Chapter 16 Paisley stood quietly behind the pair , not missing the shock that ashed across Christina and Brittanys faces as they turned and saw her .

P Paisley Brittany blinked, a moment of surprise crossing her face before she quickly plastered on a grin, her voice overly bright.

When did you come bac Paisleys lips curled into a wry smile as she regarded Brittanys feigned excitement.

She sco ed under her breath, I heard you became an actress.

Your acting skills still need some work , though Brittanys expression sti ened , her eyes narrowing with barely contained irritation before her eyes quickly turned stony .

Christinas voice cut through the tension, sharp and communding.

Paisley, what nonsense are you talking? The woman who should have been overjoyed to see her own daughter after years of absence didnt show an ounce of warmth.

Instead, she immediately snapped at Paisley in favor of Brittany Paisleys eyes hardened, a coldness settling deep inside her chest.

She had long since grown accustomed to Christinas attitude and stopped expecting anything from her or the Sullivan family , for that matter .

She had learned years ago not to hold her breath .

What are you doing here ! This isnt a place for someone like you Christina said coldly , her words laced with disdain .

You chose to leave the family , remember ! going to welcome you with open arms .

Get out of here before you embarrass Dont think that just because youve come craving back , were going yourself Mam dont be like that Brittany interjected smoothly , her voice laced with faux sympathy .

She gently looped her arm through Christinas , her eyes glinting with a practiced understanding .

Paisleys probably just out of options .

Thats why she came here , right ? At that moment , Brittany still wore the same guise of the sweet , understanding adopted daughter .

But Paisley had long since seen through the act, the layers of sweetness that had a much darker core.

A few years ago .

Paisley might have been enraged by Brittanys theatrics, by the way she played the part of the golden girl in front of the Sullivan family.

But now , she was beyond caring .

The Sullivan family didnt hold als power over her anymore least of all Brittany Paisley merely smiled , her expression distant , and took a leisurely step toward the gown that had caused all this fuss .

So, you want this gown ? she asked , her voice dripping with quiet amuserment Brittany blinked , her large , doe eyes widening with mock innocence .

Do you like it , too ? she asked , her voice shifting to one of feigned sweetness .

Well then , maybe Mom should just buy it for you , since you like it so much .

I can always go check out the ready made gowns while you take this one.

Brittany, what are you talking about ! She doesnt deserve to wear something so nice Christinas eyes swept over Paisley from head to toe, a look of distame clear on her face Paisley had dressed simply today for conventence a casual out t that d didnt scream luxury or any recognizable brand.

It was just something shed grabbed quickly from a small local shop outside her neighborhood enough to keep her warm .

On top of that , she hadnt slept well the night before , and the dark circles under her eyes were more pronounced than usual , making her appear tired and wor Christina looked at her like that , and her judgment was swift and harsh .

To her, this was proof that Paisley hadnt amounted to much in the outside world, that she had returned crawling to the Sullivan family in desperate need of a handout Christina sco ed inwardly.

She must have known she wouldnt be able to get past the g to the mall .

I bet thats what happened gated community, so shes been lurking around, following us As Paisley listened to Christina and Brittany, who seemed to be playing a perfect little duet of disdain, she couldnt help but nd it laughable.

Why did Lever waste so much energy trying to cars the love of people like this ? Its only when I stepped outside and looked at things from a distance that I realized what I once valued was just trash , nothing more .

Paisley walked up to the gown on display , a faint smile tugging at her lips .

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You u wanted to contact the owner of this gown , right ? She paused , letting her words hang in the air .

Well, Im the one youre looking for.