

## **Arabella 1911**

### Chapter 1911

No matter who showed up, Arabella was confident she could snag their tail and trace it back to the puppet master pulling the strings!

"Bella, we still keep the Christmas tree at home. You hadn't have time to decorate the tree last time, so let's go hang some ornaments on the Christmas tree, shall we?" Louisa called from a short distance away.

"Sure."

Thought they all had celebrated the Christmas Day together, and had a happy time. Since they finally had Bella back, they wanted to celebrate every festival with her. To make each one a grand event. Hence, all morning, they were busy with festive preparations. They stuck decals on the windows, arranged cheerful streamers, and hung ornaments. They crafted New Year's decorations and placed them in every nook and cranny of the house, adorning the indoor plants with fairy lights and ornaments. The family was engulfed in laughter and chatter, a lively scene indeed. The staff wasn't idle either; they strung up joyful banners across the ceiling and decorated the garden's flora with strings of lights.

The whole house, inside and out, was brimming with the spirit of the New Year. A dozen photographers captured the moment, no staged shots necessary; every frame was filled with warmth and joy.

Seeing her home transformed, Arabella felt something new stirring within her. Celebrating the New Year with so many people was truly happiness.

As noon approached.

Four chefs rolled out dough, prepared fillings, and gathered everyone to sit down and make cheese tarts together.

"Bella, do you know how to make them? I've just learned it myself." Louisa started to show her daughter how to make cheese tarts, but in the blink of an eye, Arabella had already crafted one perfectly.

Everyone was stunned, not even catching how she did it.

"Bella, did you make a fortune as a chef? You not only can make tarts but such intricate ones at that?"

Her brothers were in disbelief. Their little sister, a maestro in the making!

"Grannie Grace taught me a while back." Arabella said with a casual smile, her heart wandering to

memories of Grannie Grace.

Sensing her mood shift, they all knew she was missing Grannie Grace.

"In the afternoon, each family will have the afternoon tea. Let's honor Grannie Grace by enjoying the cheese tarts she taught you to make."

Before Louisa could finish, Kenneth chimed in, "Exactly, we owe her so much. As her parents, we should pay our respects."

"I want to thank her for raising my precious granddaughter so well." Grandma Cornelia's voice wavered with emotion, imagining how much livelier it would be if Grannie Grace were still with them.

Belinda added, "We'd like to thank her too."

"We'll join as well," said David. "If the Murphy family doesn't pay tribute to Grannie Grace, then we, the Collins family, will make sure she knows we care about her. We'll never forget what she did for Bella."

Moved by their words, Arabella replied, "If Grannie Grace can hear us, she'd be delighted."

Afterward, Arabella crafted various creative tarts which the chefs baked and served. Everyone clamored for a taste.

Grandpa Bernard snatched three cheese tarts from the emptying plate.

"I've never had the chance to taste food made by my sweet granddaughter."

"You're stealing food from the elderly."

"Has the Collins family starved you lot?"

In the end, the older folks commandeered the cheese tarts from the younger ones' plates.

Chapter 1912

"Wait a minute, Bella made a whole bunch of tarts, how come there's only few of them here?"

Louisa had barely finished her sentence when the chef brought out another cheese tarts. She quickly snatched up three and was about to go for a fourth when the plate was wiped clean.

"You bunch of pirates!"

David was fuming; he hadn't managed to get his hands on a single tart since the meal started. Before he could vent his frustration, the chef arrived with another plate. As soon as it hit the table, everyone dove in.

"Those aren't made by Bella, are they?"

"Who made these ugly tarts?"

Everyone withdrew their forks simultaneously, not a single tart taken, their faces filled with distaste.

"These are made by David."

The chef's revelation drew everyone's gaze towards David. If they heard right, David himself had called his own tarts ugly and was the first to pull back his fork.

Out of everyone, only Arabella reached out, took a tart, and took a bite. "Not bad, tastes good."

"Bella, you don't have to force yourself."

"They're a hot mess. How can you even eat that.?"

"If they were salvageable, the chef wouldn't have brought them out like this. That means even the chef couldn't save these."

"Seriously, they're good." Arabella urged everyone to give them a try.

