

Extraordinary 781

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"Ashlyn Berry?" A spark appeared in Bianca's eyes when she heard Ashlyn's name. She raised her head and gazed at the woman in front of her.

Shock flashed across her eyes.

She never expected Ashlyn to look that beautiful and elegant.

It didn't matter if it was the young woman's figure or demeanor, both were undoubtedly excellent.

The shock in the old woman's eyes was obvious to see.

Ashlyn stepped forward and smiled gracefully. "Happy birthday, Old Mrs. Yates. I hope you'll live a long and happy life."

When she smiled, it was as though the entire hall lit up.

She was like a star, forever being the center of everyone's attention wherever she went.

Penelope couldn't believe her eyes. Why is she here? Not only that, she was personally introduced by Uncle Ryan!

Mary's face was filled with jealousy and hate. Why is that b*tch here? How dare she come here to make a mess! She doesn't belong here!

She and her daughter's expression looked terrifyingly wretched, as though they were going to eat people.

Bianca had heard too many bad things about Ashlyn before.

Thus, she thought Ashlyn was just a vulgar woman from the countryside, a country bumpkin who knew nothing of good etiquette.

And yet, Ashlyn appeared so dignified that she completely outclassed Penelope.

For some reason that she didn't understand, Bianca felt the urge to cry.

Ashlyn was her ideal granddaughter in that Ashlyn was graceful, beautiful, and the perfect model of a true socialite.

Fate was cruel that way.

“Why are you here too, Ashlyn?” An old woman's voice rang out at the entrance.

As the crowd shifted their attention to the voice's owner, they spotted an old woman in a dark red outfit entering the hall with a housekeeper.

That old woman was none other than Susan.

The moment Ashlyn saw her, a familial feeling surfaced in her heart. Just as she was about to greet the old woman, Susan swiftly approached her as well.

“Grandma—”

Before she could say more, Susan cut her off unhappily. “How can you do this? Don't you know this is the Count's Mansion and your aunt's home? Are you here to cause trouble again?”

“I'm not here to cause trouble.” Ashlyn was confounded by the old woman's words. Why is she saying that? I'm just here to look for Old Mr. Yates!

Susan turned to Bianca apologetically. “I'm so sorry, Old Mrs. Yates. My granddaughter is very crude and doesn't know anything about manners or rules. She was upset that I didn't bring her to attend your birthday banquet with me and probably came here to cause trouble. Usually, she's very... There's no way to put it nicely. She's just very disobedient.”

In just a few sentences, she planted the idea that Ashlyn was a vulgar, ill-mannered woman in people's minds.

Susan was there for a reason. Mary had promised her that if everything went smoothly, she would save Horace.

When Susan thought about her goals, she continued to make Ashlyn look worse.

She reprimanded Ashlyn in front of everyone seriously, “Did you follow me in secret? What are you trying to do?” It was then she saw Greg, who was standing next to Ashlyn, and exclaimed, “You! This man sat next to me on my plane here! He harassed me and insulted me! Look at what kind of friends she has.”

When Greg saw Susan, he initially thought they were quite lucky to be able to meet again.

Before he could even greet her, however, she took a huge dump on him.

He was equally flabbergasted and angry. Is she really saying that I, the director responsible for the highest-grossing movie this year, the person who was just nominated for the best director award in the award show, harassed her, a seventy-odd-year-old woman? Yeah, sure, maybe if my head had been kicked by a mule!

The guests in the hall were all notable in their own ways. Their initial amazement at Ashlyn swiftly transformed into shock and contempt.

Not only that, they began looking at Greg with disdain, too.

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Never in a million years did Ashlyn think Susan would appear and slander her and her friends.

Susan's remark hurt her so deeply that she could barely breathe. It was unbearably painful.

All the onlookers cast disdainful looks at her as if she was stripped naked in public.

Penelope looked at Ashlyn in smug satisfaction. How I wish Ashlyn would drop to her knees and beg me.

She finally opened her mouth and said, "All this while, you've never shown Grandma any respect. People might be charmed by your innocent looks, but I know what kind of person you are."

Penelope's eyes reddened as she continued, "Grandma took good care of you when you were in the countryside, yet you kicked her out of the house during winter and refused to feed her. Fortunately, Mom and I arrived in time and took Grandma to the city. You're the most wicked woman I've ever seen."

Susan also chided, "Yeah. She kicked me out of the house during winter while I was wearing only a thin shirt. And that's how I got my arthritis in the legs. Ashlyn, what have I done to you to deserve this? I raised you and gave you a home, yet this is how you repay me?"

"I know you're famous now and have a lot of money. But have you thought of the life you had before? Have you thought of how you treated me in the past? Have you thought of taking care of me?" Susan said in between sobs.

