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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1471

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Perhaps it was due to the smear campaign that had inadvertently catapulted the Ar-BI-Clear Group into the limelight, but now the brand was comfortably sitting at the top of the charts. "Really?" Eunice was genuinely thrilled for Arabella. That girl had put in so much effort; she deserved every bit of success!

"KT's online flagship store got hammered with negative reviews, and all their products were pulled from

the shelves. Before long, the store was shuttered, and the KT folks involved are now in police custody."

As Bard shared the news, he suddenly shot a look at Eunice.

Realization dawned on her, and she voiced the thought they both were thinking, "The one who tried to tarnish the Ar-BI-Clear Group wasn't KT. Whoever set them up as the fall guy must be no small fry. Could be the same mastermind who hired the hitman!"

Even though the lead in the basement had gone cold, they could still follow the KT thread!

"I was thinking the same," Bard said, exchanging a knowing smile with his wife. They always seemed to read each other's minds.

Eunice grinned back, determined as ever.

Before long, she vowed to unearth the culprit and get revenge for her darling niece!

Meanwhile, Arabella's phone buzzed with an incoming call. It was Grandpa Eugene. "Humph, you heartless girl!" The old man feigned anger through the phone, "I bet if I hadn't called, you'd have completely forgotten what day tomorrow is!"

It suddenly hit Arabella: tomorrow was his birthday.

"I've already received a heap of birthday wishes, and here you are, silent as a mouse."

Ever since their last meeting at school, she had been off the radar, not even popping up in their old-timers' chat group. It was as if she had vanished off the face of the earth.

"Have you forgotten us all?"

This year marked his 60th, and he planned to celebrate big, but she hadn't been in touch.

He had already reminded her; if she didn't show up to his birthday bash, he'd be livid, and a couple of sweet words wouldn't cut it. The consequences would be dire.

Yet, she seemed to take it lightly!

The most irritating part was that the other old geezers, who could've reminded her these past few days,

chose not to, and just to watch him fret.

Now, with it being past four in the afternoon back home, he couldn't contain his impatience and had to call her himself.

Arabella couldn't help but chuckle,

"Grandpa, I didn't forget. I've just been swamped lately and neglected you. I'll be there on time tomorrow, I promise."

"Humph!" Mr. Eugene sulked like a child,
"Bad connection, can't hear you."

"Oh, then never mind, I didn't say
anything important."

"Hey, you trying to back out now? Don't
think I'm old and deaf. I heard you clear
as day. You said you'll be
here on time tomorrow." Mr. Albright
caught himself mid-sentence, realizing
he'd been played by his
granddaughter.

Arabella let out a laugh.

Hearing her delightful laughter, Mr.
Albright tried to stay stern, but the corners
of his mouth betrayed him
with a smile.

"You little rascal, ever heard of respecting
your elders? Can't let your grandpa win
just once, can you?" Mr.

Albright's voice warmed with affection,
"Alright, it's settled then. You better show
up tomorrow! Otherwise,

I'm calling a press conference to announce you're taking over my legacy!"

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Arabella had always resisted taking on the mantle from the old man, leading him on a wild goose chase

around the world. Now, he was practically laying down ultimatums to “coerce” her. "It's settled, oh for Pete's sake, what's wrong with this signal now? Can't hear a darn thing. Alright, that's it, hanging up."

Perhaps fearing Arabella would change her mind, Mr. Albright hastily ended the call, not without bragging in the old-timers' group chat that Bella would be punctually attending his birthday bash the next day.

[For real? Don't you dare pull a fast one on me! Listen here, if you don't share that bottle of tequila you snagged last time, I'll just sit back in my rocking chair, chill, and let your birthday bash be a frosty affair.]

[If you give that old coot tequila and don't let me feast my eyes on that luminous pearl you got your hands on last time, count me out!]

[Call me bro just once, admit you've lost to me in chess, and I might just deign to grace your little shindig with my presence.]

“You should buy me lunch for a month.”

Seeing each of them making demands, Mr. Albright haughtily replied, [Come or don't--your choice!]

Everyone was momentarily unsettled by his response. Could it be that Bella really was going to show up?!

Each year, without fail, Bella had always made time for their birthday parties, no matter how busy she was.

Even though she now had recognized her own family, they knew deep down she still cared about them.

With that thought, the old guys started changing their tunes.