Out of respect for Arabella, the others considered trying one, but in the next second, the chef came out with another plate, making a point to mention, "These are made by Ms. Bella."

The scramble began anew.

The older brothers watched in disbelief as plates were cleared in seconds. They never imagined their elders could be so fierce in the battle for food.

Eventually, the meal ended amidst the chaos.

In contrast, Serena's situation was much more subdued.

She ate the gingerbread house Martin had made for her alone, checking the new smartphone he bought her. Just as she logged into Facebook, she saw her brothers had all updated their page.

Hans: The taste of home.

Chasel: My sister, the crafty one.

Clark: My sister's cheese tarts are just too delicious.

Sean: My sister made these! Everyone, give her some praise!

David: Not only do my sister's cheese tarts look great, they're super tasty too!

Each brother posted pictures, with David also sharing a short video.

Hans' post featured a close-up of the tarts. It was clear that Arabella was skilled at making various intricate tarts.

Chasel's photo showed the tarts after they were baked, looking flavorful and appetizing.

Clark posted a photo of everyone at the table reaching for the tarts. It was clear there were a lot of people dining. Serena counted at least 15.

Could it be that their uncle's family had also come? But that still wouldn't account for so many people.

Who were these extra guests?

Could it be that Romeo was there too?

Or perhaps Grandpa Phillip and Grandma Shirley had joined?

No way.

Sean's photo was a repost from the eldest brother.

David's video showed the chef placing a plate on the table, and everyone immediately reaching in. The

plate was emptied in a flash, laughter and chatter filling the room.

Serena hadn't expected that, even in her absence, they could still laugh and enjoy themselves so

heartily.

Chapter 1913

From the video David posted, she heard her grandparents' laughter filling the air, and the beaming

smiles of Kenneth and Louisa.

Their smiles were genuine, not a hint of pretense.

She hadn't expected that losing her would have no impact on their lives. They carried on, feasting and

toasting, celebrating the year with such abundance.

A pang of discomfort twisted in Serena's chest. There she was, battered and bruised, freshly snatched from death's clutches, while her once-loving parents and grandparents laughed heartily without her. They truly didn't care about her absence.

Serena watched the video over and over, each viewing stinging more than the last. Memories of belongings discarded like trash, of past joys and happiness, sowed the seeds of resentment deep in her heart.

After lunch, they brought flowers and went to pay respects to Grannie Grace.

Once arrived at the graveyard, they were surprised to find that the stone was clean and there were flowers in front of the stone. Who could possibly remember Grannie Grace?

The others shared his surprise. The Murphy family, clearly the culprits, wouldn't bother.

Who could it be?

Once Arabella spotted the unique wrapping paper on the bouquets, she knew it was Romeo.

That wrapping, those flowers—only one florist in the area carried them, and she had taken Romeo there once. To her surprise, he had not only remembered but also brought flowers to honor Grannie



Grace.

"It's Romeo, no need to guess," she declared.

Hearing Arabella's words, everyone was somewhat shocked.

Louisa was especially moved, "Romeo remembered! That boy is so thoughtful."

She hadn't expected him to be the first to honor Grannie Grace..

Bernard and Cornelia couldn't help but feel teary-eyed as they expressed their gratitude to Grannie

Grace.

Darren and Belinda sincerely thanked Grannie Grace for her kindness to Arabella.

Kenneth and Louisa were moved to tears.

"She was Bella's grandmother, and that makes her ours too. We'll honor her every year," David promised.

"Bella's doing well now, Grannie. You can rest easy," Hans added.

"We'll all take good care of her, just like you did," Chasel affirmed.

"I'll lay down my life to protect her," Sean vowed.

"Tomorrow is Bella's homecoming celebration. Her true identity no longer needs to be hidden. That

way, Grannie Grace, you can rest peacefully," Clark said.

Arabella said, "Grannie, I'm doing well. I have my family and Romeo. You can be at peace."

A gentle breeze seemed to whisper Grannie Grace's tender reply.

Arabella spoke quietly, then left with everyone else.

She messaged Romeo and confirmed it was indeed him who had sent the flowers to Grannie Grace.

Warmth flooded her heart.

