

Chapter 1585

Anyone who knew me, Liana Spencer, spoke of me with scorn. Even strangers who heard my story would spit on the ground and say I had no shame.


Everyone knew that running away with a man was worse than theft or murder. It was a disgrace no family could easily bear.

Many asked me the same question: Did I regret it?

I never regretted marrying him, but I did carry guilt in my heart. Because of me, the Spencer family's name was dragged through the mud. My brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews had a much harder time finding good matches because of my choices.

As a daughter of the Spencer family, I lived in comfort from the moment I was born. I wore fine dresses, ate the best foods, and was showered with love. My parents doted on me, while my brothers spoiled me terribly.

But there was something wrong with me.

By the time I was fourteen, I still hadn't gotten my monthly courses. We consulted physician after physician, and I drank countless doses of bitter medicine, day and night. Yet, nothing changed. 

Mom told me I was simply delicate, and that with time and care, everything would be fine.

But one evening, I overheard a physician speaking quietly to my parents. He said my body was like that of a child's—unable to bear children. No matter how long we waited or how much medicine I drank, I would never have a child of my own.


I remember his words clearly. He gave my parents an example, saying, "She's like a little vase. You can place flowers in it, but it will never grow a tree or bear fruit."

I knew exactly what that meant for a woman like me.

When Mom realized she could no longer keep the truth from me, she comforted me as best she could. She said not to worry; she would help me marry into a good family. I could allow my husband to take a few concubines, and their children would be mine to raise.

"With our family behind you, no one will dare take your place as the lady of the house. Even if you cannot bear children, you'll still live a life of wealth and honor," she said.

Grandma once told me that if I ever got married, I would need to lower my pride once I entered my husband's household.

Since I couldn't bear children, I couldn't act proud just because I came from a prestigious family. I would have to serve my in-laws with care, be gentle with my husband, manage the household well, and treat the concubines fairly. Only then would no one be able to find fault with me, and I could still live with dignity as the lady of the house. 

After I came of age, my family began arranging my marriage.

No one outside the family knew about my condition at first. However, there was a maid who had been close to me since childhood. She had her sights set on my brother, hoping to become his bed companion. When I refused to help her, she grew bitter. Out of spite, she spread word that I couldn't have children.

At that time, the Carter family were discussing a match with us. When

they heard the news, they stormed into our house in fury. I still remember what the man from their family shouted, his voice loud and cruel.

"She can't have children? She isn't even a proper woman! Even a hen is worth more than her. You can keep her here in your fine house, but don't expect us to take her in and let her ruin our family!"

I heard every word with my own ears, and was completely shaken.

Since that day, I became deeply ashamed. I barely left the house. How could I face the world when I was worth less than a hen?

As the Spencer family was wealthy and powerful, many suitors still came. However, all of them seemed more interested in the dowry than in me.

That year, during the Maiden's Star Festival, my younger cousin pulled me out of the house to pray to the stars. I didn't want to go, but she kept begging and wouldn't let up, so I finally gave in. I covered my face with a light veil and went with her.

I never imagined that day would lead me to meet Cassius Lloyd, the man I would spend my life with.

He was setting up a small stall by one of the bridges to sell his paintings. My cousin and I were passing through the crowded bridge when I was pushed and stumbled, falling right into his stall. In the process, I knocked over an inkpot and spilled ink all over myself.

My cousin and her maid didn't notice. They kept walking happily with the crowd, leaving me standing there, flustered and stained.

Cassius hurried to help me up, then crouched to gather his scattered tools. Still, he looked up and kindly asked, "Are you hurt?"

When I took a step, pain shot through my ankle. It hurt so badly I nearly cried, but my cousin and her maid were already far ahead. I didn't want to shout and make a scene, so I clung to the edge of his table.

"I think I twisted my ankle. I can't walk right now. I'll wait here until my cousin and her maid come back for me," I said through clenched teeth.

He brought over a small stool and smiled. "Sit down for now. Once they notice you're gone, they'll surely come back to find you."

Grateful, I sat. My ankle throbbed terribly.

I noticed the ruined scroll at his stall, one large painting now blotched with ink.

I felt a rush of guilt and softly said, "I've ruined your painting."

"It's alright," he replied gently.

With a faint smile, he dipped his brush again. Right next to the stain, he added a few sweeping strokes, and to my surprise, a towering mountain began to appear where the ink had spilled.

I watched, amazed. "How much is this painting? I'd like to buy it."

"Thirty copper coins," he said without looking up.

"So little?" I blurted out before I could stop myself.

The words sounded rude the moment they left my mouth—was I insulting his work?

But he didn't seem offended. He gave a small laugh and said, "Thirty is already a fair price."

