

The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Standing by Rose's side were her three friends, poised and ready to show Arabella what they were made of.

"I've got three friends here," Rose boasted with a proud tilt of her head. "One's a black belt in Taekwondo, another's a champ in kickboxing, and the last one's an MMA fighter." "And what?" Arabella's lips curled into a cold smirk. "You think you're some kind of saint, expecting people to bow and scrape? If you're going to throw down, just get on with it. Why all the big talk?"

Rose was taken aback by Arabella's brazenness. "Novia, Polly, Antonia, let's show her some manners!"

The trio, with their fancy but ineffective moves, were swiftly laid out on the ground by Arabella, whimpering in pain.

Rose couldn't believe her eyes.

Just yesterday, when she got her butt kicked, she thought Arabella was just some amateur with a few tricks up her sleeve. She

had no idea Arabella was this formidable.

"Novia, aren't you a Taekwondo black belt?" Rose stammered, backing away as Arabella advanced.

"Polly, didn't you beat up your own instructor? And Antonia, haven't you won some fighting competitions?"

"Rose, you'd better run." Novia groaned from the ground, unable to get up. "Didn't you see? Even if the Dawnstar boxing champ showed up, they wouldn't stand a chance against her."

Hearing this, Rose was dumbfounded.

She had suspected Arabella was strong, but not to this extent.

Antonia and Polly couldn't believe it either. They had walked into a death trap set up by their dear friend Rose.

As soon as Arabella had thrown her first punch, they knew they were outclassed.

Why had Rose thought their half-baked skills could make even a dent in Arabella?

And the expectation to make Arabella bow down to them?

Pure fantasy.

Strangely enough, Arabella hadn't been ruthless. She had simply knocked them down without the intent to seriously hurt them.

If she had wanted to inflict real damage, it would have taken her mere seconds.

But she refrained.

In their pain, Antonia, Polly, and Novia couldn't help but feel a begrudging respect and a quiet gratitude.

But it was too late for Rose to make an escape.

Arabella tossed her into the flowerbed, leaving her with scratches on her hands

and face, and a likely sprained back.

Just then, Arabella noticed Arlen finishing his speech in the main hall and making his way upstairs.

She quickly followed, bumping into Eunice.

"What's up?" Eunice's gaze fell on her.

"It looks like Arlen's heading to his room."

"So?" Eunice was puzzled.

"I knocked out two bodyguards. They're in there,"

Arabella admitted, nodding. One was in the bathroom, whose uniform she had

donned to blend in. The other was by the study door.

Eunice didn't expect her niece to be so fierce and immediately stepped forward to intercept.

Arlen, accompanied by Calvin and Bess, was about to ascend the staircase when Eunice's voice rang out.

"Arlen, I need a word with you."

Arlen turned, his face the picture of benevolence.

"Ah, Eunice, what is it? Can it wait? I need to change my clothes."

But as Arlen confirmed his intention to head to his room, Eunice blurted out, "It's about Alexander."

Not just Arlen, but also Calvin and Bess' eyes flickered with a shadow of something dark and indecipherable.

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Eunice caught that fleeting expression and, with a mischievous gleam in her eye, she couldn't resist teasing.

"Today's your birthday, so consider this juicy bit my generous gift to you."

Arlen chuckled, playing along with her game.

"Whoever you're talking about, I don't know this guy, and whatever they're up to, it's no concern of mine"

Just as Arlen was about to head upstairs, Eunice's laughter stopped him in his tracks. "Oh, but it is relevant."

Arlen paused, curious despite himself.

"This matter involves someone from the Griffith clan. As the family elder, don't you want to know what they've been up to?"

Arlen pondered for a moment before relenting.

'Alright, lead the way upstairs."

"No, I choose the place,' Eunice countered with a sly smile, her red lips curving into a charming grin.

"Please, follow me, Arlen."

Arlen cast a meaningful glance at his younger brother and sister-in-law before stepping out to follow Eunice.

As Eunice passed by Arabella, she shot her a conspiratorial wink. Arabella quickly took the hint, slipping upstairs to discreetly relocate the two bodyguards elsewhere.

In the garden.

Eunice, now accompanied by Calvin and Bess, maintained her smile. "This is for Arlen's ears only." "By seniority, we're your elders. If Arlen is privy to this info, why aren't we?" Bess asked, clearly annoyed.

"Yes, you're not.' Eunice's smile never wavered as she emphasized each word. "Given your usual unreasonable behavior, I have no desire to share with you"

Bess was livid, insulted by Eunice's lack of respect, and stormed off.

Calvin, with a scowl, followed suit.

"So, what's the big secret?" Arlen asked, intrigued by what Eunice was up to. Eunice had a way of stirring trouble that could easily drive a wedge between him and the younger members of the family.

From a distance, Bess could see Eunice's red lips moving animatedly, her eyes darting in their direction now and then, as if she were speaking ill of them.

"What's that vixen on about? Why does she keep looking over here?" Bess muttered irritably.

Calvin, observing Eunice, let out a cold laugh. "If she really knew something substantial, why would she bother telling the runt?"

"That's true.' Bess had a moment of clarity, then considered another possibility. "What if she only knows part of the story and not the whole truth?"

"Possibly"

After Eunice finished speaking, she pulled out something that resembled a USB drive from her pocket and slipped it into Arlen's jacket.

Her grace and poise in every gesture, every expression, left Bess seething with envy.

It all seemed like an act of flirtation!

Arlen, having waded through a sea of nonsense, finally seized upon something worthwhile — the secret was on that drive.

As Arlen considered heading upstairs to uncover this so-called secret, Eunice called out, "Arlen."

He turned, realizing she wasn't done, and with a sigh, asked, "What now?"

"I forgot to give you the password," Eunice said with a playful smile. "There's an encrypted file. Come closer. I'll tell only you."

As Arlen leaned in, she whispered, "123456." He nodded, "Got it."

"You'll remember?" she teased.

“Who could forget such a simple password? I'm not senile yet.” Arlen retorted with a grin, then made his way upstairs.

Bess shot Eunice a disgruntled look before trailing after Arlen.

Calvin followed, his curiosity piqued.

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“Hmph, that clueless woman, all her scheming amounts to nothing. She has no idea that Arlen's playing for our team!”

