

Chapter 7 Begging on The Streets

Lauren's unwavering gaze swept over the four family members, one by one.

David, Alice, and Willow all averted their eyes, too afraid to meet her stare.

Even Elliot, his face tight with irritation, wavered under the sharp edge of her gaze.

"No one wants to speak? Fine, I'll say it for you."

"When Mr. Elliot received the gown, it was in perfect condition. The security footage proves I never touched it on the way here, yet by the time it reached Willow, it was already damaged. So, the real culprit is obvious. That's why none of you dare to check the footage, because the moment you do, you'll lose the chance to pin this on me and force me to take the fall for someone else. Isn't that right?"

Take the fall for someone else.

Those words cut into David's and Alice's hearts like a knife, forcing them to recall what had happened five years ago.

Alice was already in tears. "Laurie, it's not like that. Listen to me. You and Willow are both my daughters. I love you both the same. How could I bear to hurt you?"

If it had been five years ago, when Lauren still longed for motherly love, she would have softened completely at the sight of Alice crying.

But after five years in prison, those words filled her with nothing but disgust.

"Say whatever you want. It doesn't matter anymore."

With that, she didn't spare the Bennett family another glance and turned to leave.

At the corner of the hallway, she unexpectedly ran into Lucas.

He stood there silently, clearly having witnessed everything that had just happened.

Lauren's heart clenched, but she didn't stop. Pretending not to see him, she kept walking forward with firm steps.

Every step felt like she was stepping on the raw wounds of her own heart. She didn't want any connection with him. She just wanted to escape this suffocating place as soon as possible.

Just as she was about to pass him, his familiar yet distant voice rang softly in her ear, gentle but resolute.

"Laurie, I believe you didn't do it."

Hearing those words, Lauren felt no comfort. Instead, a cold, bitter mockery rose in her heart.

For him to say "believe" now was nothing short of ridiculous.

She paused for a fraction of a second before quickening her pace.

Because of her injured leg, her hurried steps made her look as if she was fleeing in disgrace, her limping figure painfully pitiful.

Lucas felt as if countless sharp needles were stabbing into the softest part of his heart. The pain spread so intensely that it nearly suffocated him.

He wanted to call out her name, but something seemed to choke his throat, preventing him from making a sound.

Lauren dragged her weary body back to the storage room.

She slowly sat down on the rickety folding bed, feeling utterly drained, as if all the strength had been sucked out of her.

Exhaustion crashed over her like a tidal wave.

Her gaze was empty. The disappointment she felt toward this family was like a bottomless black hole, swallowing what little attachment she had left.

The three years she had spent here had been like walking on the edge of a blade. Every second was filled with cold neglect, grievances, and pain, leaving scars so deep they could never fade. She would never allow herself to fall into this abyss again.

Taking a deep breath, she forced herself to gather her things.

Looking around, there were barely any belongings of hers in this shabby room. Just the clothes she had changed out of.

She shoved them into a plastic bag without a second thought.

It was time to leave.

She stood up and reached for the door.

Before her pale, slender fingers could touch the doorknob, the door was pushed open from the outside.

A woman in her late fifties appeared before her.

The woman was momentarily stunned at the sight of Lauren, then her face broke into unrestrained joy as she exclaimed excitedly, "Ms. Bennett, you're back?"

Lauren froze slightly. "Marilyn?"

Looking at Marilyn, she felt a complicated mix of emotions.

In the entire Bennett family, only Marilyn had ever treated her as the true Ms. Bennett, while the other servants remained distant and indifferent.

To them, there was only one real Ms. Bennett, and that was Willow.

As for Lauren, they addressed her with respect, but it was nothing more than an empty title.

During the scorching summer, when she got heat rashes from being locked in this stifling storage room, it was Marilyn who used her own money to buy her a fan.

During the freezing winter, when she shivered from the cold, it was Marilyn who bought her an electric blanket to keep warm.

Thinking of this, Lauren's eyes turned red uncontrollably.

Marilyn, still overwhelmed with emotion, finally noticed the plastic bag in Lauren's hand.

"Ms. Bennett, are you leaving?"

Lauren wanted to say something but hesitated, unsure of what to say. In the end, she simply gave a silent nod.

Marilyn's eyes filled with sorrow. She wanted to ask her to stay, but the words caught in her throat, unable to come out.

She knew too well how Lauren had lived in the Bennett family, treading on thin ice every day.

She had seen all the cold stares, the injustices, the silent suffering. She couldn't bear to make her stay in this living hell.

Letting out a helpless sigh, she said, "Ms. Bennett, I won't stop you from leaving, but let me treat your wounds first."

Lauren's expression was indifferent. "It's just a small injury. I'm used to it."

Hearing that, Marilyn felt an ache in her heart.

How much has she been through to become so numb to her own wounds?

Rage burned inside Marilyn, but as a mere servant, she had no power to speak against the Bennett family. She could do nothing.

Suppressing her heartache, she forced a kind smile. "Ms. Bennett, you haven't eaten anything since you came back. Let me make you some food before you go."

Lauren refused again. "No need."

After saying that, she realized she might have sounded too cold and added, "Leaving early will give me more time to find a place to stay."

In truth, she simply didn't want to eat anything from the Bennett family.

She had nothing now—no money, no health, nothing left except a shred of dignity.

Even if she had to beg on the streets, she would rather do that than stay here and suffer their scorn.

Anyone could look down on her, but not the Bennett family.

The Bennett family owed her too much.

They didn't deserve to treat her this way.

"Marilyn, I'm leaving."

Marilyn, full of sorrow, took out a stack of cash from her pocket and stuffed it into Lauren's hands.

"Ms. Bennett, take this and use it. You have to take care of yourself out there."

As she spoke, tears finally spilled down Marilyn's cheeks.

Lauren wanted to refuse, but Marilyn was firm. "You're a young woman alone out there. You can't just sleep under a bridge."

Lauren clenched her teeth, her silent tears falling.

Even someone unrelated to her knew how to care for her. But her own parents and brother had never cared.