

Chapter 47 The Magic Flute

The rest of dinner went by in a blur. With Roxanne's mind racing, she was barely able to force any meal into her stomach, or get herself to listen to any other word that was spoken at the table.

She could think of one thing and one thing only: how to not disgrace herself in front of the entire Dankworth family tonight. It was not that she was scared or that she doubted her capabilities. What bothered Roxanne was what they would have to say about her style of playing. She had always gotten criticisms about it before, most of them bad. But she had never really cared.

But right now, it was the only thing she could bring herself to think about.

Her eyes continued to glance over Lancelot once in a while, but their eyes never met. Roxanne found it strange. Whenever she looked away from him, she could feel his eyes on her. But when she looked at him, it felt as though she was a glass frame he could see right through.

Did her presence really not have the same effect on him that his had on her? Was she really that invisible to him? What did she have to do to make herself seen?

Roxanne noticed how Ava leaned into Lancelot time without number. Whether it was to laugh, or whisper something into his ears, or get the fucking salt from across the table! Ava made sure that her skin brushed

Lancelot's. And it was slowly driving Roxanne to the edge of the cliff of jealousy.

Could it be possible that Lancelot ignored her because of this woman? Maybe he did not want to anger his wife-to-be?

Wife-to-be, she repeated the phrase in her head. As she watched Ava laugh and rest her head on Lancelot's shoulder, anger boiled in the pit of her stomach. She was more than relieved when Lancelot looked down at Ava, his stare must have caused her to take her head off his shoulder immediately.

Madeline struggled to eat her food properly as well. She was irritated by the sight of Lancelot's new secretary. What was Lancelot thinking by bringing an American into their palace? Madeline now wished she had allowed James go on that business trip to America instead of Lancelot. She was sure none of this would have happened.

While some talked in hushed tones and some discussed out loud, others ate their meal in silence, while some didn't talk at all.

Alas, it was exactly 8:30 pm when the last of the dinner plates were cleared. The whole family was still seated around the table, each person adjusting him or herself, and taking a sitting position that would aid digestion.

"I am still very excited to hear you play dear. We must all gather at the drawing room for some entertainment. I'm sure we all need it at this point," Eloise spoke up, her eyes rested on Madeline's irked face.

"We most certainly do," Hermione muttered underneath her breath. Elizabeth heard her mother and chuckled, earning her a glare from Lady Marion.

The older men, including Reuben were deep in their discussion of mines in London and Paris. But Marion's voice caught the attention of her sons, Edward and Richard.

When Eloise looked around and noticed that everyone was now prepared to stand up, she rose first, with her usual broad smile on her face.

"Now, now, everyone, shall we proceed to the drawing room?" she called out. She watched as all eyes turned to her, and everyone began to rise slowly. "Of course."

"I am thrilled to see how this turns out."

"An American and the piano forte? Must be some sort of cruel joke."

"Let's wait and see."

All these and many more were the side remarks Roxanne's ears picked up as members of the royal family exited the dining hall. Her guess was that they were all heading to the drawing room, just as Eloise had instructed; including him. She watched with keen and hopeful eyes as Lancelot stood up from his chair. Roxanne was still hoping that he would look at her. At least a glance, was all that she prayed for. Once again, he walked out of the door without recognizing her presence. Once again, her heart crumbled into a million pieces, leaving her to pick it all up and arrange the pieces by herself.

Soon, everyone was gone. It remained Roxanne and Peter.

Peter walked to her and tapped her left shoulder gently. She turned to him, gasping and her eyes widening in shock.

Peter chuckled and looked over her.

"Let's go." With that, he turned his back towards her and began to walk.

"Where are you going?" she called out, trotting behind him.

"Rule number one of working with the Dankworths, do not ever keep them waiting," he called back, without glancing over his shoulder.

Roxanne stayed quiet as she followed him behind. After the dining room, they walked through the high and long corridor of rooms for about five minutes, before Peter ushered Roxanne into the drawing room.

When she stepped into it, she felt the same way she had felt after walking into the dining room earlier this evening; like she did not belong here.

For the second time that night, everyone keep quiet and all eyes rested on her. There were two luxurious and long arm chairs in the room, with four people in each. Around the arm chairs, three couches were scattered, each also had occupants as well. And they were all looking at her, waiting on her.

"Mrs. Ludwig Beethoven! You have finally decided to join us," Albert called aloud, and Hermione chuckled.

Roxanne forced a smile and walked into the room. Peter was in front of her, and he stood by the wall again, just as he had done during dinner.

"My apologies your majesty," she said, bowing to her small audience.

When they all gave her curt nods, she turned to the direction of the grand piano.

Something in Roxanne's heart leaped for joy, while a part of it melted in joy as well. The white grand piano, standing three feet tall in front of her, was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen in a long while. The white stool beside it matched the sophisticated color of the room, as well as the luxurious furniture.

What did these people not have? Roxanne thought to herself.

But, as she walked to the piano, her heartbeat quickened again. Suddenly, she felt as though she did not know what she was doing. As she sat on the stool and turned to her audience, her eyes found the door.

It's not too late now, she thought to herself. She could always run out and blame it on a severe case of stomach upset. Then, she would blame the

stomach upset on all the salmons and chicken she had for dinner, no one would hold it against her.