Bianca was utterly annoyed by the turn of events. She did not expect these people would make a din at her birthday party and cause the atmosphere to turn awkward.

After seeing how Susan behaved, Bianca regretted having her over. She had invited Susan to her birthday party because Mary had told her that she felt bad leaving Susan alone in the house. Since this woman named Susan took good care of my daughter, I thought she should be a sweet person.

But that was not the case. The elderly woman was not only a country bumpkin but also an uncouth shrew.

At the same time, Bianca had also begun to see Ashlyn as a troublemaker, even though she initially had a good impression of her.

She shot daggers at Ryan. Look at the guests you've brought to the house!

Ryan was bewildered. He did not know how to react to that glare.

When he bumped into Ashlyn by the door, he noticed she already had an invitation card. She's a guest and also a fellow judge at the piano competition. How can I stop her from entering?

At this point, Caleb, who had kept mum throughout the drama, walked up to Ashlyn and asked casually, "Lynnie, you've always been a free spirit and wouldn't let any stumbling block get in your way. Why don't you say something?"

A corner of Ashlyn's lips quirked up. "I used to call her Grandma, but since I'm not Horace's biological daughter, she's not my biological grandmother. I don't want to argue with them since this is not the Berrys' family dinner. We're here to celebrate Old Mrs. Yates' birthday, so I can't steal the limelight from the star of the day."

Bianca's face changed upon hearing that. Unlike Mary and her daughter, this girl has a knack for putting things into perspective. I'm impressed!

Almost all the guests had turned their attention to the drama around Ashlyn, Susan, and Penelope. At the same time, Bianca's own daughter and granddaughter continued to add fuel to the fire as if they could care less about her birthday.

That was why Bianca was taken aback by Ashlyn's remark. Though she's an outsider, she's the only one here who cares about my feelings.

The guests, who were waiting for more drama to unfold, instantly felt embarrassed upon hearing what Ashlyn said.

"She looks like a great kid. I wonder if it's all just a misunderstanding?" Bianca smiled and gently patted Ashlyn's hand. "How old are you, and what do you work as?"

Ashlyn looked at the affable Bianca and softened her voice. "I'm a doctor specializing in surgery."

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"Doctor? That's a great profession." Bianca nodded in approval.

Bianca was not a credulous person who would be easily influenced by others.

She would assess a person's character based on her judgment.

At first, Ashlyn did not leave a positive impression on Bianca, but the latter felt she could bond with Ashlyn after seeing her in person.

On the contrary, Bianca did not feel the same way about Mary and her daughter.

She could not describe her feelings for Ashlyn, but somehow, she wanted to know more about this young lady.

Penelope could not help but feel jealous upon noticing how Bianca sided with Ashlyn. The elderly woman's reaction caused an inexplicable panic in her.

Bianca had always treated Penelope well and took good care of her, but she seemed to always distance herself from Penelope.

The elderly lady, too, seldom praised her from the bottom of her heart. Yet, the way she praised Ashlyn seemed genuine. Ashlyn, you b*tch! Why do you have to compete with me even when I'm in Maredania? She's my granny! Don't you try to get in her good books!

Penelope gritted her teeth, but she still plastered a smile on her face. "Granny, do you know she was publicly humiliated by her patient's family before?"

"Ignore them. I'm sure there'll always be uncivilized people who would intentionally cause ruckuses in the hospitals."

Bianca smiled and looked at the elegant Ashlyn. "Are you single?"

She felt Ashlyn was a good match for Ryan.

Ashlyn froze for a moment. She used to hear her colleagues in the hospital talk about how the elders in their family would ask them about their relationship status during gatherings.

However, that had never happened to her before because she did not have many relatives in her family.

Besides her grandmother, no one had ever asked her this question so affectionately.

The way Bianca asked the question warmed Ashlyn's heart even though she could not quite describe the feeling.

Penelope looked at Bianca in disbelief. All this while, she had always thought Bianca was difficult to get along with because she had never seen the elderly woman being so approachable to someone since the day she joined the Yates family.

Mary, too, trembled with fury, but she managed to regain her composure. "Mom, I bet you don't know Ashlyn married someone from the Nolan family. When she was secretly married, she had quite a number of suitors. She used to be very close with Mr. Zebriele, the president of Zebriele Group—oh, and also Director Maxwell! They even worked on a film together, and he's her date today too."

"When Ashlyn was still in high school, many male students wrote her love letters. I was always worried

about her because she often came home late,” Susan said with a sigh as if she was concerned about Ashlyn.

Mary and Susan were trying to portray Ashlyn as a promiscuous woman.

