

Ready to Rule: The Real Heiress Strikes Back

Chapter 15

Her grandfather followed her gaze and let out a tired sigh. "Lucinda, sweetheart, listen to me. Actually..."

"Darling girl!"

Kylie's voice floated through the air. Suddenly, the garden burst into color as a cascade of balloons soared into the sky, bright as a rainbow stretched over the whole backyard.

Lucinda's heart leapt. She glanced at her grandfather, who looked like he wanted to say more, but she couldn't wait. "Grandpa, Mom and Dad are letting the balloons go. They're calling me over. Let's go see what's happening!"

She could barely contain her excitement. Every year, her parents' surprises were amazing. What had they planned for her this time?

Before her grandfather could say another word, Lucinda was already spinning around, ready to dash outside.

But Mr. Norwood reached out, stopping her with a gentle firmness. "Lucinda, wait. That isn't for you."

Lucinda froze on the spot. For a second, she thought he must be teasing her. She smiled, a little uncertain. "Grandpa, are you joking with me?"

He shook his head, his expression serious. "I'm not. If you don't believe me, just watch from the window for a moment."

Lucinda hesitated. It would be so embarrassing to run outside if something was wrong. Maybe it was better to stay and see for herself.

Grace looked confused. "Sir, if those aren't for Miss Lucinda, then who are they for?" In this house, who else could deserve something so extravagant?

Mr. Norwood frowned and shot her a look. Grace fell silent, not daring to say more.

He turned back to Lucinda, his voice gentle. "No matter what happens in this family, you'll always be my precious princess."

He'd said this before, but now it made Lucinda uneasy. What did he mean? Was something happening in the family she didn't know about?

With her heart pounding, she hurried over to the big window. The garden outside looked like something out of a fairy tale. Lydia was standing with Cameron and Kylie. Lucinda watched as her mother carefully lifted a dazzling diamond crown from a red velvet box. At the very top of the tiara sparkled a blue diamond, big as her thumb, catching the morning light and shining brighter than anything she'd ever

seen.

"That's... Eternal Stars?" Lucinda whispered.

She recognized it instantly. It was world-famous, one of the ten rarest and most expensive diamond crowns in existence, second only to the one worn by the queen herself. Its worth couldn't even be measured.

But what mattered most was that her parents had always promised it would be hers one day, a gift for her wedding.

And now, her mother was placing it on another girl's head.

Why?

She turned to her grandfather, her voice shaking, caught somewhere between fear and anger. "Grandpa, who is that girl? Why is Mom putting Eternal Stars on her? And those gifts, those cars... are they all for her?"

Lucinda had always believed she was the Norwood family's favorite, even more adored than her brothers. So why were her parents giving everything that belonged to her to a stranger? And why wasn't her grandfather stopping them? He was supposed to love her most of all.

Mr. Norwood reached out and gently patted her shoulder, trying to comfort her. "Lucinda, didn't I tell you? No matter what happens, you'll always be Grandpa's favorite girl."