

## Chapter 13 Ashton's Gift

Frieda quickly grabbed Harold's arm. "Today is Heidi's big day. Let it go, alright? It doesn't matter where we sit."

Heidi's aunt and uncle chimed in, trying to defuse the situation. "Exactly. They're not wrong. Heidi marrying Mr. Griffin is indeed marrying up."

They were determined not to let Harold ruin the rare chance to connect with the prestigious Griffin Family.

"You people!" Harold glared at them, snorting in frustration. Huffing and puffing, he let Frieda lead him to another table.

Meanwhile, Heidi felt a sting of injustice after being scolded by Amelie for no reason. She had to bite her tongue, though. Meeting Klaus was a rare stroke of luck, and he treated her well enough to make this small grievance worth it.

"Aunt Amelie..." Klaus frowned. He wasn't worried about Harold and the others; his concern was offending Ashton. After all, Ashton was Heidi's brother and Harold's adopted son.

But before he could finish his sentence, Amelie cut him off with a disdainful snort. "Klaus, you're the heir of the Griffin Family. Don't coddle that girl and her poor relatives, or they'll walk all over you!" She waved dismissively. "Alright, you two, go entertain the guests."

With that, she turned her attention back to the distinguished guests arriving for the engagement party.

Klaus knew better than to argue further, so he joined Heidi in greeting the guests.

Before long, most of the guests had arrived.

Hand in hand, Klaus and Heidi walked down the red carpet amid the crowd's applause. Today, Heidi was dressed in a wedding gown with light makeup, looking like a fairy descended from the heavens. Klaus, in a suit, looked equally striking. They were a picture-perfect couple.

After a brief introduction by the host, it was time for the elders to speak.

Representing the Griffin Family was, once again, Klaus' aunt Amelie. She took the microphone without a second thought about the presence of Harold and the others. "Heidi," she began, "our Klaus here is young and accomplished. The Griffin Family might not be at the very top, but we have assets worth billions. Your family, on the other hand, is just an average working-class family. Your relatives are a bunch of country bumpkins who can't even muster up one decent representative.

"Frankly, you shouldn't be marrying into our family. But Klaus really likes you, so we elders won't stand in the way," she continued. "But let me be clear. After you marry Klaus, you'd better be a good wife and mother. If you dare to fool around, don't blame me for being ruthless. And as for your questionable relatives, it's best you stay away from them."

Heidi's face turned slightly pale at those words.

John, Dylan, and others exchanged frowns as they looked at Amelie, but they held their tongues.

Seated at another table, Harold exploded in anger. "They've gone too far, looking down on us like this! If Heidi had married Ashton, she wouldn't have to endure such humiliation!"

Even though Ashton had made it clear he had no special feelings for Heidi, Harold was still feeling guilty toward Ashton for this.

"Harold, just bear with it," Frieda said, trying to calm him down despite her own discomfort. "After all, this is about Heidi's marriage. By the way, where's Ashton? He promised to be here for Heidi's engagement."

"He came by earlier but left for some business," Harold replied, suddenly recalling something. "Oh right, he asked me to give a gift to Heidi. I got so caught up in everything that I forgot." He quickly pulled a box from his pocket. "I'll take it to her now. Even if Ashton couldn't make it, as her brother, he wouldn't miss this important day in spirit."

With that, he strode purposefully toward the stage, ready to deliver the gift.

"Ashton's a poor guy. What valuable gift could he possibly give? Bringing it up now is just asking for embarrassment."

"Exactly! The Griffin Family already looks down on us. This will only make things worse."

Heidi's aunt and uncle voiced their discontent.

"Dad?" Heidi's face filled with confusion as she saw Harold approaching.

Before Harold could say anything, Amelie interjected with a sarcastic smirk, "What's the rush, Mr. Rechberg? I haven't finished speaking yet. Country folk, always showing their lack of manners."

Harold, who had been straightforward and honest all his life, could only snort in response. "I'm not here to speak. Heidi's brother asked me to give her this gift. He couldn't make it today, but he wanted this gift to stand in for him and witness her engagement."

With that, he handed the box to Heidi.

"Isn't that what Ashton wanted to give Heidi before? He bragged about it being some 'Radiant Lotus,' but it's probably just some cheap trinket. Now, Uncle Harold is about to show it off in front of everyone. This is going to be so humiliating."

Gracie and the others looked on, shaking their heads and blushing with embarrassment. They felt mortified by the situation.

Heidi stared at the box in her hand, her face stiffening. "Dad, let's just set it aside for now. I'll open it after the engagement party." She dreaded the thought of opening it in front of everyone and finding some cheap trinket, making her the laughingstock of the day.

"No way!" Harold was visibly upset. "Your brother put his heart into this gift. What's wrong with opening it now? Are you so eager to marry into a wealthy family that you're ready to discard your brother—and me, too?"

"Dad..." Heidi felt a lump in her throat, tears welling up. Why can't he understand my predicament? If this turns into a joke, what about my dignity?

Amelie's eyes gleamed as she seized the moment. "Since that's the case, Heidi, why don't you open it? Let's all see what precious gift your brother has given. It's an honor that your dad personally brought it up at this moment."

Clutching the box, Heidi bit her lip and stayed silent.

"What's wrong? Do I need to open it for you?" Amelie sneered, clearly enjoying the prospect of humiliating Heidi, whom she had always despised.

With a face pale with apprehension, Heidi gritted her teeth and opened the box. She shut her eyes tight, fearing the worst.

But instead of the anticipated laughter, there was a profound silence.

Dead silence.