Upon hearing the accusation, Ashlyn maintained the perfect smile on her fair face. She sized the two women up and said, “Do you think the Nolan family would accept me if I'm that kind of woman? Instead of defaming me here in public, why don't you two spend time improving yourselves to become more cultured people?”

Ashlyn retaliated aptly while looking at Mary and Susan.

Mary clenched her teeth. “Don't get me wrong, Ashlyn. I just want all the guests to know how gorgeous you are.”

“I believe everyone can assess my looks with their own eyes without you telling them,” Ashlyn refuted elegantly. She then looked in Greg's direction. “This is Mr. Greg Maxwell, the director of Trashy Idol, a film I've invested in. He's a brilliant director, so feel free to reach out if you wish to collaborate with him.”

Ashlyn appeared unruffled when she introduced Greg to all the guests.

Compared to Penelope, who came from the Count's family, Ashlyn looked more like a sophisticated socialite who had charmed the crowd with her beauty and demeanor.

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“Dr. Berry! Nice to meet you!”

Suddenly, a middle-aged man walked in Ashlyn's direction.

Clad in a black suit, the gentleman looked extraordinarily classy.

Upon noticing the man from a distance, Ashlyn greeted him with a light nod. “It has been a while, Mr. Berkley.”

“I didn't expect to see you here. By the way, those medical students from T University were so blessed to have attended your public lecture. It's a shame that I could only watch it from the video.” Lawrence Berkley expressed his disappointment while shaking Ashlyn's hand.

Ashlyn instantly caught Lawrence's attention the moment he stepped into the hall. He could not hide his excitement when he was walking toward her.

“Oh, my God. Did I hear that right? World Health Organization chairman Mr. Berkley wanted to attend

Ashlyn's public lecture?"

"Public lecture in T University? Didn't Penelope claim she was the one who gave that?"

The crowd started whispering behind their backs.

Lawrence smiled and said, "I guess all of you don't know who Dr. Berry is. Dr. Berry is H Nation's best surgeon, and she has saved many lives over the years. Just a while ago, she conducted a public lecture at T University in H Nation."

Bianca was stunned when she saw Lawrence walking in.

Her jaw dropped even further after hearing what the man said. She's so young, yet she's already an accomplished doctor. She's indeed one of a kind.

At the same time, she stared at Penelope and Mary. How dare these two claim credit for something they didn't do? They are a disgrace to the Yates family!

All the other guests were also struck dumb.

"So Ms. Penelope is a fake?" The guest, who believed Ashlyn was the speaker at the public lecture, could not help but exclaim.

Everyone started shooting Penelope glares of disdain. Claiming to be someone who she's not? Has she no shame? She even dared to get her mom and grandmother to humiliate Ashlyn! She should be ashamed of herself!

Penelope was so embarrassed that she hung her head in shame. This is all Mom's fault. She told me to go along with it, and now I've made a fool of myself!

The intense stares from all the guests were like needles pricking her body, causing her to shudder in pain.

Bianca had never felt so humiliated before. Throughout the last few decades, Bianca had not only made a name for herself but also taken the Yates family to the next level. She was extremely cautious with everything she did and every decision she made because making a wrong move could get her killed.

Yet, Mary and Penelope had tarnished the reputation she had built over the years in the blink of an eye. How I wish I didn't bring them back to the family. If only I could turn back the clock.

"The mother and daughter are compulsive liars. How could they lie about the public lecture since many people attended the event? I bet the accusations they made against Ashlyn previously are also unfounded."

“Yeah. Pretty sure they made up stories to ruin Ms. Ashlyn's reputation.”

All the guests were no fools. Mary and Penelope might be able to blindside some rookies with their amateur acting but not these experienced influential figures.

All these big shots were observant enough to see through their deception, so they did not fall for the duo's lies.

“N-No... I didn't—” Mary tried to defend herself, but Bianca interrupted her. “Zip it!”

“Mom—” Mary looked at Bianca, feeling helpless and awkward.

“Just stop talking, okay?” Ryan was so annoyed that he had to step in.

“You all owe her an apology.” Caleb walked up to Ashlyn and turned to Bianca. “Old Mrs. Yates, how could the Yates family humiliate Lynn like this? Is this how you treat your guests?”

The crowd gasped in disbelief when they heard what Caleb said. Oh my goodness. Another big shot jumped to Ms. Ashlyn's defense!

Lawrence finally realized the Yates family was making things difficult for Ashlyn.

In a fit of anger, he handed his gift to Matilda and said, “What has happened to your family, Old Mrs. Yates? The Yates family I knew was not like this!”

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As Nicholas stared at Ashlyn's beautiful and enthralling countenance, he finally snapped out of his daze.