While she was still contemplating, her eyes met Lancelot. He had a bored expression on his face, as though he would rather be anywhere but here, looking at her and waiting on her to disgrace herself. Roxanne's jaw tightened and her eyes narrowed at him.

To hell with the door, to hell with her cowardice, and to hell with him.

She would play her piano the way she had always played it. And she would find joy in it. Piano forte was one of the few things that made her happy, and nothing would ever change the fact.

So, she turned to the instrument in front of her. She could feel all their gazes burning into her skin, but she ignored all of it. She closed her eyes and stretched her hands to the keys. When she touched the first key, it was magical.

Her first piece was Kris Bowers' "Strange." Which she played with a sweet melody and a smile on her face.

Everyone in the room was taken aback. It was not just skill, it was the way her soul was in sync to every key that she touched. Eloise found herself smiling as she closed her eyes, Arthur was visibly in awe. He could not bring himself to look away from her.

Albert had a brow raised, he was amazed, but he did not show it. Madeline just stared at her, there were no words for what she felt at this moment.

Beside Lancelot, Ava watched Roxanne carefully. Her eyes occasionally danced to Lancelot's face to take note of his expression. She wanted to make sure he was not being hypnotized by this woman's skillset. She was relieved when she saw how bored and expressionless Lancelot was looking.

After "Strange" came Wolfgang Mozart's age long piece, "The magic flute."

It happened to be one of Lancelot's favorite tunes. As Roxanne poured her spirit and soul into every key, he threw his head back and kept his eyes closed to savor the moment. The men were impressed and so were the women as well. The tone came to an end after seven minutes, and it was followed by the Beethoven classic "Piano sonata."

When Roxanne touched the first key of this song, Arthur wanted to jump from his seat and hug her. He had never heard anyone play Beethoven with so much soul. While everybody always tried to get it perfect, Roxanne gave it her own definition of perfection.

After a while, the tone intensified and Roxanne, once again, threw caution to the wind and let her soul take over. To hell with what the piano scholars said, to hell with everything. It was just her and her piano once again. Madeline was utterly disgusted now. She did not know why she had expected this lowlife woman to respect Beethoven's artistry in the first place. She was annoyed by how Roxanne treated the tone with reckless abandon and handled the melody as though it were her song, instead of Beethoven's! The lady was too free spirited, and it irritated Madeline.

Ava equally shared in her sentiments as she frowned.

From where he stood, Peter's eyes fell on Lancelot. He had his head back and his eyes closed and Peter could tell that he was savoring every tempo and note in the song. He knew that Lancelot was floating in the melody. It was obvious from the peace on his face.

Finally, Roxanne hit the concluding note, and was greeted with a resounding applause.

"Thank you, thank you," she said, bowing to her audience. She walked into them and Madeline's angered eyes followed her. However, she decided to take advantage of the situation as well.

"Ava," she called out. On hearing her name, Ava stood up to answer the call.

"Why don't you also entertain us as well?" Madeline asked, a wide grin on her face. Ava blushed as she looked around.

"You see, Ava here finished from School of the Arts, Venice. Where she studied music and orchestra. She has also won multiple awards over the years. I would list them all, but we are short of time." She turned to Ava again. Beside her, Edward simply rolled his eyes.

A blushing Ava took to the stage. She looked over her audience with a proud look in her eyes, she was more than ready to leave them all stunned. She would teach the reckless American exactly how the piano forte was to be played; with grace and poise.

However, once Ava started, Lancelot's eyes opened. The tone was melodious, but it lacked the soul and spirit of the previous ones. When he saw Ava sitting on the stool, he was no longer surprised. His eyes searched for Roxanne and he found her standing beside Peter. When he sensed she was turning to look at him, he turned his face away from her.

Seven minutes into Ava's piece, Elizabeth yawned and stood up. There was nothing captivating to keep her up again. Slowly, one by one, everyone excused themselves. Lady Marion and Lady Eloise, Hermione and Albert, James and Arthur, Reuben, Lord Bailey and Lord Richard before Madeline and Edward.

It remained Lancelot, Peter and Roxanne in the room.

Lancelot felt obliged to stay back, and he didn't want to have any contact with Roxanne yet, so he sat still on the couch, and watched Ava finish the tune. When Peter noticed she had grown physically tired, he tapped Roxanne's shoulder. She forced a weak smile as she turned to him.

"Let's get you to bed, you're still not strong enough to keep late nights."

Roxanne chuckled and followed Peter behind. Lancelot could sense when they were both out of the room. He could not wait for Ava to end her piece.

Ava on the other hand, saw this as an opportunity to spend time with him and impress him. So, she was not going to end it anytime soon.

As Peter and Roxanne walked through the corridor again, Peter pointed towards a door.

"Mister Lancelot's room," he said aloud. When Roxanne turned to him, a tired brow raised. He smiled and turned away.

"Just in case you're told to send something to his Chambers, this is it," Peter said, looking away from her. Frankly, he did not even know why he had pointed out the chambers to her. He just felt the need to. The door was half open, and Roxanne was able to peep through it.

"Magnificent," she thought out loud.

Indeed, it was.