His tone was calm, even cheerful. It was strange. I looked at him more closely. He wore simple clothes, but there was something refined about him, an air of scholarly elegance. His features carried a faint sadness, but it seemed to blend perfectly with his smile.



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Chapter 1586

After a while, my cousin and her maid returned to find me. I asked the maid to hand thirty copper coins to Cassius. He smiled and thanked me kindly.

I thought our meeting was just a chance encounter and I would never see him again. However, to my surprise, during Grandma's birthday celebration a month later, I saw him again.

Our family was hosting a grand dinner, and Leonard Klein, a renowned scholar, had come with his apprentices. And there Cassius was, standing among them.

In Ebonflow, the rules for social gatherings weren't as strict as in the capital, with women being allowed to be in the front hall during a banquet. Of course, Cassius didn't recognize me. After all, I had been wearing a veil when we first met, so he had only seen my eyes.

He didn't stay long. After presenting Grandma with a beautiful painting, he quickly excused himself, saying he had business to attend to at home.

Once he left, Mr. Klein spoke of him with a tone of regret, explaining, "He's a clever young man, but has no ambition. He insists on leaving school. I thought bringing him today might help him meet more driven people, but he doesn't seem to recognize this opportunity. It's quite disappointing. If he wants to leave, then I suppose that's that."

"No need to be upset. You have many students. One less won't make a difference," my father replied, trying to soothe him.

Mr. Klein, who seemed to hold a great deal of frustration, said, "He was once my most promising student. Not only does he lack ambition, he's

also borrowing money from his classmates. His family is... Well, they're supporting a woman of questionable character."

Dad disliked such behavior, so he muttered, "Then, such people aren't worth discussing."

For some reason, hearing about Cassius' situation left me feeling disappointed. Perhaps it was because I had seen his talent that day when he painted, and, being human, I couldn't help but appreciate someone with skill.

Months passed, and my marriage arrangements were finally set. The man I was to marry was Phineas Langley, the second son of the governor of Riverhold.

At twenty-two years old, he hadn't married yet because his bed companion had given him a son, so no respectable family wanted him to marry their daughters. Even the lower-ranking families didn't want him. That was why he had been waiting until now.

Mom said, "If you marry him, I'll have that bed companion sent away. The child will stay with us, and you can raise him as your legitimate son."

I knew my parents were only thinking of my wellbeing. I didn't feel strongly about the marriage one way or the other. What choice did I have, being a woman who couldn't have children of my own?

My cousin soon returned with more news. She told me that, aside from having a bed companion, Phineas had taken several other concubines, one of whom was even bought from a brothel. He was often seen with her, clearly giving her a great deal of attention.

I was stunned. He wasn't even married yet, and already had a son and

several concubines. It was clear what kind of man Phineas was.

It made my stomach turn. I couldn't help but feel frustrated and restless every day. The thought of marrying such a man and spending my life with him felt suffocating.

But what other choice did I have? Marrying into an official's family was the best opportunity I could expect.

My cousin urged me not to marry him: "Marrying someone like that? You'd be better off cutting your hair and becoming a nun!"

Though she had said those words in a burst of anger, they struck me deeply. After thinking it over, I realized that instead of staying confined within the inner chambers of a household, it might be better to live as a nun. At least then, I would be free.

When I brought this up to my parents, it caused an uproar. Mom cried on the spot, saying that if I were to throw my life away like that, she might as well die. Her reaction made me fearful to speak further, but my heart was heavy with despair. ❸

The burden of these thoughts weighed heavily on me. I fell ill, unable to sleep or eat. The idea of life, in general, seemed so hopeless and empty.

One day, I made up my mind. I told my mother I was going to a temple to pray. She knew I was troubled, so she insisted that a maid and the carriage driver accompany me.

There was a lake behind the temple, deep and dark. I thought that if I "accidentally" fell into it, all my troubles might come to an end.

At the temple, I quietly prayed in the prayer room. I wasn't ungrateful to my parents, but I felt there was no way forward in my life. I prayed and


asked for the heavens' blessing for my parents' health.

After praying, I made an excuse, saying I was hungry. I sent the maid to fetch tea and the carriage driver to bring me some food. Once they were gone, I quickly headed to the back mountain.

Standing by the lake, staring at its dark, bottomless waters, fear began to creep in. But thinking of what lay ahead, that fear soon faded.

What was there to live for?

Just as I was about to leap into the lake, I heard a voice behind me.

"I've heard there are water spirits in this lake. They take beautiful girls to serve as substitutes. Once they become substitutes, they are trapped forever in the deep, muddy waters. You should be careful not to go too close, miss." 

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