Ever since she made her appearance, he could not shake off the inexplicable sense of familiarity within him. Her profile was exceedingly familiar, but he could not recall where he had seen her before.

Nonetheless, he truly could not stand Mary, Penelope, and Susan's actions.

“My brother is right. Ms. Canter, Ms. Penelope, and Mdm. Blackwood must apologize to Ms. Ashlyn.”

Mary's vision went black for a moment.

Back at H Nation, Ryan forced me to apologize to Ashlyn. Why is it that in Maredania now, I'm coerced by these few big shots to apologize again? What exactly do I owe her?

Bianca's face flushed bright red. All her dignity and prestige had been destroyed by Mary.

“Apologize to Ms. Ashlyn.”

At that, Mary's eyes went wide in disbelief.

"Mom! How could you say that as well? I'm your daughter, Mom!"

"It's because you're my daughter that you've got to have more of a sense of responsibility and take responsibility for something you've done," Bianca asserted sharply, her voice forceful and sonorous. It was as though she was still the unyielding female general who went on the battlefield back then.

Humiliated, Mary turned to Ashlyn.

However, she simply could not bring herself to apologize to the latter in front of everyone.

"It looks like Ms. Canter doesn't want to apologize to my wife. In that case, shouldn't the Yates family give my wife an explanation?"

Out of the blue, an icy voice rang out from the hall entrance.

Squinting, Ashlyn gazed at the tall figure standing against the light. Appearing like a knight on horseback, the man effortlessly snagged everyone's attention.

As his luxurious black leather shoes trod on the ground, every single step carried a strong aura, reflecting on his face and emanating off his entire body.

Every gesture of his spoke of authority and power.

Everywhere Lucas went, he was the center of attention.

He swept his gaze over the crowd in the hall, a hint of contempt showing on his frosty expression.

When his sharp gaze landed on Ashlyn, the coldness within his unfathomable eyes promptly turned into faint affection.

Ashlyn could hear his familiar footsteps gradually drawing closer to her.

At long last, he stopped right in front of her. "Did I arrive in time, Honey?"

While saying that, he cast his eyes downward, locking gazes with her lovely eyes in close proximity. "Honey."

Ashlyn blinked, her lips curving into a cool and peeved smirk. He actually came over? Her disgruntled gaze fell on Spencer, who was behind the man.

Feeling guilty, Spencer did not dare to look at her.

I can't do anything to stop Mr. Nolan when he insists on coming!

"Carry it in," Lucas ordered in a deep voice.

A few tall and muscular men in black proceeded to carry a lacquered mahogany box in before placing it down heavily in the middle of the hall.

Then, they all left.

After retracting his gaze, Lucas nonchalantly swept his cold gaze over the crowd. "This is my birthday gift for you, Old Mrs. Yates."

His voice was low, tinged with a hint of iciness.

It carried an indescribable sense of chilliness that penetrated deep into the marrow of everyone present, making them shudder in fear.

"Ms. Canter, back when you were Mrs. Berry, you enjoyed infinite glory." A smile hovered over his lips, but his words cut into Mary like a knife.

Why is he bringing up the Berry family all of a sudden?

Mary's heart was in her throat. "Mr. Nolan, what... what exactly are you trying to say?"

"Don't you want to take a look at the contents of this box, Ms. Canter?" Lucas looked at Spencer with a smile.

Instantly discerning the man's meaning, Spencer opened the huge box.

Almost everyone present fixated their eyes on the box, curious to know the contents of it.

By then, Bianca's expression had turned as black as thunder.

He's definitely up to no good! This young man is either affluent or prominent. His aura is exceptional, and he radiates nobility and aloofness. One can tell that he's no ordinary person at a single glance!

"Ah..."

A moan drifted into the ears of everyone present.

In a flash, the crowd gaped at the box in astonishment. There's actually someone in there, a living person?

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Perhaps it had been too long since the man in the box had seen any light, for he subconsciously lifted his hand to shield his eyes. Only after some time had passed, and he had probably adapted to it, did he lower his hand.

He then stood up from the box and scrutinized his surroundings curiously.

When his gaze fell on Mary, he was promptly elated. "Why are you here as well, Mrs. Berry? I'm so glad to see you!"

Mary's face blanched, and she could not help taking several steps back.

"Who are you? I don't know you!" she shrieked.

"I'm Mario from the host club, Mrs. Berry! Back then, you were exceedingly satisfied with my service. Have you forgotten? You even said you'd bring me abroad after Mr. Berry had gone to prison!" Mario jumped out of the box and rushed over to Mary.

The host club?

The instant the crowd heard those three words, their jaws dropped in shock.