Eunice watched their retreating figures with a curious glint in her eye. Although she didn't have any concrete evidence to reveal who the mole really was, the sight of the trio ascending the stairs together gave her a strong hunch that the traitor wasn't acting alone.

"Arlen, what did that woman say to you earlier?" Calvin whispered urgently as they reached the top of the staircase. "How much does she really know?"

"She blabbed a whole lot of nonsense at first, nothing of value. But then she handed me this USB drive, claimed all the secrets were on it"

Arlen pushed open the door to the study and booted up the computer, plugging in the USB drive.

There it was, an encrypted folder!

Arlen typed in '123456', but the password was incorrect. He tried again, same result.

"Is that woman tricking me?" Arlen's face darkened with suspicion, wondering what kind of game she was playing.

"Earlier, she asked if you remembered, and you said you did. You bragged about not being senile, so why can't you remember now?"

Bess was suddenly skeptical. Could it be that Arlen was deliberately entering the wrong password, planning to keep the contents to himself once they left?

Arlen frowned, irritated. "Bess, what are you insinuating? Are you suggesting that I'm faking the password error so you can't see what's inside?"

"You said that the secret Eunice gave you was simple, but you got it wrong. So, what's the real password?"

"123456."

"Who sets such a simple password? If the contents were that important, she would never use something so basic!"

Arlen was getting annoyed. "That's what she told me, the password!"

"You said earlier that she spouted a bunch of useless nonsense before mentioning the USB drive. Based on what I know about her, she's not one to beat around the bush. Could it be that she said something beforehand that you're not comfortable sharing with us?" Bess pressed on with her suspicion.

"What could possibly be so uncomfortable? Did you or Calvin do something in the past that might come back to bite you if I found out?"

"That's out of line!" Bess exploded like a cat with its tail stepped on.

Seeing Bess' reaction, Arlen suddenly considered the possibility.

But Eunice's business took precedence.

"Eunice only talked about her life with Alexander and how sincere his feelings were for her. She didn't say anything else!"

That's why he thought Eunice had been rambling on about irrelevant things.

"Nothing else, are you sure about that, Arlen?"

When Arlen realized he was getting nowhere with Bess, he turned to Calvin. "Calvin, you don't trust me either?"

"Let's do this. Do you have anyone who could crack this password?"

Calvin's words were cut short by a sharp nudge from his wife. "Honey, have you forgotten? We have our own tech whiz. It's

Arlen's birthday today. We can't bother him with this. Let's take the USB drive back and have someone on our team look into it"

Upon hearing this, Arlen realized that Bess wanted to see the contents first. Could it be that there were things even he wasn't aware of?

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"Bess, you are so hung up on that flash drive, could it be that there's something on there you don't want me to see?"

Arlen didnt hesitate. He yanked the flash drive from the computer and slipped it into his pocket.

Bess panicked, "I knew it! You know the password, you've just been playing dumb, trying to catch us out! What could we possibly

have that you don't know about? It's you, isn't it? Have you been doing something behind Calvin's back? Hand over that flash drive."

Upstairs, Eunice knew chaos had erupted. When she saw Arabella approach, a smirk played on her lips. "You're quick on your feet, kiddo"

"You're not too shabby yourself, Aunt Eunice."

Eunice's voice dropped to a whisper, "There are over a hundred cameras around this mansion. Can you hack them remotely?"

Her people, upon arriving nearby, discovered that the entire area within a five-hundred-yard radius of the mansion was under surveillance. It looked like Arlen was planning something big.

"I've taken care of the cameras by the back door and along the east fence"

Eunice was taken aback, "When did you do that?"

"Just now. After eavesdropping on Mr. Clarence and his goons in the study, I paid a little visit to Arlen's room and took the liberty of disabling them."

Eunice hadn't expected her niece to be so swift, nor so clever to anticipate their moves and disable the cameras in advance.

"So, you're telling me that if someone were to come in through the east fence or the back door, the cameras wouldn't catch a thing?"

Arabella nodded, "The guys in the security room will see the timestamps moving, but the footage is frozen. The system isn't recording anything. Even if someone were to walk in right now, it wouldn't show up on their screens." "You're amazing!" Eunice couldn't help but pinch Arabella's cheeks, her niece was truly a hidden gem. Meanwhile.

Mr. Clarence's gaze remained dark and menacing. He turned to his head of security, "How's the surveillance footage coming along?"

The head of security replied respectfully, "Right before you went upstairs, seven or eight guests left the main hall for the garden.

The cameras don't cover every nook there, but those who appeared on screen seemed normal. No anomalies detected."

"And what about Eunice and that girl she brought with her?" Mr. Clarence asked, eyeing them from a distance, suspecting something fishy about the pair.

"Eunice has been cornered by a group of ladies the whole time, and as for that girl, Mr. Burnell was chatting her up not long before the cameras went down. We didn't get anything on tape."

"What did you say?" Mr. Clarence's eyes flickered with shock. Could it be that girl had pulled off her move right then?

"After you mentioned someone was eavesdropping outside the study, I led a team to check on the quests. We searched the main hall, then the garden, and found Eunice and the girl there. Neither had left the area. They didn't seem suspicious."

"No.' Mr. Clarence still sensed trouble. If that girl knew how to restore deleted footage, then she surely knew how to erase it!

"But the time from when you went to the study until we discovered the eavesdropper was only a few minutes.

Our men were all over the property. If that girl really went upstairs, she would've been seen. It's unlikely she could move in and out undetected in such a short span."

So, the head of security believed the suspicion was unfounded.

"It's either she's up to something, or she has an accomplice. Either way, keep a close eye on them! Even if they go to the restroom, send some women in after them to make sure they're not plotting something!"

"Yes, sir"

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Ten minutes later.

Arabella spotted Mr. Clarence ambling solo towards the restroom.

Before his hand even grazed the restroom door, Arabella knocked him out cold and dragged him to the adjacent terrace, swiftly drawing the curtains closed.

The head of security had just seen Arabella heading in the direction of the restroom, and in the next moment, she had vanished

from sight.

His instincts on high alert, he first searched the area, then had one of the maids knock on the restroom door.

The maid's hand hadn't even touched the door when a soft cough of a woman could be heard from inside. It was so brief that the head of security couldn't be sure if it was Arabella or not. He could only stand aside and keep a stealthy watch.

