

DON'T MESS WITH THE GIRL WITH CANDY

Chapter 4

Unfortunately, Saskia's husband had died young, and as a single mother raising her own daughter, she didn't meet the legal requirements for adoption. Heartbroken, she had no choice but to place Juniper in an orphanage. Believing Juniper had found a better life after being adopted by the wealthy Sherwin family, Saskia never interfered. Now that the Sherwins had sought her out, Saskia had agreed without hesitation to take Juniper in.

It was only through this that Juniper learned she had parents, three older brothers, and three older sisters. They had all been missing since the shipwreck, their records lost to time.-

"Your cousin Juniper is used to the good life. I wonder if she'll find this place too shabby," a plainly dressed middle-aged woman sighed as she swept the small house. "They say she's withdrawn and difficult to manage."

"Hmm," Janet Wilcox replied, crouching on the floor as she washed vegetables. "People have hearts, Mom. If we're good to her, she'll come around eventually—"

She broke off as a pair of mud-caked shoes stopped in front of her.

Janet looked up, her gaze traveling up a pair of long legs until it rested on a face that was strikingly beautiful, despite being smudged with dirt.

"Are you...?" Janet swallowed nervously. "Miss, who are you looking for?"

"Hello," the girl said, her lips pressed into a thin line. "I'm looking for Saskia Payne. I'm from the Sherwin estate."

So this was her cousin, the one who'd just been kicked out by the Sherwins?

"Mom! Mom!" Janet scrambled to her feet, her voice trembling. "Juniper's here!"

With a clatter, the broom fell from Saskia's hands. Her eyes reddened the moment she saw the girl's face.

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Half an hour later, Juniper, now in clean clothes, sat obediently at the dining table. She had a big appetite and hadn't eaten all day, so two bowls of stew barely touched the sides. Saskia ended up cooking all the remaining stew and brought the whole pot to her.

"Thank you," Juniper said politely before continuing to eat.

She's grown so much, Saskia thought, watching her from across the table, her heart aching. But why is she so thin?

Beautiful, polite, skinny, and helpless. And... a very healthy appetite. To Saskia, she seemed like a perfectly good kid, nothing like the troubled girl from the rumors.

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After dinner, Saskia gave Juniper her only bedroom.

"It's not much, but please make do for now." Knowing that Juniper was grieving Lemuel's death, Saskia didn't press her with questions. "But don't you worry. As long as I have food to eat, I'll never let you go hungry."

"That's right, Juniper," Janet added, handing her a clean set of pajamas. Her round eyes were full of sincerity. "Please, make yourself at home here."

Not wanting to disturb her, the mother and daughter quickly left the room after tidying up.

Juniper noted that the house was tiny-just one bedroom and a living area. They were clearly struggling, yet they still took her in.

After a moment of thought, she pulled out her cracked phone and dialed a number.

"Juniper! Juniper!" Luella Langley's boisterous voice boomed through the phone as soon as the call connected.

"I'm still alive," Juniper said dryly, holding the phone away from her ear.

"We heard about Lemuel Sherwin. My condolences," Luella said, her tone softening. She ran a hand through her short, silver hair, her androgynous style giving her a roguishly handsome look.

"It's for the best," Juniper replied, taking her grandfather's photo out and placing it on the desk.

"The Paynes aren't even your real blood relatives. Why did you have to go there?" Luella sighed. "Come back to Australis. The guys at the base miss you."

"The Paynes are good people," Juniper said with a yawn, scrolling idly through her phone. "Besides, I have to get into college."

"Tsk, tsk." Luella rolled her eyes, finding the situation absurd. "What college is so prestigious that it requires your personal attention to get into?"