The look in their eyes as they regarded Mary brimmed with ridicule and scorn alongside disdain.

Even Ashlyn was obviously taken aback. She reflexively glanced at Lucas, only to meet the man's bewitching eyes.

This man... How did he come up with such an idea? Many families in the upper classes enjoy indulging in the pleasures of the flesh, so it's nothing new. But to put it in the open and make it public... it's a first.

With her face drained of all color, Mary hid behind Penelope. "Stay away from me! I really don't know you, so don't slander me! I'm pure and innocent, never having done such a shameful thing as patronizing a host club!"

Penelope was likewise stunned.

Mom went to a host club and hooked up with a gigolo, betraying Dad?

For a moment, Bianca's vision went black.

I've tried my best to uphold the marriage agreement between her and Nicholas, but never had I expected her to be so foolish that she hooked up with a gigolo! How is the Yates family to hold its head up in Maredania henceforth?

"Mrs. Berry, I was kidnapped and brought here for no reason. You're the only person I know. Why are

you hiding from me? Sure enough, sugar mommies are heartless!”

Mario was so irate that he stomped his feet.

Meanwhile, Mary felt utterly mortified. She felt weak all over, and she almost could not remain on her feet.

It was as though an invisible hand was squeezing her heart to a pulp. What should I do? Am I to become everyone's laughingstock today?

She could not help screwing her eyes shut, seized by the urge to skin Lucas and Ashlyn alive.

Horace was no straitlaced man and had many affairs out there.

She was resentful for a time, so she went out and patronized a host club to relieve her boredom.

Mario was exceptionally skilled in bed, satisfying her infinitely.

Thus, she sought him out quite a few times.

Later, she was no longer in the mood to patronize the host club after the series of incidents that happened to the Berry family.

Never had she expected Lucas to be so powerful and capable that he actually found Mario to humiliate her.

Her dignity was all but gone.

Mario hurriedly whipped out his phone, on which were scandalous pictures of him and Mary.

They consisted of a myriad of risqué postures and positions.

On the whole, they were simply an eyesore.

He held the phone up to Ryan and Bianca. “Quick, look! I really hooked up with her!”

Some of the curious guests could not resist craning their necks and stealing a peek at the phone screen.

Seeing that, Mario smugly swung his phone over to them. “You all didn't expect it, huh? The high and mighty Mrs. Berry acted just like a sl*t, begging me.”

People like him always made it their goal to hook up with rich and noble women. When they had succeeded, they would then go around boasting about it. There were plenty of people there, and they were all moneyed. As such, he naturally had to brag about his skills and capabilities since he might be

able to snag a few clients.

Bianca's mind went blank, and her head started pounding.

She pointed at Mario, her voice seeming stuck in her throat. "Scram! Get out of here!"

"Men! Hurry up and throw this shameful creature out!" Ryan instructed sharply.

All at once, a dozen bodyguards of the Yates family rushed over and seized Mario, dragging him out.

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Following that turn of events, Mario hastily cried out, "Mrs. Berry! How could you do this to me? Have you forgotten how I served you in bed? At that time, you even called me your darling!"

Mary looked at Bianca in a panic. Her breathing grew laborious as though someone was crushing her throat.

The force was so great that she could not quite breathe.

Bianca pinned a sharp and chilly gaze on her. "Get on your knees!"

Mary knelt before her with a thud and reached out to clutch at the latter's hem. "Mom... Trust me! I really don't know that person! Mom... Trust me, Mom!"

"He came all the way here and pointed you out! Don't tell me even those pictures were fake?"

Frustration swamped Bianca at the fact that her mental fortitude was too strong that she did not pass out on the spot.

How I wish I had passed out! Then, I wouldn't have to deal with all this filth!

After lifting her hand, she slapped Mary across the face. "The Yates family's glory that had prevailed for a century is now destroyed at your hands! How I regret bringing you back to the Yates family!"

"Mom... I beg you. Please don't kick me out. I know I was wrong. I've really realized my mistake." Mary could not help weeping aloud.

"What a shameless and brazen creature! I never expected you to have such loose morals that you even cheated on my son!" Susan was so livid that she charged at Mary and rained blows on her even as she tore into her.

She could finally vent her anger right then for all the times Mary had picked on her in the past. After learning that the woman cheated on Horace, in particular, she almost burst a blood vessel from rage.

Ugh! And I foolishly believed that she'd get my son out of prison! I was too much of a fool!

"Lock her and Penelope into the dark room!" Bianca ordered in a steely voice.

My birthday banquet is now ruined by them both, and the Yates family's reputation is all gone!

"No! Granny, I didn't do anything wrong. Please don't punish me, Granny. My mother was the one who did something wrong, so just punish her alone!"

