



“Emmeline!” Alana’s smile was saccharine sweet as she made her way toward her cousin. “If you didn’t have a dress to wear tonight, I could have lent you one! I have plenty of better-quality dresses after all!”

“Well, this dress was only 99 dollars, including shipping!” Emmeline chuckled. “It’s perfect for tonight,” she added.

Alana’s expression hardened. “What do you mean? Are you mocking our family with your cheap fashion?” Alana gave Emmeline a hard shove, causing Emmeline to stumble and fall backward. However, she was saved by a pair of strong hands that cushioned her fall from behind. Abel Ryker had just arrived.

With an arm still wrapped

protectively around Emmeline’s

waist, Abel turned toward Alana with

a frosty expression. “What’s wrong with a 99-dollar dress? Emmeline looks better than any other lady here tonight.”

“Mr... Mr. Abel?” Alana stammered. “I... I was just teasing my cousin. You’re right, her dress is beautiful!”

“Don’t you owe her an apology?” Abel insisted, refusing to let Alana off the hook so easily.

“I...” Alana paled visibly. They were surrounded by many guests who had come to check out the commotion.

Adrien Ryker strode over as well. “Did you think you could just push my wife around and get away with it?” his tone was cold and menacing. He extended

an arm, trying to get Emmeline over to his side, but she distanced herself away from him.

“Emmeline...” Alana pouted. “I’m sorry, I was just messing around.”

“My daughter-in-law looks amazing in anything, including this dress!” Julianna Campbell announced, trying to diffuse the tension.

“So does Alana!” Rosaline Turner chimed in, feeling the need to protect her grandchild’s mother. “A fine lady indeed!”

“Hmph, she’s not even close to Emmeline. It’s three against one! Isn’t that right, son?” Juliana snickered, referring to Emmeline’s three children.

“That’s right!” Adrien agreed with his mother. “Not everyone can achieve what Emmeline has done!”

Displeasure was clearly written all over Rosaline and Abel’s faces.

Emmeline shifted herself to a corner, willing herself to disappear. The families could continue bickering on their own for all she cared!

Alana was still seething over the dress incident, but she told herself to be patient. She had bigger plans in place to take down Emmeline tonight. She shot her Aunt Alondra a look.

Alondra walked to the center of the hall and lifted her wine glass to the crowd. “To express our gratitude for showering us with your presence tonight, Alana will delight us all with a special piano piece!” She claps her hands encouragingly.

Alana lifted the skirt of her gown and waltzed toward the piano as graceful as a swan. She was a talented pianist, having been taught since young, unlike Emmeline who did not

care for the arts. She laid her slender fingers on the instrument and began to play confidently. A beautiful melody travelled through the room as Alana's fingers moved up and down the piano keys, capturing everyone's attention.

"Truly the daughter of an upper-class family! She could rival any famous piano soloist!" a guest commented.

"That's true, she's beautiful but also talented. I suppose that's the criteria to marry a Ryker," another friend chimed in.

The praises and admiration did not slip past Alana's eyes and ears. There was a devious glint in her eyes as she chuckled to herself. Watch out, bitch!

A thunderous round of applause rang out as soon as Alana finished her piece. She stood up to face the crowd and took a graceful bow before turning to her cousin.

"Emmeline," Alana called out to Emmeline with a smile. "You should play something for the crowd too!"

"Me?" Emmeline pointed a finger to herself.

"Emma? Emma's not a pianist," Alondra joined in. "I've raised her since she was a teenager and I've never seen her touch a piano!" She turned to Emmeline. "Isn't that so, Emma? Do you even know how to play the piano?"

"I... I know how to play a little," Emmeline pinched her thumb and index finger together to indicate her level of skill.

"I think you're being way too modest,

Emma!" Alana trilled. "Why don't you play something for our dear guests then?"

"Trust me, she's not being modest," Alondra reiterated. "She can't even play a simple tune. You're asking too much from her!"

“Why don’t you play something simple then, Em?” Alana persuaded her cousin. “What about a nursery rhyme?”

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