[Out of the relationship we've shared over the years, I suppose I can make an exception and drop by your birthday dinner tomorrow night.]

[Just imagine if Bella doesn't show, and us old buddies stand you up. That'd look pretty bad for you. I'll be there. At least if no other guests show, you'll still have me to blow out the candles with you.]

[I'm in too.]

[If everyone's going, it'd be rude for me not to show up.]

Upon reading this, Mr. Albright, seizing the opportunity, replied, [No tequila, no luminous pearl. And you think I'd shout a month of lunches? No chance! Admit I'm not as good as you? In your dreams!]

The group saw his message and thought, wow, with Bella coming to the party, the old man's backbone

was suddenly made of steel, his words all toughened up. Just before, he was sighing in the group chat hinting for them to remind Bella about his birthday.

What a drastic change of attitude!

[You think we want to come? We're just worried about what others will talk.]

[Exactly, you think we want to sing 'Happy Birthday' for you? So childish, I would never!]

[I'm just looking to play a couple of chess games with Warner, and I happen to pass by your place.]

[I'm coming because my house has a blackout, just need your Wi-Fi for a bit.]

Mr. Albright, unable to hold back, retorted, [Tomorrow I'm the star of the show; Bella is coming for me. You old fossils better not bother her, especially keep away from the topic of succession - not a single word.]

[Hey, watch who you're calling old! I'm a year younger than you! Don't you mention it either. Don't think I don't know you're hoping Bella will fulfill your wish by taking on your legacy. You're just counting on her being dutiful and sensible.]
[Oh, Mr. Albright, I never thought you were this kind of person. I've underestimated you all this time.]

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[Come on, everyone has a birthday. If you try to blackmail Bella with that, I swear I'll make a wish at my birthday bash to stop her from taking over your legacy.]

Was it really necessary to be that harsh?!?

Meanwhile, at the other side.

Serena, paralyzed with fear, hadn't even come down for lunch. The help had to bring her meal to her room.

When Eunice reached the door, she heard from the staff that Serena's hands were trembling so badly that she could barely hold her cutlery.

She looked like she was still reeling from last night's ordeal.

"Serena," Eunice knocked on the door and without waiting for a response, she pushed it open, "I'm coming in."

Hearing Eunice's voice, Serena looked up with anxious eyes and uttered timidly, "Aunt Eunice."

"Still not over it?" Eunice asked as she entered, finding Serena curled up on an armchair, her feet not even daring to touch the floor. The fear in her eyes seemed genuine.

"It's so dark in here. Why don't you let some sunshine in?" Eunice walked over to the window and drew back the curtains.

The sound of the curtains sliding sent a shiver through Serena, and as the sunlight streamed in, she

squinted, finding it almost blinding and unreal.

Eunice sat down on the sofa opposite her and, noticing the untouched meal on the table, asked casually,

"Not hungry?"

"Yeah." Serena just hugged her knees tighter, her long hair cascading down and framing her overtly startled face.

"What's up with the kitchen staff?

Knowing you had such a scare last night, yet they cooked up this bloody mess. Blood sausage, and what's with the black sesame seeds sprinkled on these egg whites? They look like dead men's eyeballs."

At the sight, Serena's fear intensified.

Eunice watched her reaction and continued, "Serena, tell me, do people die with their eyes open or closed?"

Serena looked at Eunice, alarmed, "Aunt Eunice, I don't understand what you mean by that."

"Nothing. Just making conversation. It's just that I happened to notice these eyeballs, oh, I mean these egg whites. Don't overthink it," Eunice smiled gently and sweetly.

But Serena couldn't bear to look any longer.

"Serena, dear, if you remember anything about last night, you let me know." Eunice spoke softly, "I've had people looking into it, but no leads so far. You know I don't take kindly to threats.

Remember when you were a kid and someone pulled your hair, and pushed you down? I gave that bully a piece of my mind.

You know my temperament."

Serena eyed the stylish woman with the short hair and red lips. Her voice was soft, her smile beautiful, but Serena could sense an underlying warning in her words.

"In business, I'm the same way. I'm willing to give my competitors a chance, but if they don't appreciate it, well, let's just say they won't get a second one," Eunice's smile grew even more enchanting.

Yet Serena dared not meet her eyes.

