

Chapter 859 He Didn't Grate On Her Nerves Anymore

Sally had never wavered in her devotion to Rita. Everyone knew it—she would've planted herself right here at the villa, counting the days until Rita returned.

So where the hell had Sally gone? Had someone dragged her away against her will? Had those assassins from years past finally tracked her down and killed her within these very walls? Or had fate dealt some other cruel hand?

Dark possibilities spiraled through the group's minds like vultures circling carrion.

The group clustered at the entrance, staring at those two closed doors with dread pooling in their stomachs. Nobody dared to push them open. Nobody wanted to find bones scattered across the threshold.

Adah bit down hard on her lip until copper flooded her tongue. Her hands curled into fists so tight that her nails carved crescents into her palms. She couldn't tear her eyes from those doors, and her whole body shook like a leaf in a storm.

Through all those years hunting for her mother, Adah had rehearsed a thousand different reunions in her head. Never once had she imagined this. If those doors swung open to reveal her mother's skeleton, she'd be trapped in that nightmare forever. No waking up. No escape.

Adah had marched through Delta alongside Elliana, wading through blood and chaos without batting an eye—but standing here now, terror squeezed her chest so hard that she could barely pull in air.

Elliana ached to comfort Adah, to say something that might ease the weight pressing down on both of them. But when she opened her mouth, emotion knotted in her throat and strangled the words.

Back when Elliana and Adah were little, Sally had showered Elliana with

affection, loving her as fiercely as if she'd carried her in her own womb. Elliana had adored Sally. The thought of Sally dying here, alone and forgotten, gutted Elliana just as deeply as it gutted Adah. They shared the same gnawing dread, the same suffocating grief.

Just then, Allan moved to Adah's side and wrapped his fingers around hers. "Don't be afraid," he murmured. "I'm right here with you."

Then, without releasing Adah's hand, Allan pushed the doors open.

The doors clearly hadn't been touched in years. Cobwebs draped the corners like tattered lace, and the hinges shrieked in rusty protest as the doors gave way.

Late afternoon light slanted through the opening, painting long shadows that stretched across the ground like reaching fingers.

Adah's heart slammed against her ribs so violently that she thought it might crack through bone. She squeezed her eyes shut, too paralyzed by fear to look.

Then, Allan's voice broke through the fear. "It's okay. What you're dreading isn't here."

Adah's breath snagged. She snapped her eyes open and swept her gaze across the villa's interior.

Dust blanketed the living room floor in a thick gray shroud—undeniable proof of years of abandonment—but the furniture sat neatly arranged. No signs of a struggle. No grotesque aftermath waiting to scar them.

A sharp, shuddering breath tore from Adah's chest as relief crashed over her. She rushed inside.

Allan stayed glued to her side while the others filed in behind them.

Every window was latched tight, every pane of glass still whole. Furniture vulnerable to sunlight had been draped with protective sheets. In the kitchen, not even a scrap of garbage lingered.

Everything pointed to the same conclusion. Sally had left of her own accord, and she'd planned it carefully. Before walking away, she'd scrubbed this place clean with meticulous precision.

The group hadn't found Sally—but that crushing weight lifted from everyone's shoulders.

Desperate for more clues, the group charged up to the second floor and tore through every room.

The bedrooms told the same story. Everything had been tucked away with care. Even the quilts were folded crisply and stowed in closets.

After combing through the upper level, they regrouped downstairs in the living room.

"Sally must've had urgent business," Sophie said, piecing it together. "She knew she'd be gone for a long stretch. That's why she prepared everything like this."

Rita nodded slowly. "Knowing her, she would've raced back here the second she finished whatever she'd set out to do. But she never came home. Either she never completed her mission... or something happened to her along the way."

The speculation hung heavy in the air. The brief spark of hope flickering in their chests dimmed back into worry.

Anxiety carved deep lines across Adah's face, and her eyes looked hollow, lost somewhere far beyond this room. She'd been waiting for Rita's memories to return, clinging to the belief that those recovered fragments would guide her to her mother and the reunion she'd craved for so long. But now, that hope had crumbled. Every clue ended here in this silent, dust-choked villa. Where should she go next to find her mother? How could she still find her mother when the trail had vanished into smoke?

Doomsday Rose—the woman who'd never bent, never broken—stood there looking like spun glass. One strong wind and she'd shatter.

Allan captured her hand again, his voice anchoring her. "Don't lose hope yet. I don't care where we have to go—through deserts, across oceans, into whatever hell geography throws at us—I'll walk beside you until we find your mother. We'll find her breathing, or we'll find her grave. But I swear to you, I won't let you live the rest of your days haunted by not knowing."

Everyone fractured sometimes. And when they did, comfort and care

outweighed anything else.

Allan's words fell on Adah's withered heart like the first rain after years of drought. She lifted her gaze slowly until she met his eyes. Something in his expression—that raw tenderness blazing there—made her realize he didn't grate on her nerves anymore.

She'd always chosen younger men, the kind who gazed at her with worship shining in their eyes, who treated her like a queen ascending her throne. But standing here now, she understood something she'd missed before. Being cherished—being held with care that asked for nothing in return—felt dangerously, unexpectedly good.

With younger men, she'd carried all the weight alone while shielding them from every storm that raged around them. But someone like Allan—someone forged strong enough to bear the burden, someone steady enough to lead when she couldn't—he offered something different. With him, she could lower her armor. She wouldn't have to fight every battle solo. She could rest against his strength and share the load. But... could she trust him? Could she really let Allan carry pieces of her heart?

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