Chapter 1914

Under the watchful gaze of generations past, Kenneth stood in the grand hall of the family estate, a place where tradition and history melded into the rich tapestry of their heritage. He spoke with a voice brimming with pride, "Dear families, I bear joyful tidings. Our daughter, who has wandered far from us for many a year, has at last been found and returned to our fold."

He guided Arabella to pay her respects.

After Arabella had completed the ritual, Louisa chimed in, "Tomorrow, we shall host a grand feast to celebrate Bella's return and to make her identity known to all. May you bless her with safety, health, and everlasting happiness."

Meanwhile, a sleek stretch limousine pulled up to the grand entrance of the estate.

A servant hurried over to announce, "Lucas Collins and his family have arrived."

Lucas, Beverly, and Alma stepped through the threshold, their chauffeur following closely behind, arms laden with an array of elegant gifts.

"Kenneth, Louisa, we're a tad late this year," Beverly greeted them with a smile that was the epitome of grace and warmth, her gaze sweeping over the men around her. "This year even Chasel, Clark, Sean, and David made it. Seems like Bella is more influential than your words alone."

Louisa laughed, "You can say that again. Usually, it takes all my nagging to get them to wrap up their work and come home for the holidays. This year, they've all come back willingly, without so much as a nudge from me."

Beverly's smile grew more knowing as she turned her affectionate gaze to Arabella, "It must be this charming sister who has drawn them back. Not just her brothers, but even I am particularly fond of her."

"Bella, long time no see," Lucas said jovially as he arrived. "The end of the year has been a whirlwind of busyness. I intended to invite you out for a meal, but just couldn't find the time."

"Lucas, Beverly," Arabella greeted them with a polite smile. "It's okay, I understand how busy things can

get."

"Bella," Alma offered a friendly smile of her own.

Arabella simply nodded, her response lukewarm at best.

Beverly noticed right away that if it weren't for the others present, Arabella might not have even offered

Alma that much courtesy.

But as it stood, Beverly cheerily suggested, "Let's greet the guests first, then we can catch up on family matters."

"Bella, it's a bit crowded here, shall we head inside?" Hans worried that his sister might tire from standing too long.

"Yeah, let's go to the living room. I'll play some video games with you," Clark suggested, casually slinging an arm around Arabella's shoulders.

The other four brothers were quick to object, "Get your hands off her!"

Alma couldn't help but feel surprised, perhaps even a little perplexed, at the brothers' affection for

Arabella. Not even Serena had managed to endear herself to this extent. Could it really be the ties of

blood that made them cherish Arabella as one of their own?

Wouldn't that just infuriate Serena?

A sly smile played on Alma's lips. Anything that vexed Serena was a source of delight for her.

Speaking of which, where was Serena today?

As she watched Arabella being escorted by her brothers into the main house, Alma quickly followed.

Once Lucas and Beverly had finished paying their respects, they shared a few laughs with Kenneth

and Louisa before heading into the main house themselves.

Chapter 1915

"Munch on this, Bella." Sean held out a piece of fruit he had snagged from a platter brought in by the house staff, feeding it to his sister.

"It's freezing out—better for sis to have a hot drink." Clark pushed a steaming cup of tea towards her.

"Brewed it myself, but watch out, it's a bit scorching."

"Hey Bella, do you dig this?" Sean flashed an image of a gemstone necklace on his phone to Arabella.

"The brand folks sent it over, saying the gem's a rare find. They're thinking of crafting it into this necklace style. You into it? Or maybe you'd want it as a ring or earrings."

"Wait up, I just remembered something that's even better for Bella." David whipped out his phone,

pulling up a pic his buddy had sent him. "Check this out, don't you guys think sis would look even more smashing with this hair accessory? The moment I saw it, I knew it was tailor-made for her!"

"That's a winner. I'll wire you the cash to lock it down—as a gift from me to Bella," Chasel declared.

"No way, I spotted that first. I'll treat Bella, I've got the dough!" David objected, showing the photo to Arabella. "What do you think, Bella? It's decent, right?"

He was secretly worried if Arabella's taste was above theirs and she'd find it tacky.

"David, don't bother buying it."

Arabella's response made David hastily place the order. She didn't call it ugly. She was just concerned about him splurging, which meant she didn't despise the diamond hairpiece!

Alma watched them all bonding and felt like an outsider.