"I've said before, Bella finally came back to this family, and I just want to make things right for her. She nearly had an accident on my turf, someone tried to have her killed. If I find out who's behind it, what do you think I should do? Expose their deeds for all to see, let them rot in jail for life, or maybe just chop them up and feed them to the fish?"

Serena couldn't quite fathom the woman before her. She was the epitome of elegance and intellect, but her words sent chills down Serena's spine.

"Serena, you've been at Dawnstar for a while now, and we haven't had a proper sit-down chat. You're leaving soon. Is there anything you'd like to tell me?"

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Eunice's smile was gentle and beautiful as she spoke, "I've cherished you for eighteen years, honey. You wouldn't leave without even saying a word to me, would you?"

"What exactly are you trying to say, Aunt Eunice?"

"I know you're still a kid at heart, love. There are some things you might not know how to handle, so I thought maybe I could help you."

"You still suspect that I had something to do with what happened last night, don't you?" Serena lifted her

gaze, a touch of hurt in her eyes as she bit her lower lip, asking sadly, "Am I right?"

"Is this incident related to you in any way?"

Tears began to stream down Serena's face, her eyes filled with an unbearable sense of injustice. She seemed to be holding back her emotions, but the sense of being wronged made her reveal a hint of resentment.

"Why do you have to think so poorly of me, Aunt Eunice? If my sister had never come back to this family, if there had never been any mix-up, would you still think of me this way?"

Looking into Eunice's eyes with profound sadness, Serena asked, "If I were still your biological niece, if I

still shared blood with this family, if I were still the same old Serena I've always been, would you still believe that I was capable of such a thing?"

Eunice remained silent; her beautiful eyes gave nothing away.

"Just because I'm not the flesh and blood of this family, you think you can throw any accusation at me. If one day it turns out that I have nothing to do with this, will you feel even the slightest bit of guilt for how you've treated me today?"

Eunice's gaze fell upon her, but she still said nothing.

Serena laughed, though her smile was laced with bitterness and sorrow, "I know you won't. Because in your eyes, I'm no longer your dear niece. Now you have my sister, who is more capable and impressive

than I am. The less she speaks, the more you all think she's better than me. Isn't that right?"

"Serena."

Eunice seemed like someone who had weathered great storms; the slight turbulence before her did nothing to disturb the calm composure of her smile and gaze.

"You might have forgotten, but I've only just returned to this family. After what I've been through, I look at everyone with fresh eyes, not like your grandparents, whose image of you is frozen in the past. A person who lived under the identity of her sister for eighteen years, fighting over simple things like a breakfast burrito or a cheesy omelette, completely disregarding the hardships she endured all these years; A person

who deliberately hid her sister's true identity, allowing her boyfriend to believe her 'fiancé' was seduced by her sister."

"A person who doesn't even care when her own boyfriend is hurt, not sparing him a single look of concern.

Someone who, even when drunk, can't stop thinking about her brother-in-law. Do you think I can look at her with the same eyes as before?"

Serena looked up, her emotions complex as she faced the woman before her.

"I watched you grow up, thinking I knew you. But it turns out I didn't know you at all; you've become a stranger to me. Since we've come this far, I will ask you straight. Did you do it? Did you kill him?"

Serena closed her eyes in despair, letting the tears fall freely before finally replying, "No, I didn't."

Before Eunice could respond, Serena continued, "No matter if you're straightforward or beating around the bush with your questions, the answer is no. I won't admit to something I didn't do. How he died has nothing to do with me, and if you're only here to talk about that, then there's nothing left for us to discuss." Eunice looked into her eyes and simply said, "Alright, then we won't discuss it." Serena was taken aback, looking at her aunt with a mix of surprise and confusion.

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She didn't come off as a pushover. "Anyway, I've said my piece." Eunice chuckled, shifting into a more graceful posture, and declared with effortless poise, "Whoever thinks about hiring a hitman to take out Bella, or playing dirty tricks behind the scenes, they won't get off lightly with me. Of course, I hope it's not you, but if it is, I've just given you a fair warning, and you chose to ignore it." Having finished her piece, she stood up, smoothed out her dress, and was about to leave when something

seemed to strike her. She turned back with a smile, "Oh yes, when I mentioned someone wanting to hire a hitman to kill Bella, you didn't seem surprised at all. It's as if you already knew, as if hiring a hitman and the incident last night are connected." Serena's face showed a flicker of change as she looked at Eunice.