Behind the curtain, Arabella transferred all the chat messages from Mr. Clarence's phone to her own and set up remote monitoring. Then, she slipped the phone back into Mr. Clarence's pocket, leaped onto the roof, and flicked a pebble at him to wake him up.

Mr. Clarence grunted in pain, groggily coming to, immediately alerting the head of security.

The head of security pulled back the curtain to find Mr. Clarence sitting on the ground and hurried over to help him up.

"Mr. Clarence, what are you doing here?"

Mr. Clarence's head throbbed painfully. He vaguely remembered heading to the restroom but couldn't figure out how he had passed out.

Was it possible someone had tampered with something?

With this thought, he frantically checked his pockets. His keys and phone were still there, nothing seemed to be missing.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe he had just run out of steam.

Just then, someone emerged from the restroom.

It was Eunice.

She walked with a seductive grace that caught the head of security's eye, making him suspect something was amiss.

Eunice made her way to the main hall, right as Arabella returned from a different route. Arabella smiled and asked her darling niece, "Got it?"

"Yep, it's on my phone now."

Not only did Arabella secure the chat history, but she also set up real-time monitoring of Mr.

Clarence's phone.

From then on, whatever messages Mr. Clarence received or sent, Arabella would see them too.

Eunice cast an approving glance at her niece. She hadn't expected one niece to be worth a hundred others.

Arabella's efficiency was so high, it was a true relief.

At that moment, Arabella noticed Calvin, Bess, and Arlen descending the stairs with grim expressions, seeming to have parted on bad terms.

Then, Mr. Clarence received a message, which he relayed to Arlen. The gist was that the deed was done.

Arlen's eyes flickered with shock and delight. He seemed to hardly believe it, but Mr. Clarence nodded affirmatively, as if to say, rest assured, our people witnessed it.

Reassured, Arlen invited all the guests to the garden for a fireworks display.

Under the grand fireworks, Arlen urged all the guests to raise their glasses and drink to their heart's content.

When the fireworks ended, he cut the cake amidst the crowd's cheers.

"What could possibly make him so jubilant?" Eunice noticed Arlen had been beaming since the beginning, an expression of triumph she had never seen before.

"Somebody messaged Mr. Clarence a while ago, saying the problem had been taken care of; Arabella explained. "Perhaps this was someone who had been a thorn in Arlen's side."

"It can only be your grandfather or uncle, but that's impossible,' Eunice stated confidently. "They don't have the means to take care of anyone."

A servant brought over slices of cake to them. Arabella nibbled symbolically on a few bites, but soon after, she noticed quests collapsing one by one.

Eunice too struggled to stand, massaging her temples.

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Arabella steadied her, "Aunt Eunice."

She hadn't expected Eunice to be such a masterful actress. Eunice put Serena's attempts to shame Arabella had already slipped Eunice the antidote earlier, so whatever they had been served, it had no effect on either of them now.

One by one, guests collapsed before their eyes, and then suddenly the lights in the entire villa dimmed. Arabella felt a wave of malice surge toward her as a dozen men in black launched their attack.

Another group of men in black went after Eunice, who, just a second ago seemed dizzy but now sprang into action with fierce precision. Within seconds, she had laid out several attackers.

Those lurking in the shadows couldn't believe their eyes.

"Is Eunice that skilled?"

"What kind of moves are those? When did she learn them? Why has no one ever mentioned this?"

"That woman has some deep secrets! Who is she, really?"

Arabella was just as surprised by Eunice's prowess. With her stunning looks, Eunice was a storm of beauty and strength in combat, not dragging Arabella down in the slightest.

On the contrary, in the next five minutes, the two women together took down every one of the assailants.

In the darkness, Eunice's lips curved into a seductive smile, "Calvin, Bess, your guys are pretty weak. Aren't you going to show yourselves now?"

No one stepped out of the night, and Eunice taunted, "Hiding is so boring, isn't it? And Arlen, Teresa, planning a murder and you hire these amateurs? Is this level of skill meant to tickle us?"

The lights in the living room flickered back on. Several elders, flanked by dozens of their men, emerged.

Arabella saw that it wasn't just Calvin, Bess, Arlen, and Teresa. There were two other elders she didn't recognize.

Eunice kept her smile, "Calvin and Arlen are in on this too?"

This was unexpected.

"What do you mean 'in on this'? We have no idea where these men in black came from!" Arlen said with a chuckle, "Your fighting skills seem quite polished. It's not something you picked up overnight, right?"

"You don't seem like someone who'd want me dead on a whim, either. When did this start?"

"Enough chit-chat, you wretch. Today's grand birthday celebration will serve as your funeral!" Bess had never liked her, "And this little girl by your side, it's your fault for bringing her along. You can keep each other company on the way to the underworld!"

Eunice laughed, "Bess, you're acting high and mighty, even more so than my father-in-law. You'd think you were ready to take over this family. My in-laws aren't dead yet, and you dare to be so bold! What, are you planning to usurp them?"

"Since your in-laws are bedridden, someone needs to take charge of this family, and you younger ones need to be kept in line!"

"The head of this family is Bard! If he knew what you've done today"

Before Eunice could finish, Bess interrupted with a laugh, "He won't find out."

"What do you mean?"

"Even if he did, he can't do anything about it!" Bess declared triumphantly, "We just received word. The plane he was on exploded mid-flight and everyone was turned to ash."

"That's impossible,' Eunice stated flatly.

"Whether you believe me or not, see for yourself in the video."

Bess pulled out her smartphone, showing footage of Bard's private jet indeed exploding in the sky.

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Eunice gazed at the jet's distinctive silhouette and emblem. There was no mistake. It was Bard's private plane!

That very aircraft had whisked him away on business earlier that day.

Bard had promised her he'd return as soon as his work was done.

She was in shock for a long moment before lifting her gaze, incredulous. "Did you do this?"

"It's his own damn fault for having bad luck! Did he really think he was too good to attend Arlen's birthday bash?"

Does he have any respect for us elders? Who did he think he was?"

"It was just a birthday party. Was it really worth all this? Bella and I showed up, didn't we?"

"And who are you to talk? You're nothing but an outsider to the Griffiths. We've never acknowledged you as one of us all these years!"

Eunice's eyes blazed with fury and hatred as she faced the murderers. "Your acknowledgment isn't worth a dime! It was Bard

who got down on one knee, not once but three times, to propose to me. It was my in-laws who wanted me to marry him. My

place in the Griffith family was approved by the head of the family himself, my father-in-law!"