The real kicker was that the bitch, Serena, who would have died of jealousy seeing this, wasn't even

here to witness it. Curiosity got the best of her, "Oh right, where's Serena today?"

Her question shifted the mood instantly. The brothers' faces soured.

What, did Serena screw up?

As Beverly walked into the living room, she couldn't help but ask, "Yeah, how come Serena's not around today?"

Usually, when the brothers came home, she'd be all over them.

But today, not a shadow in sight.

"She's kicked out," Louisa said matter-of-factly.

Kicked out?

Not just Lucas and Beverly, but Alma too, was taken aback, followed by barely containable glee!

Was that bitch finally thrown out on her ear?

How could her parents do it?

Louisa spilled the beans about all the things Serena had done, including how she bullied Arabella over the past six months and the revelation that she was the daughter of Erik and Martha, the butler and the maid.

"Erik and Martha's daughter?" Lucas and Beverly exchanged incredulous looks.

Alma was thrilled to realize the previously haughty bitch was just the offspring of the house staff. She couldn't be happier.

Seeing the grandparents fuming over Serena, Alma couldn't help but fan the flames, adding fuel to the fire.

"The real reason I haven't visited you, grandpa and grandma, is because of Serena. I mean, she had her goons beat me up. So I've been home, nursing my wounds. I didn't show my face because I didn't want you to worry."

"Alma." Beverly's warning tone and reproachful glance seemed to scold her for making things worse.

"What did you say?" Bernard and Cornelia pressed for detail and learned Serena had bullied even Alma, having her beaten up, and that Alma had been recovering at home all this time.

"That ungrateful wretch!" Bernard and Cornelia's fury knew no bounds, tarnishing Serena's image even further in their eyes.

Chapter 1916

"Grandpa and Grandma, please don't be mad. It's all water under the bridge now. What we need to focus on is making it up to Bella for the hurt she's endured. I'm fine, really. What matters most right now is how Bella feels."

Arabella never expected that with Serena out of the picture, Alma would step into the spotlight. She



had heard Alma had a sister who was sick and couldn't make it today.

She just hoped they weren't cut from the same cloth.

"Why would Serena have someone hit you?" David suddenly asked. "Did you two have a falling out?"

Bernard and Cornelia's gaze shifted back to Alma.

"Serena's been bullying me, and it wasn't just a one-off. At Mr. Eugene's birthday bash, she dumped champagne on my face when no one was looking—and she spat in it first."

Everyone cringed at the thought, appalled by Serena's behind-the-scenes behavior. It was just tasteless.

"There must be some bad blood between you two," David said, cutting to the heart of the matter.

"Knowing her, if she didn't like you, she'd just dish out some snide remarks. It wouldn't come to blows unless you really pushed her over the edge."

Alma couldn't believe David was actually taking that little troublemaker's side. And from the looks of it, her mother didn't seem inclined to back her up either!

Her mother must be upset with her for being too brash.

But if she didn't speak up about Serena's bullying now, when would she?

"Alma, what's the real story? Tell us everything you know, so we can all make sense of this," Bernard

said, sensing that the situation wasn't as straightforward as his granddaughter made it out to be.

Speaking of that night." Beverly interjected with a graceful smile, smoothly steering the conversation

elsewhere, "Alma and I attended Mr. Eugene's birthday party, and who knew that Bella was not only the

chess prodigy Queena but also the violin virtuoso Jamie Noelle."

Everyone but Kenneth and Louisa was gobsmacked.

"Bella is Queena? And Jamie ?" The brothers looked astonished.

Their little sister was just too impressive.

And she had these two amazing alter egos?

"Dad, Mom, why don't you look surprised at all? Did you know about this?"

"You knew and didn't tell us?"

Louisa indeed knew about it, explaining, "I only found out after Mr. Eugene's party. That ingrate Serena

even pretended to be Queena's disciple at the party and more than once told friends that it was Bella

who ruined her engagement with Romeo. That's why your father and I decided she needed to spend

some time next door to reflect, but we had no idea."

The brothers all knew that Serena had been sent next door to reflect because she had bullied Bella, but they hadn't known she was also masquerading as Queena's disciple.

"I never realized my granddaughter was so remarkable." Bernard and Cornelia were full of praise for Arabella.