"Goodbye, and godspeed," Eunice said without further ado and left the room.

Watching her leave, Serena felt the familial bond with Eunice thinning with each step she took away.

An hour later.

The estate's helipad bustled with servants shuttling luggage and gifts back and forth.

"These gifts are from me and your uncle, for your parents, and some are for you."

Eunice said,

straightening Arabella's clothes gently and whispering in her ear, "Stay safe on your way back, dear. I will speed up the investigation, and I'll make good on my promise within a week."

Arabella knew her aunt referred to rooting out the remaining threats.

"I hope it won't bring you too much trouble, Aunt Eunice."

When Serena came down, she caught Eunice whispering intimately with Arabella, both laughing merrily.

Bard, Belinda, Darren, and the rest of the family were bidding a reluctant farewell to Arabella, who seemed to be the heart of the home.

Whether it was sorrow or envy, Serena found herself rooted to the spot.

May hugged Arabella tightly, "Miss Collins, I'll come to find you at Reflections Villa during the holidays with Mrs. Belinda Griffith."

"Come on, it's not like a final goodbye," Belinda chuckled.

"Bella, make sure to spend some quality time with Romeo. Don't leave the poor guy lonesome."

Arabella laughed, "I will."

"Serena, you're here too?" Bard noticed Serena standing a little way off. He called out, "Come here,

Serena. Once you and Bella are safely home, give me a call or send a message."

"I'm not taking this flight," Arabella clarified, "I'm going back with Romeo."

The group, taken aback, then remembered that she and Romeo were the couple. Romeo had come to Dawnstar for her, and naturally, he would return with her.

"Has Romeo wrapped up his business here? When did this happen?" Darren inquired with concern.

"Just now."

Arabella had just packed her bags and received a call from Romeo. She had intended to inform her aunt and uncle but seeing them heading towards the helipad, she decided to go downstairs and tell them in person.

But to Serena, this came off as a blatant show-off. Arabella had plenty of chances to mention it earlier, yet she waited until Serena arrived to drop the news. If this wasn't intentional, what was it??

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"Having Romeo take care of you on the road makes me feel so much more at ease." Belinda said with a smile, gently patting Arabella's head, "Once you arrive, give me a call or shoot a message whenever you can."

"And me, too," Darren quickly added, "sometimes your grandma might be in the shower or asleep and can't respond right away. If it's urgent, give me a call."

"Will do." Arabella gave them a gentle look, "Well, I should be off. His car is waiting outside."

"Safe travels." Eunice said, her eyes filled with affection as she watched Arabella, "No matter how busy you get when you're back, don't forget to eat, and if you need any help, just tell me."

"And don't forget about your uncle." Bard chimed in fondly, "If there's anything I can help with, just let me know."

"I will." Arabella could feel the full force of their love and care, and her heart softened in response.

Off to the side, Serena felt left out. It was supposed to be her boarding the plane, yet here was Arabella stealing the spotlight, deliberately mentioning that Romeo's car was waiting. It made everyone revolve around her!

"Grandma Belinda, I'm going to miss you all," Suddenly, Serena burst into tears and hugged Belinda.

"Oh, you silly kid, why the tears?" Belinda could only offer comfort, "It's not like we're parting forever."

"Even though I know you will be coming to Reflections Villa in a few days, these moments we've shared have been so precious that I can't bear to part with you for even a second."

"Then stay with us. We can have a little chat together," Eunice suggested with a smile, her red lips curling into a warm and lovely expression.

Serena quickly countered, "But mom and dad are waiting for me at home, and I can't be an ungrateful daughter. Grandma, grandpa, uncle, aunt, you'll come visit soon, okay? I'll be waiting at home for you."

"Don't worry, dear. Give me a few days to wrap up some work, and I'll definitely come to see you."

Eunice's smile was beautiful, but Serena could feel a bit dreadful.

"I better board the plane now."

Almost afraid to linger, Serena said her goodbyes and hurried up the airplane stairs.

Eunice watched her leave and suddenly called out, "Serena."

Serena stopped in her tracks and turned back awkwardly, managing a stiff smile, "Aunt Eunice."

"Remember, I will come for you, and when I do, you better not be sneaking off on some overseas adventure with friends."

Serena felt a chill.

