

Chapter 863 Melanie

When Adah had slapped Rowena earlier, everyone had been stunned into silence, their outrage only fueling a collective urge to retaliate.

Yet, after witnessing the way Adah thrashed Westley, far more ruthlessly than she had Rowena, the shock had quickly morphed into fear. Even Gia, normally brash and commanding, turned ghostly pale with fright. Nobody could have foreseen Adah unleashing such force.

Sally had been brilliant and single-handedly pulled the Norris family back from financial disaster. Despite everything Gia put her through, Sally had always answered with patience and grace.

The family had simply assumed Sally's daughter would also be gentle, easy to push around. Instead, Adah was proving herself to be a hundred times more formidable than her mother.

Rowena and Kimberly were too scared to even shed a tear, while Gia simply sat there, frozen and speechless.

Westley lay curled up on the floor, shaking from pain. He raised a shaky finger at Adah, voice quivering. "You're nothing but a rude hillbilly with no upbringing!"

Adah looked him over, a faint, chilling smile tugging at her lips. "You insulted my mother, so I responded in kind. What is wrong with that? But if you think I went too easy on you, I don't mind making my point a little more... substantial." She spoke with a glint in her eyes, her gaze turning razor-sharp.

A wave of shudders wracked Westley as he dove for cover behind Gia, sobbing. "Mom, just look at her! I'm supposed to be the head of this family, but she hit me, and in front of everyone, no less! If you let her get away with this, she'll destroy us all!"

Gia finally regained her senses and exploded with rage, "Guards! Don't just stand there. Punish this ungrateful brat!"

Two bodyguards lunged at Adah, ready to do as they were told.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on my daughter!" Leonel yelled.

But Leonel's words fell on deaf ears. At Gia's subtle signal, two guards pinned Leonel in place, gripping his arms tightly.

Melanie Norris, who had been standing quietly beside Leonel, panicked. "Gia, please! Adah is just a child! You can't be rough with her! If you're looking to punish someone, then take me instead. I'll take the beating in her place!"

Melanie was Leonel's second wife, making her Adah's stepmother. Her beginnings were humble; she'd first joined the family as Leonel's housekeeper. She was an ordinary woman, with no fancy education, no extraordinary talents, and nothing that set her apart in a crowd.

Ordinarily, a woman of Melanie's background wouldn't have married into such wealth, but their marriage had an unusual origin.

After Adah's mother left, Gia had hounded Leonel to go on endless dates, determined to marry him off to a wealthy socialite and lock in a powerful family alliance. Eventually, Leonel had snapped and chosen Melanie out of sheer rebellion.

That act had nearly sent Gia to an early grave from sheer fury.

To corner Leonel, Gia had presented him with a choice: either divorce Melanie or hand all his shares over to Westley. She had assumed he'd cling to his fortune, but he had signed away everything without a second thought. He would rather give up his shares and become a subordinate than ever give Melanie up. Most people chalked it up to him being hopelessly in love.

Gia, bested and exhausted, had decided Leonel was a lost cause. Since her heart had always favored Westley, she had poured her energy into his side of the family, expecting only financial returns from Leonel and otherwise leaving him to fade into the background.

Melanie's quiet ways and humble demeanor had meant the family never truly noticed her. Her bold stand today made Gia snort in derision. "Melanie, who do you think you are, butting into matters that aren't yours?"

Placing herself protectively in front of Adah, Melanie spoke from the heart. "I know I'm nobody, and my opinion means nothing here. But Adah's mother was always good to me. I can't just watch her daughter get hurt. If you want to lay a hand on Adah, you'll have to get through me first."

Gia answered with a biting laugh, "Listen to yourself, acting so loyal. If you had any shame, you wouldn't have married the husband of the woman who was kind to you. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Melanie pressed her lips together and said nothing, yet her determination never wavered.

Everyone around dismissed Melanie as naïve, but Adah watched her with new eyes, suspecting there was more beneath the surface.

"Then beat them both!" Gia barked.

Without warning, the guards surged forward, targeting both Adah and Melanie.

Westley's family waited gleefully for Adah's downfall, but their smugness quickly turned to shock.

Adah met the bodyguards head-on. With swift, precise kicks, she knocked both men to the floor. Her combat skills left no room for doubt; broken ribs echoed through the hall as the guards collapsed, helpless to get back up.