Beverly saw how the topic had smoothly changed and softened her gaze. She had just taken a sip of tea when Sean spoke up.

"What does any of this have to do with Alma getting hit?"

Everyone snapped back to the present and turned their attention to Alma.

Chapter 1917

"Really, what's the connection between these two things?"

The conversation circled back to the beginning.

Beverly's face remained composed, but she was acutely aware of the events that transpired that fateful night.

Because Alma and Arabella had lost a violin duel, Serena just had to rub it in Alma's face, which was the last straw that led Alma to violence. She first slapped Serena, pulled her hair, and then got

drenched in champagne.

But Alma wasn't one to take things lying down. After getting splashed with champagne, she retaliated by smashing a cake into Serena's face, pushing her off the swing, trampling her, and even dousing her with red wine.

When it all boiled down, it was Beverly's daughter who had started the bullying, and quite ruthlessly at that.

"That night, Serena mocked my violin playing compared to Bella's, and even said that no matter how talented Bella was, she couldn't touch her deeply rooted status in this family over the past eighteen years."

"She also said that even if Bella has Collins blood running through her veins, she's still from a no-name family, just like me, not worthy of the high society. I couldn't hold back and argued with her, and that's when she splashed me with champagne."

"She even said that Kenneth and Louisa are notorious for spoiling your daughter, and that all Serena had to do was cry in front of them, and they'd believe her black is white tall tales. If she said it, you

would believe her, and I'd be the one getting a strict talking-to from mom and dad. Even with a hundred mouths, I couldn't clear my name. That's why I've kept silent about this whole mess."

As Alma spoke, her eyes began to glisten with unshed tears.

Everyone was shocked to hear the extent of Serena's cruel words behind the scenes!

Beside them, Arabella fought off sleepiness, nearly dozing off as she listened.

She hadn't witnessed the altercation between Alma and Serena that night, but she could tell that Alma was lying.

Yet, Alma had hit a nerve with the Collins family.

"The nerve of her, calling Bella lowborn. Saying even with Collins blood, she can't measure up to an adopted daughter of eighteen years?" Bernard was livid.

"Kenneth and Lucas are both my son, I treat them equally. How's Lucas' daughter not fit for society?

Serena! She's clearly trying to drive a wedge between us," Cornelia was equally enraged, feeling she had been blind and had wasted years doting on Serena.

Seeing her plan working, Alma feigned concern, "Grandpa, Grandma, don't be upset. It's the festive season, don't let it ruin your health. Tomorrow we will hold a feast, just think how joyous that will be.

Why don't we talk about the arrangements for tomorrow?"

As they discussed Arabella's homecoming banquet, the mood lightened somewhat.

Finally, Lucas mused, "I always thought Erik was trustworthy and Martha was so warm and outgoing.

Not just you, but in my eyes, they were family. I never imagined they'd be such rotten characters deep

down. If only they had revealed sooner that Serena was their own flesh and blood, we wouldn't have

had to wait until now to find Bella, sparing her eighteen years of undeserved hardship."

"Indeed." Cornelia sighed, fate plays strange games.

Beverly chimed in, "We can't let those two off easy. They need to be dealt with, for Bella's sake."

"It's a pity Martha's gone now, crushed by her own scheming. Otherwise, I wouldn't have let her off so

easily!" Louisa said indignantly.

"What do you mean?" Beverly's eyes flickered with surprise, "Are you saying Martha is dead?"

Louisa then recounted the incident of Martha kidnapping Arabella.

Chapter 1918

"I still can't believe she was the ringleader of some secret society," Lucas exclaimed, clearly shocked.

"This whole situation feels like it runs deeper. But with Martha gone, there's some truth to the saying

'what goes around comes around'!"

Alma was stunned that Arabella had gone through so much and yet, there she was, sitting pretty as a picture, not a hair out of place.

Alma thought, "Was she even human? Her luck was just too unbelievable! I mean, we're talking about a kidnapping and a ticking time bomb. And she made it out alive. It's just mind-boggling!"

"So, that leaves just Erik still breathing," Lucas mused, then added with resolve, "This man, we can't let him off easy! We have to grill him, find out if he intentionally switched the kids to give his daughter a better life."