"We'll all be there," Darren added, waving cheerfully, oblivious to Eunice's insinuations.

Serena forced a smile, "Okay, I'll wait for you."

Eunice blew her a kiss.

Serena felt her legs go weak, and she gripped the handrail, forcing another smile, "Goodbye."

"Goodbye!" They all waved back.

Finally, as the plane took off, Serena let out a sigh of relief, feeling like she had just survived a close call.

Meanwhile, Arabella climbed into Romeo's car and apologized, "I had promised to meet your friends, but I nearly forgot that tomorrow is Grandpa Eugene's birthday."

"No worries," Romeo took her hand, his gaze tender, "they're just a bunch of old pals. Besides, they'll all be heading back for the holidays soon enough. We can meet up then."

Arabella glanced at him, "Have you finished up everything on your end at Dawnstar?"

"Yeah, all done. I've set up a new full-spectrum production company. We can develop and produce our own movies and TV shows. Just yesterday, we got the green light for twelve popular TV series and sixteen movies."

Romeo shared details of his work, "Also, one of the subsidiaries acquired two resort hotels and three forest hotels, all nestled in the woods on the outskirts of the city. They cover nearly a thousand acres of forest and are surrounded by rich tourist resources, like Dragon and Tiger Cave and Mystic Mountain, as well as other natural and cultural sites. We're looking to create a massive resort area."

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Arabella nodded, listening as he continued.

"And I've also acquired three pharmaceutical companies."

Arabella chuckled, "Today I saw that your pharmaceutical company made a generous donation of 10

million dollars in essential medicines and another 10 million in immunotherapy drugs to impoverished areas within the country."

That was quite the grand gesture.

Immunotherapy drugs were particularly beneficial for the elderly with respiratory infections and kids who suffered frequent respiratory ailments, boosting their immunity and reducing the recurrence of respiratory diseases during the winter. While the essential medicines included cold remedies, gastrointestinal drugs, and more. You could say he had thought of everything.

Romeo gave her a tender look, "I'm just following the lead of my fiancée. Didn't you donate 3 million dollars worth of medicines to the Red Cross this month?"

"How did you know?"

That was a donation Arabella had made under the name of her pharmaceutical company, and she believed nobody else knew about it.

"Because I know you founded that company." Romeo said with a smile, "You always concerned about the welfare of the people."

Before he could finish, his phone rang. It was one of his friends calling.

Pressing the answer button on the steering wheel, a male voice came through.

"Romeo, Natalie Monroe heard you're heading back home and insisted I make this call." The voice was cut off as the phone was snatched away.

"Romeo, you're leaving without even telling me. What's the rush?" The girl's voice was whiny and a bit

petulant, "You hardly come to Dawnstar, and we've only hung out once, and now you're leaving again!

Where are you now, still in Dawnstar?"

Arabella watched Romeo with a curious expression, her gaze full of intrigue.

Romeo feared a misunderstanding, "Let Sebastian answer the phone."

"Tell me where you are. Are you still in Dawnstar? Send me your location; I'll come to you!"

"I'm with my fiancée right now. It's not convenient," Romeo bluntly refused.

"So what you're saying is, if your fiancée isn't here, it would be convenient? Our relationship isn't

something secret. Didn't you say you think of me like a sister? Can't a sister come to see you off? Your

fiancée isn't the jealous type, right? I don't care. If you won't tell me, I have my ways of finding out where

you are."

"If you're not going to say anything, I'm hanging up."

Without waiting for the other person to finish, Romeo cut the call.

"She's just a friend's sister, and we hardly ever talk. Please don't get the wrong idea."

Romeo explained, glancing at Arabella nervously multiple times, worried she might get the wrong impression.

Arabella looked ahead, her lips curling playfully, "I know, just a chance meeting."

Romeo hurried to clarify, "It was because a buddy of mine was having a birthday bash. I didn't expect her to be there. She's usually at boarding school and hardly ever joins our get-togethers."

"You seem pretty well-informed."

"It's not like that."

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Before Romeo could finish his sentence, his car's display lit up with an incoming call from an unfamiliar number with no saved contact name. "Is that her cell?" Arabella teased with a chuckle, "You've got it memorized?"

He hesitated to pick up. Knowing who it was without a saved name meant the number was etched in his heart.

