**“The ‘Bad’ of the Bunch” / 991**

September 17, 1822

“Why is she so ugly?”

“Oh, you know you shouldn't talk about your baby sister like that….even though she really is ugly!”

 Fast forward to my tenth birthday. Like every birthday, it’s a terrible day. My family hated me from the moment I could talk. It was almost like I was a different species, even though the only species of human is human. But obviously they think that I’m an alien, not a human. Sad, I know. But until I get a husband and move in with him, I’m stuck with my parents and siblings.

 Here’s a little backstory: When I was born and my siblings came to meet me, they all told me that I was ugly. And they still do. Not that they’re very pretty either, but of course mother and father praise them like gods. And they give me poorly made clothing and nothing but hatred…for years. My family has never celebrated my birthday; they just told me what day it was when I was five and went from there. So every year, I celebrate alone up in my attic, because that’s the only place where I feel safe from my family’s hatred.

November 15, 1842

“Mary, meet your future husband,” my mother said as a handsome man stepped through the door. My mom didn’t know that he was a friend from school. He was my best friend. We had both agreed to play dumb when we met each other at my home. His parents knew about our friendship and they were the only ones that did.

“Hello. What’s your name?” I hated playing dumb like this.

“My name’s Miguel Swan. And yours, fine lady?”

“Mary,” I said, excited about getting alone time with Miguel after mother and father introduced us. That is what we had all agreed. After we got introduced, Miguel and I would get to know each other without anyone’s company. Then in a week, we would get married, move out, and give our parents grandchildren.

 “I hate playing dumb Miguel. I know it’s odd to be saying this, but I can’t wait to get out of this house once we marry!”

“It’s okay Mary, I want to get out of my home too. I love my parents, but they want me to run the family business, and do what they tell me. Not what I want to do with my life. I want to marry a beautiful woman and have a farm. I want us both to participate in it, raise at least 1 child together and have a lovely life,” Miguel said with a very serious face. “Sorry. Sometimes I just vent to people and tell them all my wants. That isn’t a good trait in a good husband.”

“I think it is. And I agree with everything you said. I too want to have a farm that everyone participates in and raise at least 1 child to be an amazing man or woman. And I don’t mind you venting, I think it’s good for a wife to know her husband’s feelings about the world and vice versa.”

November 22, 1842

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. Miguel, you may now kiss your bride.”

Miguel pressed his lips to mine as he became my husband. Our wedding was simple with only our families coming together and celebrating. My family showed up in very casual clothes and talked about how happy they were that I was getting married and leaving the house. I even overheard them say that they wanted nothing to do with us and didn’t even want to meet their “ugly” grandchildren!

 As I fought back tears, my new mother-in-law pulled me aside and handed me a beautiful bracelet with a swan charm on it.

“Mary, we are so honored that such a beautiful woman married our son. I’m very glad that you are part of our family now.”

 “Mary, do you want to see our new home?” Miguel asked me when we finally got away from the crowd. It was surprising how in a week knowing that you’re about to marry your best friend you start to love them so much.

“Yes, I do. And how did you get it?” I said. I was a bit confused. Normally after you marry in our little town you get a room at an inn and work until you can pay for a home.

“When my grandfather died a few years ago, my family agreed that when I got married I would inherit it and live here with my wife. Over the years we took care of it and kept it in good condition until me and you moved in,” Miguel said like he had said it a thousand times already. I had started to admire him throughout the last week more than I ever had in our childhood. I was excited to move away from my family and start a new life with Miguel. Last week, our families had agreed that on our wedding day I would move all my belongings to my new home. Today would be busy because I had to unpack and start work to revive the little garden outside of the house to plant flowers and some food in it.

January 21, 1848

As Miguel placed our newborn baby in my arms, I looked at our first son with great gratitude and love. Over the last six years, I had become very happy with Miguel and our two year old daughter and now that we had our son, our family was complete. We had built a farm and had become very successful with it over the years.

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Miguel and I have an amazing and healthy life with our little Michelle and Louis. I’m so grateful that I found where I belong: with my beautiful kids and loving husband. I love them very much and they return it to me all the same every day.