"I'll get to the bottom of it once he wakes up."

Louisa hadn't shared with them that there was more to the old fire incident, that a puppet master was still lurking in the shadows.

Lucas and Beverly assumed that it was all Erik and Martha's selfish scheme to switch two kids.

"Wake him up?" Lucas was confused by her words. "What's he doing sleeping at a time like this? Why don't you shake him awake and give him a piece of your mind?"

"He's not sleeping, he's in a coma. It's a long story, but you know Bella's got healing hands. Luckily she

stepped in, and now Erik's out cold until we can question him about what really happened back then."

Lucas and Beverly's eyes shifted back to Arabella.

"Absolutely, Bella's skills are legendary," Lucas couldn't help praising Arabella's medical prowess,

especially since she had saved his own parents.

Beverly smiled and chimed in, "Bella's truly a jack-of-all-trades. Whoever ends up marrying her is one

lucky guy."

"But with the holiday rush and all, we need to keep a close eye on Erik, make sure he doesn't slip

through our fingers!" Lucas cautioned, pausing before adding, "If you need any help, just holler."

"Reflections Villa is locked down tight," Kenneth assured, clapping Lucas on the shoulder with a grin.

"No need to worry, we've got twenty guys just in his room alone!"

Lucas was surprised by the manpower. Nodding, he said, "Once he comes to and you've got the full

story, let me know. I want to get justice for Bella too! If it weren't for him and Martha, Bella wouldn't

have been cast out for all those years."

"I'm gonna teach him a lesson too, let him know that you don't mess with the Collins family!"



As Beverly finished her sentence, Arabella's lips curled into a sly smile, "Lucas, Beverly, you're so concerned."

Her comment drew everyone's attention, and the atmosphere tensed.

"Knowing that you have my back and want to stand up for me. as the younger generation, I'm honored, truly," Arabella defused the situation with a swift change in tone, easing Lucas and Beverly's expressions.

"What are you saying? You're our niece. Who else are we supposed to care about, Erik? You're the family's treasure now," Lucas said heartily.

The conversation then drifted to work matters and catching up on old acquaintances with Kenneth.

Feeling the conversation was wearing on her, Arabella stood up and excused herself, "I'll be right back, just need to make a phone call."

Chapter 1919

Actually, she didn't have to make a phone call at all.

After finding an excuse to leave, she made her way to the garden.

Romeo had already messaged her, saying he would come over to join her for dinner.

"Bella!"

Suddenly, a voice called out.

Alma caught up to Arabella, "Can we talk?"

She'd noticed earlier that Arabella was bored and didn't want to stay in the living room, hence the excuse to step outside.

Arabella didn't have much to discuss with her. As she started to walk away, Alma said, "I'm not like Serena, I don't play her childish games. Let's wipe the slate clean on the past. With Serena out of the picture, I think we could be great friends."

Before Arabella could respond, Alma presumptuously added, "Even if we can't be good friends, there's no need to be enemies, right? I really admire you. You and Serena are worlds apart."

Arabella looked up, eyeing her shrewd and confident cousin.

At Mr. Eugene's last birthday, Alma haughtily challenged her to a violin duel, claiming they'd see who

Jamie would take on as a pupil.

They both played a piece that Regan and Jamie had performed together—The Life.

Arabella was clearly superior, but Alma, not accepting defeat, insisted on another round, only to lose

again and had to abide by the bet: she was banned for life from the violin world and could no longer touch anything related to the violin.

Could they really be friends after that "monumental humiliation"?

"Don't waste your time on me." Arabella walked away without giving her another glance.

"Bella!"

Alma, unwilling to give up, called out again, "After what Serena did to you, and now that she's been kicked to the curb by the Collins family, don't you want some revenge? I know you always hold yourself above petty acts behind the back, but I can take care of her for you. I just don't want to be your enemy.

This is my olive branch, whether you believe it or not."

"You think I'd buy that?" Arabella's lips curled coldly. "How you deal with her is your business, don't drag me into it."

If it weren't for the fact that she was the daughter of the Collins family and held in high regard by the entire family, Alma would never have come over pretending to want to be friends.

It was because Alma couldn't beat her, she had to retreat in order to advance, to gain her trust on an emotional level, and then to destroy her.