"No, you've got it all wrong. She's just...she's never changed her number since we were kids," Romeo quickly dismissed the call.

"So you've known each other since childhood?"

Arabella's meaningful glance made Romeo slam on the brakes, eager to clarify, "We knew of each other, but weren't close, totally unrelated."

"She's your buddy's younger sister, right? You said you knew her number by heart. Grew up together but still no connection?"

"That's 'cause a long time ago, my folks looked after her for a while."

Watching Arabella's knowing nod, Romeo grew more anxious, "Not like that, her family had some troubles."

He grabbed Arabella's hand, pleading with his eyes, "Anyway, they moved to Dawnstar after that, and we barely saw each other once a year."

"That's kind of a shame."

"Bella," Romeo was truly frantic now, "don't get it wrong. Should I block her to make you happy?"

"That might not be enough, given she's your friend's sister," Arabella feigned a dilemma.

"Then I'll change my number."

"No can do, your current number's tied to so many things, like bank accounts, WhatsApp."

"I can update all that."

"What if you miss something?"

"I'll keep the old number inactive, just shut it down, and if I ever need it, I'll turn it back on." Romeo was desperate for her understanding, willing to do anything she asked.

"And if she finds out your new number? You'll change it again?"

"I'll make things clear with her."

"Weren't things clear already? You said she's just like a sister to you."

"I don't even have sisterly affection for her, Bella." Romeo was at a loss for words, "Baby, honey~"

Before meeting Arabella, he was always reserved, hardly the type to spill his guts like this.

Seeing his distressed face, Arabella couldn't help but laugh.

"You're joking around?" Romeo finally caught on.

"Let's get moving. Don't block the road."

Although other drivers wouldn't dare mess with his license plate, it was still a public road after all.

Stopping like that looked bad.

Seeing Arabella smile and act nonchalant, Romeo finally relaxed, caressing her face, "You scared me. I

was about to drag you to my friend's place to vouch for me."

He had no extra feelings for Natalie, not even a sliver.

"If I do that, I'll lose face in front of your friends. They'll think I'm a shrew."

"It's my own choice to steer clear of flirts, nothing to do with you. Besides," Romeo gazed into her eyes, "I

like it when you're in charge."

Feeling her concern, he knew he was cherished.

Just then, his friend called again. Romeo tapped the answer button without hesitation, "You got a death

wish? You think I'm too busy to deal with you? If you dare play messenger for someone else again, we'll see if I let you off the hook."

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“Does your fiancée know about your temper?” The voice on the other end of the phone struggled to suppress a chuckle.

“Ha, she loves everything about me.”

“Even your affairs?”

“Man, you're really asking for a smack.”

“Hahaha.” The guy on the phone burst into laughter, “I was totally strong-armed into calling, man. Is she there? I need to clear the air with her.”

“Just beat it, will ya? Don't bother my fiancée.”

“Just let me say a few words to her, I promise.”

“Your voice is too gruff; I don't want to scare her.”

“Gruff? Me? Are you kidding? Maybe you're losing your hearing. Forget it, just hand her the phone, bro. I need to explain.”

“Beat it.” Romeo hung up directly.

Arabella couldn't help but laugh, "Your friend's quite the character."

"He's just a pain in the neck when he's not looking for a beating. Otherwise, he's a decent guy."

Smiling, Arabella asked, "So, what's next on the agenda?"

"There's a McMillian Corporation airstrip nearby." Romeo glanced at her, "That girl is a friend's sister. Their family went generations with only sons until this little princess popped out. So, she's pretty spoiled. My buddy indulges her, and sometimes even drags her along to gatherings so she won't feel left out."

Arabella nodded in understanding, "So, the guy on the phone, he's her brother?"

"Nope. Her brother knows I don't have feeling towards her, so he never helps her with this. She ropes in

his friends to do it for her, and she's tried every trick in the book with them. When their family was caught up in some inheritance drama, they were worried she might be in danger. They made up a story about her going missing, but in reality, they stashed her at our place. My parents were abroad and swamped with work, so they couldn't look after her. It was just me and her at home."

Arabella nodded, "Ah, that explains her crush on you."

In times of turmoil, it was not strange for someone to fall for the person who offered them a sense of security, especially someone with Romeo's good looks.

With that thought, Arabella's gaze shifted to the man beside her. Even his profile was flawless, especially those bright, piercing eyes.

