

49 All the authority to make the decision.

The chefs and the entire team of helpers assembled in the dining hall, keeping their eyes fixed on the floor, as if prepared to accept punishment without offering any defense. 1

While Aiden and Arwen sat, the butler spoke, "During your training to serve the Winslow household, you were taught one fundamental rule —the absolute discipline to follow commands. Yet today, of all day, when the lady of the house made her first appearance, you chose to act wilfully, disobeying her orders. Do you realize the consequence of such actions?"

Everyone exchanged confused glances, not understanding what they had done wrong. However, even in their confusion, none of them dared to speak, as they knew that whispers among themselves would not be helpful in this situation.

The head chef finally voiced out the question that had been troubling everyone. "Mr. Jones, we

are truly unsure of what you mean. Which order did we disobey?"

The old butler exchanged a look with Aiden before responding, "Did I not inform you earlier that Madam dislikes coriander? She specifically requested that you prepare a few extra dishes without it, yet every dish contains coriander. If this isn't disobedience, then what it is?"

The checks exchanged confused glances, shaking their head at one another. Seeing their confusion, the head chef replied, "Mr. Jones, following Madam's request, we did prepare several dishes to suit her taste, without adding coriander. We have no idea how it got added into the food."

Arwen knew exactly whose foul play this was. The chefs' denial confirmed her suspicions. Her gaze shifted to Amanda, who was watching her with a nervous yet vicious expression, further confirming Amada's involvement.

"Your ignorance won't excuse you, Abraham. You have worked here for many years, and I am sure you know that this is not how we handle mistakes," the butler said, the consequences

very clear underneath his tone. While Arwen didn't know exactly what those consequences were, the way the chef flinched indicated that he knew them all too well.

The head chef exchanged a glance with his subordinate before turning to the butler with determination. "If the fault lies with us, please allow me to take the responsibility, Mr. Jones. I should have ensured everything was in order. I will accept both the responsibility and the punishment for this."

The butler sighed but nodded, preparing to speak when Arwen intervened.

"I don't think punishing someone who isn't at fault will set a great example, Mr. Jones," she said, turning Aiden and continuing, "Whatever happened is clearly not their fault. It's someone else's doing, and if we let him take the blame, then that will only set the real culprit free. That's not right."

Aiden met her gaze, and Arwen didn't look away. She just wanted him to read her thoughts, just as she believed he could.

"What do you suggest, then?" Aiden asked.

And Arwen smiled knowingly, before glancing briefly at Amanda, who grew increasingly nervous under her scrutiny. "I suggest we let it go this time and see if the real culprit reveals herself next time. Once she does, I am sure we will have appropriate punishment ready for her offense." 1

Arwen deliberately used a gendered pronoun to scare Amanda, and she was satisfied when she saw the woman's anxiety deepen. 2

Aiden followed her gaze but remained silent. "You are my wife and the lady of this household. You have all the authority to make the decision. If that's what you want then, go ahead with it." 2

Arwen turned to give him a reassuring nod, only to meet his confident gaze. Her heart skipped a beat, but she didn't dwell on it. Turning to the chefs and the team of helpers, she said, "You can all go back and rest now. I know today must have been hectic as usual, so it's better for you all to recharge your energy for tomorrow."

Everyone was taken aback by her kindness. Smiling, they nodded and bowed slightly before leaving. However, the chefs remained. Noticing

this, Arwen turned to them, and the head chef spoke up.

"Madam, please allow us to make something fresh for you. It won't take much time, and we will —"

Arwen shook her head against their request. "I understand your concern, Mr. Abraham, however, it's fine. Make up for it by cooking something delicious tomorrow. For tonight, I will make do with what's already prepared."

The chef looked at the dishes and felt conflicted. Although he didn't know the lady well, he could see from how she handled the situation today that kindness and righteousness was a strong trait of hers.

Bowing their heads slightly, they left. Soon after, even the butler excused himself, leaving Aiden and Arwen alone.

Arwen glanced back at the dishes. "I said I was not picky, but it looks like I will have to pick out the bits of coriander," she mumbled, trying to add humor to the situation, but Aiden stopped her mid-motion.



"You don't have to do that," he said, and Arwen looked up at him with a subconscious pout of confusion.

"Huh?" she asked before explaining something that she thought he didn't know. "Dear husband, let me tell you – food has been always my bottom line. I can't skip my meals even if the world is about to collapse in the next second. If you expect me to simply skip this dinner and wait for breakfast, I can't do that."

Without realizing it, she had effortlessly referred to him as her husband, and it rolled off her tongue as naturally as breathing. When Aiden heard her, his gaze softened several times before he let out a small chuckle.

The sound was like a melody, making Arwen smile instantly. But before she could compliment him on his laughter, she felt his hand reach out to hold hers.

"I didn't mean that," he said, gently pulling her up with him. "Come with me, and I will show you what I meant exactly."

Arwen didn't get the chance to even guess, not like she minded following him like that.