Truthfully, Arabella disdained even exposing such petty tricks, but Alma didn't know that and mistook her pride for aloofness.

"Even if I can't touch anything related to the violin for the rest of my life, I've never blamed you. I was simply outplayed!" Alma shouted after her retreating figure, "Isn't it better to have one more friend than

one more enemy? Arabella, I know you don't trust me, but I truly want to let bygones be bygones. We are family after all!"

Arabella paused, turning her head slightly, her voice icy, "You and I will never be family."

The blood of the Collins family ran through her veins but they would never truly become a loving family.

Alma was taken aback, not expecting Arabella to be so blunt.

"Keep being ungrateful, and you'll end up just like her." Arabella dropped this line and walked away.

Alma hadn't expected Arabella to be so resistant and wondered what methods her brothers had used to get close to her.

Chapter 1920

Cornelia beckoned with a warm smile as she entered the garden and spotted her granddaughters,

"Bella, Alma, you're both here. Perfect, come over, my dears."

Arabella had only wandered off a short distance when she heard her grandma call. She quickly returned to Cornelia's side.

"Grandma Cornelia, you needed to see both of us?" Alma's face broke into a smile as if nothing had happened earlier.

"Well, my dears, I have a friend who's a violin maestro, and she's been on the lookout for a protege. She messaged me to ask if I knew anyone who might fit the bill. She's looking for real talent."

Cornelia still held her smartphone, the chat window open, "Bella's already a master in her own right, way beyond my friend's skill level, so it got me thinking about you."

She patted Alma's head affectionately, "You've loved the violin since you were a little girl, and you even took lessons from Oswald, but he never truly passed on the torch. My friend, she's more skilled than Oswald, and I think you could really flourish under her tutelage. Given some time, you could do great things."

"Me?" Alma was caught in a bind. She couldn't admit that she could no longer play the violin.

"Bella here is Jamie Noelle. Since she's around, why don't you play something for her? Let's see where

you stand. My friend has very high standards, and even if you're talented and skilled, she might not be convinced."

Cornelia was about to fetch a violin when Alma quickly interjected, "Grandma Cornelia, I've decided not to pursue the violin professionally."

"Why ever not?" Cornelia was clearly surprised.

"I've set my sights high, you see. I had even thought about studying under Jamie Noelle." Alma revealed with a playful grin as she spoke, "But I've realized that's not really my calling. So I've made up my mind. Music and arts will remain hobbies, and I plan to focus on building a different career. But thank you, Grandma Cornelia, for always thinking of me when opportunities come up."

Seeing Alma had other plans, Cornelia nodded, "You've always been decisive, my child. If that's what you want, I won't push. Whatever you both choose to do in the future, I'm behind you all the way."

Relieved, Alma offered a smile.

"Well, then, I'll let my friend know I don't have a suitable candidate at the moment." Cornelia was about to leave when something else occurred to her, "If you're ever in need of advice, you can always turn to Bella. When it comes to chess, she's a Queen, a master of all sorts. For music, she's both Melody and

Jamie Noelle; and in medicine, she's Dr. Bell. Whatever path you choose, Bella can surely give you a few pointers."

Alma, not to be outdone but resigned to the situation, replied, "Of course, Grandma Cornelia."

"But I'll say this upfront: just a few pointers. Don't bother her too much. Bella's a busy girl," Cornelia chuckled as she tapped her screen, replying to her old friend's message, and walked back toward the house.

Feeling a bit awkward, Alma looked up to find that Arabella had slipped away at some point.

What was with Arabella, not even wanting to spend an extra second with her? Why the rush?

That bitch Serena used to be around the Collins family all the time, and Arabella never seemed so put off.

Could it be that she was even less appealing than that Serena?

From a distance, Arabella spotted the head of the bodyguard confronting a man who had been blocked from escaping. Crossing half the garden, she approached the unfolding scene.

"Ms. Collins!" The head of the bodyguard seemed relieved at her arrival, his gaze falling on the

uninvited guest with suspicion, "This fellow was lurking around the basement skylight, acting all sneaky."

At the bodyguard's feet was a skylight that led down to the basement; a glance through it offered a view into a corner of the subterranean space.