

Chapter 868 The Truth

Rowena's declaration hung in the air, igniting a predatory spark in the eyes of everyone in the room.

Kimberly was the first to break the silence, practically vibrating with a frantic, nervous energy. "Exactly! Rowena was sculpted for the stage—she's a lock for the Ubento Dance Competition Championship. Once that crown is on her head, her influence will be absolute. She won't even have to lift a finger; one post to her millions of followers and they'll tear Adah to pieces. Under a digital onslaught like that, even Allan wouldn't dare step in to save Adah."

"That's the plan," Westley remarked, though his bravado faltered as doubt clouded his face. "But it's a global stage. The talent pool is massive. Are we certain Rowena can actually clinch the title?"

"No need to fret," Gia chimed in, her voice dripping with cold arrogance. "I've spent months and a fortune marketing Rowena as a 'prodigy.' Her fanbase is already obsessed. More importantly, I've paid off two of the judges. That trophy is already sitting on her mantel."

Meanwhile, outside the Norris estate, the evening air bit at Adah's skin. She stopped abruptly and threw a sharp look over her shoulder at Allan. "How much longer do you plan on tailing me?"

Allan stopped before her, his gaze steady and unreadable. "I need to leave on a business trip to secure your birthday gift. It might take a while, but I will definitely be back before your birthday. Wait for me, alright?"

Adah hadn't expected anything from him, let alone a gift, but his cryptic words sparked her curiosity. "Where are you going?"

"The Delta," Allan said.

Adah's curiosity deepened. What kind of gift would require a trip to Delta? That region was a lawless cage, famous for danger and little else. Still, she knew she had no claim over his life, so she swallowed her questions and settled for a clipped, "Don't get yourself killed."

"Is that a hint of concern I hear?" Allan asked, a lazy, teasing smirk tugging at his lips.

Adah huffed and looked away. The idea of worrying about him was absurd.

Allan didn't seem convinced. He reached out and affectionately ruffled her hair, a gesture that felt far too intimate. "I'm going. Bye."

Then, he turned and vanished into the night.

As the taillights of Allan's car faded into the distance, Leonel and Melanie emerged from the shadows to join Adah.

"Where are you going, Adah?" Leonel asked, his voice thick with fatherly concern.

"Rosewood Villa," Adah replied flatly. "Elliana bought it. I've been camping out there."

"Living under someone else's roof isn't a life. It'll never feel like yours," Leonel said, his eyes pleading. "Come home with me. It's been years—I just want the chance to look at you and talk."

"Yes, please come home with us," Melanie added softly.

Adah met their gaze with a cool, clinical detachment. Every instinct she possessed screamed at her to walk away. She felt a flicker of gratitude for how they had stood up for her earlier, risking Gia's wrath, but she couldn't reconcile their presence in her life.

Years ago, Melanie had been a stray on the streets until Sally had offered her a roof and a job. If Sally ever returned to find that the very woman she had rescued was now married to her husband, the betrayal would be unbearable.

"Adah, you've got the wrong idea about your father and me," Melanie said, offering a small, bitter smile as if she could read Adah's mind. "We were never actually married. Your father's heart hasn't moved an inch from your mother."

The confession hit Adah like a physical blow. "What are you talking about?"

Leonel stepped forward and took her hand, his grip warm and steady. "Let's get off the street. I'll explain everything once we're home."

Adah followed them, but the "home" Leonel led her to wasn't the mansion she expected. It was a cramped, weathered apartment in a forgotten corner of the city.

Over the years, Gia had bled Leonel dry, forcing him to funnel every cent of his inheritance to Westley. Living on a monthly salary of just 5,000, money was tight.

The moment Leonel had caught wind of Gia's plan to disown Adah at the press conference publicly, he had scrambled to rent this modest place, desperate to create a sanctuary where he could live with his daughter.

The moment the door clicked shut, Melanie tied on an apron. "You two catch up. I'll see what I can whip up in the kitchen."

As Melanie retreated into the kitchen, Leonel guided Adah to a worn sofa and took a heavy breath, finally revealing everything.

Leonel confessed that he had never intended to remarry after Sally's departure. However, when Gia had begun relentlessly hounding him with orchestrated blind dates, he had realized he needed a shield. Later, he'd claimed to have married Melanie to silence the gossip, enduring the mockery of high society for "marrying the help." In truth, their marriage certificate was nothing more than a convincing prop.

"Adah, I love your mother with everything I have. I could never give my heart to anyone else. This apartment is your home—don't ever think you don't belong here," Leonel said.

Adah felt a lump form in her throat, but the scars of the past still throbbed. "Dad, if you loved her so much, why were you so weak? Why did you just stand there while your mother tore her down? Why did you let them ship me off to a backwater town and transfer all your shares to Westley?"

"I'm not the coward you think I am," Leonel whispered, his voice cracking. "If I were a weak man, I never would have defied your grandmother to marry your mother in the first place. I've never been a pushover. Everything I did and every insult I swallowed was because your mother begged me to."

Adah stared at him, her confusion deepening. "Why would she ask for that?"

"Although I never knew exactly where your mother came from, I knew she was hiding a massive secret," Leonel explained, his gaze drifting as if seeing a ghost. "She was terrified that any spark of conflict would draw the eyes of the people she was hiding from. She pleaded with me to live a life of total obscurity—she said it was the only way she could stay by my side. I loved her enough to become a doormat if it meant keeping her safe. That's why I let your grandmother win every argument."

Leonel's face grew solemn. "Before she disappeared, she knew your grandmother would eventually try to exile you. She made me swear to let it happen. She told me that, in the end, being far away from this family would be the only thing that kept you alive."