"And what of it? They're bedridden now, too busy to care about your fate,' Bess said with a smile that was as warm as a spring breeze.

Teresa chimed in with a smirk, "Why waste words on her? Now that Bard's gone, everything he owned will naturally fall into this

wench's hands. Boys, bring the pre-drafted share transfer and the deed of gift. Let's have her sign everything over to us."

Dozens of bodyguards closed in around Eunice and Arabella, blocking any chance of escape.

Mr. Clarence handed over the contract and a pen with a sly grin. "Mr. Calvin and Mrs. Bess are reasonable. Just sign, and we can talk. Who knows? They might even show you mercy and spare your life."

Eunice remained unmoved by the contract and pen in his hand.

"You can't escape from here. There are sixty guards in this living room alone, not to mention the hundreds outside. Even if you could fight, you'd eventually run out of steam."

Besides, they had cast a net so wide that escape was impossible.

"Do you know the consequences of not signing?"

Teresa asked, arms crossed over her chest, looking down at Eunice with

arrogance. "You may not fear death and wish to follow your husband, but this young girl beside you is innocent. It would be a

shame for her to miss out on a life of luxury before it even started."

"If you lay a finger on her, Kenneth and Louisa won't let you off the hook!" Eunice shot back fiercely. "The Collins family cherishes her like a treasure. Even setting aside the influence of Kenneth and Louisa, just my nephew, Hans alone is enough to make you think twice."

The mention of Hans indeed changed the expressions of the elders present.

Hans was known for his ruthless efficiency, a cold machine of a man who didn't entertain pleas of sentiment.

Then there was Chasel. If they dared cross him, he could expose countless secrets they held in Solterra. And Clark, renowned as a forensic expert with a wide network of powerful contacts and rumored to be a formidable hacker. If he decided to infiltrate their systems, they'd be in for a world of trouble.

As for Sean, he might appear to be a charming playboy, but his methods were even more brutal than the eldest's. His unpredictable nature made him impossible to read. And of course, there was David, whose charisma and influence were undeniable.

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The Collins clan was not to be trifled with, and everyone from top to bottom knew it.

Even though Eunice was well aware of this fact, and understood that bringing Arabella to the Collins' doorstep was akin to

waving a golden ticket for protection, the temptation of the fortune laid out before them was too great to ignore. Especially since

Bard was gone, and such a huge "pie" was up for grabs, no one could keep their hands to themselves.

"If she dies, it's on you, not us! You're the one who brought her here,' Teresa snapped, snatching the contract and pen from Mr.

Clarence's grasp and hurling them at Eunice. "Sign it now!"

Sign first, deal with the consequences later.

Arabella couldn't be left to walk free. If she lived to see another day, she would surely spill the beans to Louisa.

And if Louisa sought vengeance for her brother Bard, she would become their most formidable roadblock.

As for Eunice, not only did she need to die, but her death had to be particularly brutal to quell both her and Bess"

resentment.

"Don't get too cocky,' Arabella finally spoke up, her eyes glinting with an icy displeasure.

"This pretty little thing. with sixty bodyguards here, it would be a real shame if something happened to her."

"You lay a finger on her, just try it!" Eunice threatened fiercely.

"Oh, what? Do you think you're still Mrs. Griffith?"

Teresa taunted. "With Bard gone, you're nothing but an ant beneath our feet.

Besides, Alexander's already had his way with you.

In a bit, I'll let these bodyguards give you a proper welcome too! That's what

you get for flaunting yourself around all the time, pretending to be something you're not."

Eunice grabbed her by the collar, ready to give her a good thrashing.

"Hold on, Aunt Eunice,' Arabella urged calmly, "there's no point in fighting a losing battle."

Seeing Eunice let go in frustration, Arabella coolly addressed Teresa, "So, if Aunt Eunice signs this, can we leave Dawnstar safely?"

"Of course!" Teresa hadn't expected the young one to be so gullible. She smiled, "I always keep my word. Just hand over all the property and shares to us, and I'll spare you both." "If they wanted to let us go, they would've done so by now."

Before Eunice could finish, Teresa cut in, 'It's because you havent signed yet. Sign it now, my patience has its limits!"

She was still in the mood to cajole them.

But that would soon end.

"I just don't understand,' Arabella interjected, lifting her gaze with an innocent bewilderment, "We're family.

Wouldn't it be better to live happily together? Why harm Uncle Bard? If you wanted the money and shares, you could've just asked him. He would've certainly agreed. Why kill him and freeze all familial ties?"

Teresa couldn't help but think this girl was naive to a fault, even foolish.

"In the world of high society, what is family really worth? You think too highly of your uncle" Teresa chuckled.

"You think he'd just hand over his position if I asked? You young people are so shortsighted. If it were that simple, would we be where we are today?"

"But Uncle Bard had the ability to take the Griffith empire to greater heights. He only took over the group from Grandpa. If you wanted it that badly, why didn't you ask Grandpa back then?"

"I'll tell you why," Teresa started, "it's because your great-grandfather left the position to your grandpa, giving only a small dividend to his siblings, and that's what led to the situation."

Before Teresa could finish, Arlen interrupted sharply, "Enough talk. Make her sign."

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Now Arabella finally understood why Calvin and Arlen were hell-bent on seeing her grandpa six feet under.

It was all about the uneven split from years back. But was there a chance that Grandpa's father saw him as more capable and fit for the job? To prevent a family feud, maybe he gave the others a slice of the pie but reserved the position for Grandpa.

And later, how did Calvin and Arlen manage to hold key positions within the company? Was Grandpa just being soft-hearted, or did he genuinely trust them enough to break protocol and let them in?

"Pick it up," Teresa demanded, pointing at the contract and pen on the floor, her gaze icy as she stared down Eunice. "I don't

have the patience to play games with you!"

"I'd rather go down fighting than let any of you get one over on me!"

"What, you think your minions are going to come to your rescue? Our guys have surrounded the whole estate. If all goes as planned, even your father-in-law is in our grasp."

"You!" Rage flashed in Eunice's eyes. She wanted Teresa gone.

"But rest assured, in the spirit of family, we'll spare his life. He's had his glory days, and it's about time he got a taste of ours.

Especially now that his beloved eldest son is gone. Next up, he'll really get to savor the full spectrum of life. I can almost picture his heartbreak."

