"Should the picture be authentic, I would devise a plan to obtain it from Verena at a later time," William pondered in his head.

Amidst the watchful eyes of the onlookers, Verena had little choice. Besides, Darren's gift was undeniably extravagant. She graciously accepted it. "Thank you."

Darren offered a slight nod before being ushered inside.

The Briggs family had prepared an elaborate dinner, awaiting Darren's arrival.

"It's been too long since you've graced us with your presence. I've had your room prepared. It would be more comfortable for you to stay," William suggested.

Darren's steps faltered as his gaze landed on the kennel.

The kennel, now refurbished, resembled more of a cosy abode fit for a human inhabitant.

Once, he had endured half a month's stay inside it!

Darren's lips curled into a faint smile, his eyes glinting with a cold resolve. "I must say, that kennel over there looks rather inviting, wouldn't you agree, William?"

Instantly, William felt a chill run down his spine. When Darren was around ten, he had relegated him to sleep in that very kennel.

What was Darren implying?

"Yes... I mean, it does seem rather inviting," William stammered.

"Well, since you find it so appealing, why don't you spend the night there?" Darren suggested, his tone carrying a hint of amusement.

A flicker of panic crossed William's face. As the head of the Briggs family, being seen sleeping in a kennel would be a disgrace.

Before he could protest, Eric interjected with a string of curses.

"If you fancy it so much, why don't you take up residence there yourself? Who do you think you are, suggesting my dad sleep in a kennel!"

Eric, already angered from the engagement debacle earlier that day and aggravated by the two-hour wait in the biting wind for his uncle's arrival, couldn't contain his fury any longer.

Unaware of the Briggs family's current predicament and his father's apprehension towards Darren, Eric bristled with defiance.

Darren didn't frighten him!

"Shut up!" William reprimanded him severely.