Penelope swiftly gazed at her pleadingly.

"Look, this is the good daughter you educated! When trouble comes, she quickly disassociates herself from you. You're the one who produced such a disloyal and unfilial creature!"

The final shred of affection Bianca had left for them both was wiped out by Penelope's words.

Intense disappointment brimmed in her eyes. Penelope doesn't even care about her own mother! How callous!

Mary was initially delighted by her daughter's ability to protect herself. However, upon hearing Bianca's remark, she was entirely stunned.

When she met the latter's gaze, she felt as though something was obstructing her throat, keeping her from uttering a single word.

"Mom... Mom, it was her! It was her doing! It was Ashlyn who set me up! She's behind everything that happened tonight! She was the one who framed me!"

Pointing at Ashlyn, she shrieked, "She has hated me since we were young!"

"Don't tell me it was Ashlyn who urged you to seek the services of a gigolo, Mary?" Bianca suddenly felt incredibly tired and weary. "Take them away!"

Several bodyguards came over and seized the two of them.

Without warning, Mary broke away from the bodyguards and lunged at Ashlyn. "It was you, right? You simply can't stand seeing Penelope and me happy, am I right? Your mother—Alice Chapman—was sold, so you have always detested me, yes? Let me tell you this—no matter how much you hate me, she has still been sold! Haha!"

In the blink of an eye, Ashlyn's expression turned as cold as ice. She wrapped a hand around the woman's throat, her gaze as sharp as a drawn dagger. "Why do you mean by my mother having been sold? You'd best explain things clearly!"

"You didn't know, did you? Ashlyn, your mother was the prodigy of the Chapman family!"

Mary was so enraged that all reason fled. She only wanted to deal Ashlyn a blow, hitting her where it hurt.

Even after so many years, she was aware that the latter still could not get over her mother's death in a car accident.

Therefore, she was eager to use something pertaining to Ashlyn's mother to deal her a blow.

Regarding Ashlyn triumphantly, she continued, "She was the prodigy of the Chapman family, yet she was forced to marry Horace. Do you know why? It's because your mother was with child out of wedlock, and that child is you! You're not a descendant of the Berry family! Back then, Horace only agreed to marry your mother because of her money! After marrying her, he never touched her because he found her filthy!"

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"Haha! So what if she was the prodigy of the Chapman family? She was still kicked out by the family and forced to marry Horace! Do you know why your mother married him? It was because she didn't want you to be deemed a bastard as soon as you were born, so she found you a father in name! Back then, I was already pregnant with Penelope, but that jerk insisted on marrying your mother because of her money!"

"So, Penelope is also his biological daughter?" Ashlyn abruptly snickered.

No wonder Penelope has always been the most favored child since we were young. As it turns out, I'm the bogus heiress while she's the true heiress of the Berry family. Everything makes sense now!

Mary burst out in gleeful laughter.

"Yes! She's the rightful heiress of the Berry family! Hence, I really loathe you! I hate that you stole my daughter's place; I hate your beautiful looks and your resemblance to that b*tch, Alice! Whenever I lay eyes on your exquisite face, I seemingly see the b*tch who stole my husband! I hate the two of you! You both stole the statuses that should have belonged to Penelope and me! I was supposed to be the rightful Mrs. Berry, and my daughter the rightful Ms. Berry!"

She failed to notice that the expressions of Bianca and Nicholas, who were there, changed in concert the instant she mentioned the name "Alice."

"You should hate Horace and not me. The tragic lives of my mother and you were all his doing, caused by his greediness." Ashlyn suddenly dropped her hand from around Mary's neck. She asserted, "He's a scumbag who ruined the lives of two women!"

Having obtained freedom, Mary could not help gulping in multiple lungfuls of fresh air.

Her face was ashen, but she glowered at Ashlyn with a peculiar and maniacal look in her eyes. "It was all because of your mother and you! Everything was caused by the two of you!"

"How did my mother get sold?" Ashlyn stared at her frostily.

Mary was promptly startled. In a trice, all her sanity gradually returned, and a shiver ran down her spine. "What are you talking about? How would I know how your mother got sold?"

That was a secret neither she nor Horace could reveal, no matter what.

Ashlyn fixated her glacial gaze on her as though wishing to look through her. "Earlier, everyone heard you saying that my mother was sold, loud and clear. Yet, you're now denying it?"

Mary could not help backing away. Under Ashlyn's icy gaze, her knees went weak, and she seemingly could not stand straight.

"I never said that! You must have misheard me! Your mother died in a car accident!"