Eunice lunged at Teresa, but a barrage of switchblades flew her way.

Teresa, shaken, scrambled to her husband's side. If Arabella hadn't pulled Eunice back in time, she would have been hit by every single blade.

"You wretch!" Teresa was terrified, her teeth clenched in anger. "Bard was too busy working to discipline you, so today I will teach you a lesson."

"No need to trouble yourself, Teresa"

Suddenly, a man's voice cut through the crowd. All the bodyguards turned, and the elders were stunned to see Bard had arrived!

He was decked out in a suit, looking as calm and collected as ever.

"She's my woman. I'll handle her."

Bard's words froze everyone in their tracks, especially Teresa, who couldn't believe her eyes.

Bard wasn't dead?

He was still alive?

"Bard??" The elders were in utter disbelief.

Eunice and Arabella just slightly curled their lips, not surprised, as if they had expected this moment.

Bard pushed a wheelchair forward, and sitting in it was none other than Darren!

Arabella's grandfather was not only awake but looked furious.

"Darren??" Calvin couldn't believe what he was seeing. "You're awake."

"Calvin, were you hoping I'd never wake up?"

The icy question made Calvin's legs turn to jelly. He hurriedly responded, "No, no, Darren, you've got it all wrong."

"You lot are quite something. I've barely been out for a few days, and you've already started tormenting my daughter-in-law!"

Darren's voice was strong and indignant, with an air of authority.

"Dad!" Eunice rushed to her father-in-law, squatting by the wheelchair, her voice filled with grievance.

"I'm so glad you're awake.

If you hadn't come, they would have devoured me!"

It was the first time Arabella had seen her aunt act so coquettishly. It turned out that she had many facets, an interesting character indeed.

As Darren heard his daughter-in-law's complaints, his anger intensified as he addressed his siblings,

"What are you all doing? By

seniority and age, which of you isn't older than

Eunice? A bunch of you ganging up on a defenseless woman, I'm ashamed of you!"

Defenseless? Arabella couldn't help but smirk at the irony of that description.

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Teresa's eyes popped, "Darren, do you even know what that word means?"

Just moments ago, Eunice and Arabella had teamed up and knocked down over twenty bodyguards.

So much for being helpless.

"Darren, you didn't see it. She just flew into action, like one kick per person."

Before Teresa could finish, Eunice retorted with a pout, "Dad, you heard them. When could I ever fly, let alone kick them like

that? When someone wants to accuse you, they'll find any excuse."

Teresa was floored by Eunice's acting skills.

"Everyone shut it! I'm still here. Do you think you can frame her?" Darren barked, then his gaze softened as he turned to his

daughter-in-law, "Dont worry, sweetheart. Daddy's here, and I won't let anyone bully you!"

Eunice nodded meekly, but when she looked back at Teresa and Bess, her face broke into a triumphant smirk, as if to say: What

can you do about it?

Teresa and Bess were fuming, "Darren."

"Zip it. We'll settle your scores tomorrow! It's late.

Eunice, let's head home!"

Upon hearing this, Eunice quickly scuttled over and took Arabella by the hand, "Dad, did Bard ever mention Bella to you?"

Darren suddenly realized he had let his anger get the better of him, almost forgetting his granddaughter!

"Bella, is that you?" Darren's voice quivered with excitement as he studied Arabella, "You look so much like her."

She was the spitting image of his daughter Louisa! Only, the girl before him was even more beautiful than his daughter in her younger days, with an even more striking presence.

"My dear, you've had it tough out there." Darren grasped Arabella's hand, his voice choked with emotion, his hands trembling.

"Grandpa." Arabella knew something was off.

Perhaps overwhelmed, and still recovering from his outburst, Darren's hands shook violently as he struggled to breathe, his expression growing more pained.

"Grandpa? Grandpa." Arabella's hand rested on her grandfather's wrist, urgently saying, "To the hospital! Quick!"

Darren had passed out.

Everyone was in disbelief. Just a second ago, Darren was scolding them, and the next, he was unconscious.

Bard and Eunice called out to him, but to no avail. "If anything bad happens to my dad, I will never forgive you."

With those words, Bard rushed off, pushing the wheelchair swiftly.

Eunice and Arabella followed close behind.

No one dared to stop them.

Arlen stood frozen, only after a long while turning to Calvin, "Calvin, what do we do?"

Had Darren heard their insults to Eunice, and if so, how much had he heard?

If Darren found out the dirty tricks they'd played behind his back, even plotting against Bard, then none of them would be safe!

"When did they come in?" Calvin didn't answer Arlen but turned to the bodyguards in the hall.

All the bodyguards shook their heads, none had noticed their arrival.

When exactly Bard had wheeled Darren in? They hadn't heard a sound.

"Are the people outside dead or what? Call them in now!" Calvin was livid. How could someone enter without them being notified?

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Panic rippled through the grand mansion as a breathless servant burst into the dimly lit drawing room, "Everyone outside has passed out and they won't wake up no matter how much we shout!"

"What do you mean, every single bodyguard is out cold?" Calvin's voice was laced with disbelief.

"Yes."

Calvin stood frozen, his mind racing, until a thought struck him, "Arlen, don't you have guys posted in the security room watching the monitors? How could something like this happen?"

"Mr. Clarence, get to the security room now! See if the guy in there fell asleep on the job!" Arlen barked, his temper flaring. "If he did, I want him gone!"

Incompetent fools! They've messed up everything! Mr. Clarence hurried off, returning a while later, trembling, "Jacob's awake, but the cameras are not working."

Fury washed over Arlen. "The cameras are down and Jacob's blind? He didn't notice until now?"

"It's not Jacob's fault. The cameras at the back door and the east side of the villa stopped working. They seemed to be recording, ticking away second by second, until I asked Jacob to pull up the footage of Bard's appearance. That's when we found out, nothing was recording at all, the mouse clicks did nothing."

Arlen, for the first time, was hearing of such a mess. A name suddenly flashed in his mind.

"It has to be that girl!" Arlen seethed with rage, "When did she get into the security room? Did Jacob step out? Or was he

knocked out and didn't know?"

"Jacob swears he never left the room. He'd stake his family's lives on it, no one came in or out."

"What the hell happened then?" Arlen was on the brink of madness. Ever since Eunice and Arabella showed up, he felt like a monkey being played in circles.