“She didn’t stay long. Once her family sorted out their issues, they whisked her away. That was years ago.”

Romeo couldn’t remember exactly how many years. He’d never really cared.

Natalie, however, had developed a soft spot for him after staying with him.

“Did she ever confess her feelings to you?” Arabella inquired.

“She did, but I made it clear I wasn’t interested. I only saw her as a sister.”

Honestly, not even a sister. Still, Natalie kept bombarding him with messages. Out of respect for his friend, he’d never blocked her, but he rarely replied.

Unless it was something about his friend getting hurt or a birthday- that kind of stuff would get his attention.

“Bella, you’re the first person I’ve ever truly loved.” Romeo said, looking at her earnestly, “I’ve never thought about spending my life with anyone but you. You’re the first and the last.”

From the moment he saw her, he couldn’t look away.

He couldn’t believe how much he could like someone, to the point of no return.

“You’re my first, too.”

Arabella's simple words caught Romeo off guard, and then he realized she was responding to him.

He was her first love. His lips curled into a smile, his eyes filled with surprise and joy.

All the worry and unease vanished, replaced by pure sweetness.

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/ Chapter 1480

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1480

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Once on board the plane, Romeo was still basking in bliss.

He sliced apples for Arabella, holding her close, feeding her piece by piece.

As she listened to him reminisce about his childhood, Arabella learned of the strict upbringing he endured

as the heir to his family's fortune - enduring hardships and witnessing the cutthroat nature of high society. Feuds were commonplace among the elite; siblings turned against each other, and marriages fell apart - all in the name of competition. From vying for attention as children to battling for wealth as adults, if direct confrontation failed, they resorted to underhanded tactics. And then, there was the endless one-upmanship - from comparing spouses and children to flaunting designer clothes and extravagant parties. Having seen it all, and surrounded by people who were either deferential or fawning, Romeo never knew true intimacy until he met Arabella. He looked down at the girl snuggled in his arms, his eyes softened as he continued to feed her, "You've

never really talked about your childhood." Arabella dredged up her memories, "Do you remember when we first met, you took me out to La Belle Vie, with its retractable roof for stargazing? That night, it reminded me of those days I spent as a kid."

Arabella uttered blandly, "When I was young, Attlee and Olga were always busy, and it was Grannie Grace who spent countless nights with me. Those star-filled evenings are just like that night when we had dinner.

Attlee and Olga have never prepared any surprise for me. It wasn't until I returned to the Collins family that I discovered how naturally and freely family can express their love. Attlee and Olga didn't even have time to be with me, let alone taking me outside to play. It was you who took me to the biggest amusement park

in Summerfield, allowing me to relive my childhood."

Romeo chuckled, reminiscing, "Back then, to get closer to you, I rode the carousel with you on the same

horse, and we took so many photos which I've kept in my phone. And during that haunted house visit,

there were those 'assassins' after me."

"Those goons were no match for you,"

Arabella had been baffled at the time, wondering where those

people got the nerve to take the job.

Romeo talked with her a lot about the past until she fell asleep in his arms, and

he gently carried her to

her room, tucking her in.

The plane soon landed at Reflections Villa.

Serena hadn't quite made her mark when she saw Romeo's plane arrive, feeling a twinge of jealousy.

"My darling, you're finally back." Louisa hadn't seen her beloved daughter for days and embraced her

tightly, "How was your stay with your uncle and aunt? Settling in alright?"

"They were so kind to me, and my grandparents adored me." Arabella replied obediently, "The meals were always to my liking."

Louisa's affection for her grew with her docile demeanor, "Your aunt has been singing your praises! We wouldn't have known that you are the one who founded the Ar-BI-Clear Group if it wasn't for her. You're juggling so much; these years must have been exhausting."

"Romeo's here too." Kenneth smiled, patting Romeo's shoulder, "Thanks for bringing Bella home. I heard

from Bard that you went out of your way to Dawnstar for Bella. Good lad, it eases my mind knowing she's under your care."

"It's no trouble at all. I'm grateful for the opportunity to bring Bella back," Romeo replied politely.

"You must stay for dinner tonight."

Kenneth insisted warmly, "Bella was new to Dawnstar, a stranger in town, but luckily you were there. Anyway, let's not chat out here in the cold, let's go inside."

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