"You won't speak the truth, yes? I don't mind..." Stalking toward the woman, Ashlyn abruptly shot her hand out and seized her throat at lightning speed once more. "I've got many ways to make you talk!"

Everything around her seemingly faded, with only Mary remaining in her eyes. This cold-blooded woman actually conspired with Horace and sold my mother! Previously, I only knew of some rumors without any evidence, but now, I've heard her personally admitting that my mother was sold!

Her heart twisted painfully. My mother was the prodigy of the Chapman family, but she was humiliated and tarnished by a piece of trash like Horace and met such a tragic end!

The urge to rip Mary and Horace into a thousand pieces gripped her.

"Let go... of me!" With her neck held in a stranglehold, Mary's breathing gradually turned rapid. At long last, she could not breathe at all, her face flushing bright red from the lack of oxygen.

Her eyes rolled back into her head, and she appeared to be moments away from passing out.

Such fear struck Penelope that she charged over to rain blows on Ashlyn. "Let go of my mother! Let go of her!"

However, she was tossed aside by the bodyguards Lucas brought with him before she could even make any contact with Ashlyn.

Sprawled on the ground, she could not help wailing, "Let go of my mother, Ashlyn! Let go of her!"

Ultimately, Mary was a member of the Yates family.

No matter how many wrongdoings she had committed, the blood of the Yates family flowed in her veins.

Therefore, Ashlyn was also humiliating the Yates family when she was treating the eldest daughter of the Yates family thus.

In consideration of that, Ryan walked to the woman, who wore a chilly expression on her face. "Please spare her, Ms. Ashlyn."

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Ashlyn's expression remained cold. She cast an icy gaze at Ryan before releasing her grip on Mary without warning.

Mary sprawled on the ground pathetically like an oxygen-deprived eel.

She trembled uncontrollably, for she had no doubt that if Ryan had not come over to call a halt to things, Ashlyn would have certainly strangled her to death.

"I'll let you go today for the sake of Mr. Yates and Old Mrs. Yates. You'd best tell me the truth." Ashlyn emanated a murderous aura.

Her grace and elegance from before were all but gone. At that moment, she was like Grim Reaper, who came from the underworld to take lives.

In the next heartbeat, however, she regained her previous indifference and composure. Turning to Bianca beside her, she said apologetically, "I'm sorry. It's your birthday banquet today, yet I did such a disrespectful thing."

Unexpectedly, Bianca regarded Ashlyn with a complex look in her eyes. "Sweetie, is your mother named Alice Chapman?"

Lifting her eyes, Ashlyn looked at the woman in puzzlement, only to notice that the latter was not glaring at her furiously. Contrarily, a trace of suppressed excitement showed in the older woman's eyes.

Ashlyn pursed her lips for a moment. "Yes, that's my mother."

"Then... do you recognize this handkerchief?"

With trembling hands, Bianca took out a handkerchief. It was the one with a centenary icon, which she had kept for many years.

Ashlyn's eyes stung, and she ventured, "From the embroidery technique... it's my mother's work?"

"Yes." Bianca was seemingly lost in her memories, murmuring, "More than ten years ago, I personally went to H Nation to look for my daughter. It was drizzling at that time, and I bumped into Ms. Chapman, who was embroidering earnestly by the lake. Back then... she was beautiful. Her eyes shimmered like stars, and her features were exquisite. She was a very gentle lady."

Her eyes turning red-rimmed, she continued, "I was all too tired and weary, falling into despair. I thought I'd possibly never see my daughter in this lifetime. I slumped to the ground by the lake and started weeping. It was her who gifted this handkerchief to me. She said the centenary icon on it would undoubtedly bring blessings upon my daughter and me."

By then, tears escaped her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. "I've loved embroidery for my entire life, and I'm also skilled in it. However, Ms. Chapman's embroidery is unparalleled. I love it. I also cherish this handkerchief greatly. Above everything, I cherish Ms. Chapman's kindness."

Subsequently, she lamented, "It's the Yates family who wronged you and your mother. My daughter, Mary, committed too many misdeeds. Not only did she insult and disparage you, but she even did many things that hurt you. I'm the one who should apologize to you on her behalf."

Patting the back of Ashlyn's hand, she queried, "What kind of compensation would you like, Sweetie? Tell me everything, and I'll definitely fulfill all your heart's desires."

That remark stunned everyone present.

After all, Bianca was no ordinary elderly woman but the wife of a count in Maredania!

If one could have her fulfill all of one's heart's desires despite the lack of blood ties, that would be a veritable honor.

Ashlyn lowered her eyes and chuckled. "I don't need any compensation, Old Mrs. Yates. I only need you to introduce someone to me."

Bianca looked at her up close. Under the lights, even her skin glowed crystalline.