Bess spoke up, fear tinging her voice, "Didn't our men surround the villa? How could Darren be with Bard? And how did Bard come back alive? Our men were all around the villa, how did Darren leave? And how did they manage to knock out all the guards outside. There are too many questions."

"I'll make some calls." Calvin, equally agitated, dialed his men, but no one answered. In a fit of rage, he hurled his phone to the ground!

They thought Bard was dead, Darren comatose, and Eunice would sign over the Griffith estate to them. But their plans had crumbled.

"Even if Darren didn't hear what we said, once he wakes up, Eunice will spill everything about tonight," Arlen fretted, "Darren's still out, but Bard is wide awake! If Eunice tells him that we're linked to his plane's explosion."

Even if Darren couldn't step in to deal with them right away, with Bard's principles, he'd turn against his own kin!

None of them here would be spared!

“Better to strike first than wait for doom!”

A cold glint appeared in Arlen's eye as he plotted,

“Darren's down, and Bard and Eunice are at the hospital with him. They won't

have many guards, and the hospital won't allow a crowd in the ward. Tonight's our best chance to make a move!”

Calvin felt the same, though the risk weighed on him, “But if we fail, it's the end of us.”

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"If we don't take action, we're done for!" Arlen's voice trembled with fervor. "Calvin, we're out of options. It's either Darren, Bard, Eunice, and that little girl who go down, or it's curtains for us. We've got to take the plunge."

"No, I'm not ready to die." Teresa dreamed of a lavish life, throwing money around like it was nothing, living the high life.

Bess wasn't keen on dying either. She had her whole future planned out.

"We've reached the point of no return, Arlen said, looking to Calvin for confirmation.

Calvin and Arlen nodded in agreement. "He's right, now's our best shot. Calvin, we're one step away from victory!"

Calvin mulled over another strategy in his mind.

"There's one more way, a safer bet, that could preserve everything we've got."

"What way?" The siblings and their spouses were all ears, eager for a plan that promised such ease and security.

"The key lies with Eunice. With Darren suddenly taken ill, and Eunice and Bard rushing him to the hospital, they won't have a

moment to gossip about our doings tonight. As long as Eunice keeps mum, Bard and Darren will be none the wiser."

That would give them the time they needed to devise an even more foolproof plan.

"But Eunice's no pushover. How could she not spill the beans? She won't miss a chance to rat us out!"

Bess suddenly felt her

husband's idea was half-baked, as good as useless.

Yet Arlen couldn't help but ask, "Calvin, you sure about this? Eunice's a tough nut to crack. We just tried to corner her and take

out her husband. Would she really play ball?"

"We'll have to cut a deal with her." Calvin pondered before suggesting, "She's always had a soft spot for you.

Pretend to ask her for the hospital's address, if she's alone, try to negotiate."

Arlen doubted Eunice would agree, but Calvin made a valid point—if she kept silent, Darren and Bard would remain oblivious to

their scheme, allowing them to plot more meticulously and ensure a fail-safe outcome next time.

"I'll give it a shot; was all Arlen could say.

Meanwhile, in the car.

Arabella spoke calmly, "No one's following us.

Grandpa, you can wake up now."

Darren hadn't expected his granddaughter to be so astute and opened his eyes, looking back to make sure, then asked, "How did you know I was faking?"

"Bella is a renowned doctor. She was the lead surgeon on your operation. How could she not see through such a simple ruse?"

Eunice chuckled, turning to Arabella. "Did you figure it out while checking his pulse?"

"Even before that; Arabella said with a slight smile. "Grandpa, your acting is terrible."

"Was I that unconvincing? Then Calvin must have caught on, Darren suddenly regretted not having put on a more realistic performance.

"Don't worry, they were too scared seeing you to notice whether you were acting,' Eunice reassured him with a laugh. "But yes, your acting skills could definitely be improved."

Laughter filled the car.

Bard looked at Eunice, "I did as we agreed. I boarded the plane and when it flew over the mountains, I parachuted out. My men picked me up and we returned to the lodge, rounding up all of Calvin's guys."

Eunice's smile widened, "I also stuck to the plan. When I saw the video of the plane exploding, I acted shocked and furious.

Then, when they let their guard down, I recorded everything."

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"You guys are quite a crafty couple." Darren began, catching a glimpse of their gazes and quickly backpedaling, "I mean, the most intelligent, the most in-sync couple."

"It's mainly because Bella played along so well." Eunice said, pulling Arabella's hand into hers in praise, "She even managed to

coax out Teresa's words. The root of their jealousy is that back in the day, Grandpa favoured Dad in his will, leaving him the entire corporation and only a few dividends to them." Eunice's earrings were actually miniature spy cameras, and she had recorded everything that had just happened, sending the footage to Darren's phone.

"I sent it to you on WhatsApp, you can take a look." Hearing Eunice's words, Darren, despite knowing the gist of it, still couldn't bring himself to watch the video.

After all, these were his siblings who he had loved wholeheartedly for most of his life.

And to think that after he fell ill, these same siblings wanted to murder his entire family, including himself, his eldest son, his daughter-in-law, and the granddaughter they had just found.

They wouldn't spare a single one!

"Let's not dwell on these sad matters for now. Bella, I thought I was a goner, ready to join your grandma on the other side, but you, my girl, have such great skills that you could even cure my complex illness!"

Darren looked at his granddaughter with immense admiration, "So young, yet so exceptional, what a blessing for the Collins and

the Griffith families to have you back home with us." Since they were sitting in an RV at the moment, the family was gathered on the couches. Arabella smiled at Darren before her,

"Grandpa, I'm glad to have been of some help with your illness."

At least, her return to the family wasn't without purpose.

"That's not just 'some help'. You saved one life. This is a great kindness."

Darren was beaming, "Your medical skills could give me many more years of happiness. From now on, I want to make up for all the time I've missed out on with you!"

Arabella's smile deepened, "Seeing you full of vitality in front of me is all I could wish for. I only hope that both you and Grandma stay healthy and live long, joyful lives together."

"You are such a darling. No wonder Bard speaks so highly of you. I've taken quite a shine to you myself from the moment we met!"

Unfortunately, he had rushed out without preparing a proper welcome gift.

He would have to make it up to his granddaughter when they got back!