"Who is it? Just tell me."

"I'll tell you later." Ashlyn glanced around and noticed that the expert psychologist Sinclair mentioned, his mentor, was not present.

"Okay, then." Smiling, Bianca took out another handkerchief given to her by Nicholas as a birthday gift.

"Do you know who embroidered this handkerchief, Sweetie? The embroidery technique employed in this is exactly the same as your mother's, but this handkerchief is very new. Earlier, Mary said that your

mother had passed away... Could it be that someone else inherited her embroidery skills?"

Nicholas' lips trembled. He, too, wanted to know the answer.

Back then, that woman misplaced a scented sachet. The word "Alice" was embroidered on it.

He searched for her for many years, but to no avail. She seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth all of a sudden. The embroidery of "Alice" on the scented sachet was precisely the same as the "Alice" embroidered at the lower right corner of the handkerchief Bianca treasured.

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The scented sachet was similar to the handkerchief, be it the embroidery technique, the shape of the word embroidered, or even the color.

Could it be that... the woman was Alice Chapman, and Ashlyn... is her daughter?

Nicholas stared at Ashlyn in disbelief. His heart had not pounded so wildly in many years.

Caleb perceptively sensed something amiss with his brother beside him. He appears... nervous? Why is that? Why would he be nervous?

As Bianca asked about the person who embroidered the handkerchief right then, Caleb could not help taking a step forward.

Just when he was about to speak, the president of Aureate Embroidery Group, the largest company in Maredania, Seraphina Young, stepped into the hall with a gift in hand. The moment she entered the hall, she noticed the strange atmosphere there.

Seraphina was a middle-aged woman of about forty years old, but she maintained her looks well. In a sapphire blue dress, she looked graceful and elegant.

She went over to Bianca and Ashlyn in her high heels. "This is my gift for you, Old Mrs. Yates. This year..." Before she had finished her utterance, she inadvertently glimpsed Ashlyn beside Bianca.

Thrilled, she promptly rushed over to Ashlyn and grabbed her hand. "Why are you here, Ashlyn? Gosh, Ashlyn! Why didn't you give me a call when you came to Maredania? I missed you so much!"

The crowd was wholly dumbstruck.

Aureate Embroidery Group was no ordinary company. Its president, Seraphina, was on the same level of eminence as Leslie, a renowned embroiderer in Maredania. Also, she founded Aureate Embroidery Group single-handedly. Rumor even had it that Sonia Jackovich, Maredania's Secretary of State, loved wearing clothes personally sewn and embroidered by her.

Besides, she was very close with Bianca.

That aside, she was inextricably linked with the entire aristocratic circle of Maredania. Maredania's aristocrats considered it an honor to be able to wear clothes embroidered by her.

Yet, she was acting exceedingly familiar with Ashlyn.

"I'm here to celebrate Old Mrs. Yates' birthday, Ms. Young."

In contrast with Seraphina's excitement and enthusiasm, Ashlyn's expression remained unchanged. However, one could tell that she exuded a hint of warmth.

That was an expression she only showed in front of people whom she was close with.

"You managed to invite Ashlyn over, Old Mrs. Yates? How impressive!" Seraphina led Ashlyn over to Bianca before opening the gift box she brought, revealing an exquisitely embroidered shawl within.

"This shawl was embroidered by Ashlyn, Old Mrs. Yates."

Bianca's lips trembled, and she stared at the shawl in disbelief. The base color of the shawl was cream. Graceful and elegant peonies were embroidered on it, with a few butterflies in flight beside the peonies, looking very much lifelike.

Seraphina deftly draped the shawl over Bianca. Only then did the latter snap back to her senses and promptly grab the former's hand.

"What... did you just say? Ashlyn can embroider? This shawl... Such a beautiful shawl was embroidered by her?"

A proud smile bloomed on Seraphina's face, and her voice carried great pride. "She's Aureate Group's top master embroiderer, far more skilled than me. In fact, the emblem representing our country on the clothes our president wore to the global summit was embroidered by Ashlyn!"

"Oh my goodness!"

"The emblem design back then was said to have been revised more than twenty times. In the end, it was the design submitted by Aureate Group that the president approved straight away!"

"I never expected it to have been designed and embroidered by Ashlyn!"

"How incredible!"

"She's too impressive!"

At once, the look in the crowd's eyes as they gazed at Ashlyn turned awestruck and impassioned.

While sprawled on the ground, Mary and Penelope gawped at Ashlyn, who was standing there. Suddenly, intense envy and indignance welled up within them.

There was seemingly a moat between them and her that they could never bridge.

Even after they had joined the Yates family and become the heiresses of the Yates family, they were still beneath her.