Just then, Eunice's phone rang. She glanced at the caller ID, it was Arlen. Her lips curled into a smile as she answered on speakerphone.

"Eunice, how's Darren feeling? Any better?" Arlen's voice came through with feigned concern.

Darren's face darkened at the sound, and he huffed, turning his head away.

Eunice replied with a scoff, "Thanks to you, Dad's still in surgery fighting for his life."

"And what about Bard?" Arlen inquired, seizing the opportunity to gather more information.

"He's discussing the medical details with Mr. Chapman. Bella's already in the OR assisting. If you've got something to say, Arlen, just spit it out"

Arlen chuckled, not expecting Eunice to be so sharp.

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"Eunice, you're a sharp cookie, and I'm not one for beating around the bush. We're all family here, and you don't want to see our clan fall apart, do you? Darren's sick as a dog, and he just can't handle any more bad news."

"So, what's your big plan, Arlen?" Eunice asked coolly.

"Like I said, you're smart. You know what I'm getting at, and what I want you to do. You know me, Eunice, I've got no beef with you."

Arlen was probably scared to death Eunice was recording the call, because he didn't say anything too incriminating.

Eunice chuckled, "Are you asking me to keep mum? But you know I never enter a losing deal."

The moment Arlen heard that, he sensed there was room to negotiate and quickly said, "Name your price, anything within my power, I'll give it to you."

"Anything you can offer, Dad and Bard can give me too. Your usual trinkets hold no allure for me."

Arlen's face soured, "Then what do you want?"

"There is one thing Dad and Bard can't give me.'

Eunice's smile grew even brighter, "It's about time for Calvin to hang up his boots, so let's cut to the chase. I want all of your shares, and Calvin, Bess, and Teresa's shares, and I want you all to announce

your retirement from the company. From here on out, you won't get a single cent of the dividends."

Arlen was flabbergasted at her audacity to make such demands!

"Think it over with them, Arlen. Don't say I didn't give you a fair chance. You've got one hour." With that, Eunice hung up the phone.

"Hello? Hello?" Arlen couldn't believe what he had just heard. It took him a second to snap back to reality, shaking with rage.

That cunning fox was totally exploiting the situation! After Eunice put away her phone, she turned to Arabella with a smile, "Bella, what do you reckon? Will they bite?"

"Aunt Eunice, isn't it obvious you know they won't agree?"

Eunice smirked, "Explain."

“They've been drooling over Grandpa and Uncle Bard's shares from the get-go, which means they're hungry for more. What they have now just doesn't cut it. But the moment you open your mouth, you're basically leaving them high and dry. How could they possibly agree?”

Arabella paused, then added, "You intentionally told them Grandpa's in surgery and Uncle Bard's busy discussing his condition with Mr. Chapman. They definitely know who Mr. Chapman is, so they can guess which hospital Grandpa's in. They'll assume everyone's too busy to rally the troops, making it their perfect opportunity to strike."

Not just Eunice, but Bard and Darren too, looked at Arabella with admiration and agreement, waiting for her to continue.

“By demanding the moon and giving them just an hour to think, aren't you forcing their hand to make a move within that hour?”

"Dad, smart granddaughter, huh?" Eunice said with a laugh, glancing at Darren, “Sharp as a tack, right?”
“Sharp, very sharp." Darren nodded with a beaming smile, "A clever kid"

From the start, Eunice had no intention of playing ball with Arlen and his crew. She was just fanning the flames of their ‘rebellion’.

And sure enough, after hearing Arlen's message, Calvin, who had been on the fence, lost his cool completely, slamming his fist down on the table in fury! That little upstart had ambitions too big for her boots. It was time to cut her down to size. "Get the men ready. We move on my command tonight!" A glint of ruthless determination flashed in Calvin's eyes.

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Chapter 1358

On the way to the hospital.

Calvin tried calling another group of his guys, but nobody was picking up.

His face set in a grim line, he mulled over, "The fellas I sent to surround the estate, not a single one's answering.

Odds are, Bard's got them all cooped up there."

"Calvin, look at it this way, it might actually be a good thing" he reasoned. "I sent at least a couple of hundred guys. Bard's gotta

spare a fair number of his own to keep an eye on them. This means he's short on manpower.

Tonight's our best shot!"

A flash of hatred crossed Calvin's eyes. "No matter what, we can't afford to screw this up!"

Inside the hospital.

Eunice sat on a bench in the corridor, her expression heavy with worry.

The elevator dinged open, and out stepped Calvin with Arlen in tow.

"Eunice, why are you all by your lonesome? Where's Bard?" Arlen asked with feigned concern.

Eunice lifted her sorrowful eyes. "Arlen, what brings you here? Calvin, did you know Arlen's come too?"

"Your dad's in there, and to tell you the truth, we share some of the blame." Calvin pretended to be remorseful.

"Couldn't sleep a wink, so we came to check on him."

"Well, isn't that a surprise. I thought Calvin has no conscience, but seeing him now, I guess he's not totally heartless."

Calvin's face darkened, but he lowered his voice and said, "I know you're mad, and tonight, I was out of line. I scared you, left a bad impression. I'm here to apologize. I agree to those terms you and Arlen set. We'll go home and discuss it with our better halves."

Calvin and Arlen quickly chimed in, "Right, absolutely. We'll get back to you with an answer that'll satisfy you."

Out of the blue, Eunice said, "You guys agree so quickly, it almost seems fishy"

"Now, now, kiddo, we're your elders, after all. We wouldn't trick you, one of the younger generation.' Arlen hurriedly said.

"Besides, you have Bard by your side. Who would dare to deceive you?"

"When can I expect a decision?" Eunice seemed somewhat convinced.

"By sunrise tomorrow, I swear to you, we'll persuade Teresa and Bess to transfer all their shares into your name!"

"Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal!"

Just then, a voice carried over: "What's this about making a deal?"

"Bard." All the elders turned, and upon seeing this young upstart, couldn't help but feel a bit intimidated. Arlen was the first to express concern, "Bard, how's your dad doing?"

"You seemed to forget that my dad is in there because of every single person here. What are you all doing here?"

Think he's not sick enough? Want to give him another scare?"

"Bard, tonight was a misunderstanding, ask Eunice. Your dad and I are brothers. Seeing him in there, it hurts me too" Arlen said somberly.

Calvin's tone carried a similar weight, "Just the thought of your dad suffering in there, we can't sit still. We had to see him with our own eyes to settle our minds."

In the operating room.

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

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Chapter 1359

Darren and Arabella clinked their soda cans together in a secret toast. They sat sprawled on the floor, sipping their drinks and savoring the crispy fried chicken.

"This chicken is spot-on—crunchy on the outside, tender on the inside. If we only had some barbecue skewers to go along with it"

Arabella couldn't help but chuckle. "Grandpa, you're just on the mend. It's best to stick to lighter fare for now.

Besides, BBQ skewers are too aromatic. The folks outside will sniff us out in no time."

Even with the windows cracked open, the aroma of fried chicken seemed to fill the entire recovery room. Skewers would definitely give the game away.

“You're right, Bella. Skewers might be too much. The chicken is perfect. I'm more than content with this,” Darren conceded with a smile.

He picked out a particularly plump piece and handed it to her. “Here, Bella, this one's meaty. Take it. You're too thin. You need to eat more.”

Arabella accepted it with a grin. She loved eating meat but never seemed to gain weight, perhaps because of her fondness for teas and lemon water.

“To think that our first meal together would be in a place like this, It's certainly memorable.”

Darren wolfed down the chicken, his mood souring as he thought about the backstabbers outside.

Sensing her grandfather's shift in mood, Arabella offered comfort. “It's painful to face the truth, but it's better than being kept in the dark. You've supported them for years out of brotherly love, Grandpa, but what they're after is your life and your fortune.”

As she spoke, Arabella pulled out her smartphone.

“Let me add you on WhatsApp, Grandpa.”

“Alright, alright” Darren's spirits lifted as he fished out his own phone. “Should I scan your code, or do you want to scan mine?”

Amused that her grandfather was so tech-savvy, Arabella replied, "Either works."

"I'll scan yours." After adding each other on WhatsApp and Arabella's approval, Darren set her contact name to "Sweetie Bella"

Arabella sent him a file. "I copied all the chat records from Mr. Clarence's phone at the Arlen residence and monitored his mobile.

They're plotting something for tonight. And those close calls you and Grandma had all linked to ther.

I've sorted the evidence

somewhat. Consider it an accompaniment to your meal. But don't get too worked up over it. Your health is what's important."

Darren was amazed at his granddaughter's prowess, to have gathered so much evidence.

He had suspected his close encounters were linked to those around him but had no proof.

Until now.

After reviewing all the material, he chugged his soft drink and then opened a surveillance video Eunice had sent him from earlier in the car.

"AS a junior, he not even attending Arlen's birthday bash. Does he have any respect for us elders? Who does he think he is?"

"You're not afraid to die, following in your husband's footsteps, that's your choice. But this young lady beside you, she's innocent.

Barely found her way back to us, never tasted the high life, and now gone."

The more Darren listened, the more he felt a thunderous rage. Behind his back, his brothers wore such masks!

They not only plotted against his son's life, causing his plane to explode, but they also pressured Eunice to hand over all her

shares and assets to them, even bullying his granddaughter.

"In these families, what weight does kinship hold?"

"Out of respect for our familial bonds, we'll spare his life. He's basked in success for half his life; it's time he sees how we shine.

Especially after his oh-so-prized eldest son's demise. What comes next? I can almost taste his despair."

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The Princess and the Pauper (Arabella)

Chapter 1360

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Chapter 1360

Darren crumpled the soda can in his hand, his momentary soft-heartedness completely extinguished.

All that remained was a bitter chill and burning rage. For years he had poured his heart and soul into being the benevolent patriarch, and yet, in their eyes, he was worth less than the almighty dollar and shares in the company.

His life, and the lives of his son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, didn't seem to weigh as much as those assets!

No wonder his father had gripped his hand tightly on his deathbed, urgently cautioning Darren never to let his brothers into the family business.

Even then, his father had seen their true colors, knowing their insatiable greed would one day lead to disaster.

"It's all my fault, I was too soft then, too trusting."
Darren rambled to Arabella, "When I first took over the company, I was swamped, working all hours. They came begging me, time and again, wanting internships and vowing they wouldn't take a penny, just wanted to ease my burden, saying they couldn't bear to see me so overworked. I actually believed them!"

Looking back, he felt like a fool.

"Grandpa, you trusted them, and I think that's far more precious,' Arabella said with a wisdom beyond her years, "but they just didn't value it"

Darren looked at his granddaughter, feeling a stinging sensation in his nose, "They've lived half their lives and still aren't as clearsighted as a child."

After a heavy silence, Darren added, "What was once a good home is falling apart. I wonder if my father is turning in his grave, blaming me for letting the wolves in"

"There was never a perfect home, Grandpa,' Arabella comforted, "You thought we were united and loving, but that might have been true only in your eyes. To them, it wasn't about brotherly love or family warmth, it was all about the benefits in your and

Uncle Bard's hands."

Darren realized she had a point.

The happy family he thought he had was an illusion!

Sensing her grandfather's mood, Arabella couldn't help but say, "Don't be sad, Grandpa. You've done everything a good man

should. It's not on you that they failed as brothers.

Should we just let them keep making mistakes without any consequences?"

She analyzed further, "An ordinary person's mistake might be a small lie, a minor misdeed, but their mistakes are the kind that

could cost lives. If you turn a blind eye, what you'll lose won't just be our family, and they won't care.

They'll trample over bodies,

spending money with wild abandon while evading justice."

Yes, she was right. If he turned a blind eye, it would be like gambling with his family's lives for a semblance of brotherly affection.

He couldn't, he wouldn't allow it.

"Bella, you're a good kid. Thanks for helping me see clearly."

If he had harbored any reluctance or regret before, it had now vanished.

"It's something you had to realize yourself, Grandpa.

No one else's words would've sufficed," Arabella said, raising her soda.

Darren couldn't drink alcohol, so he popped open another soda and clinked cans with her.

He suddenly realized that this young girl possessed a remarkable character, her maturity and sense of the world far surpassing those of her peers. She was indeed a promising talent.

Outside the operating room.

Eunice feigned overwhelming distress, "Bard, Dad's been in there so long. I'm really worried."

Before she could finish, she pretended to be overcome, her body sagging as if she would collapse.

"Eunice," Bard rushed to catch her, "Don't worry, with Bella and the doctors in there, they'll surely pull Dad back from the brink."

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