

Extraordinary 711

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The two bodyguards were no match for Franklin and Livia at all, let alone when both of them had brought along tens of subordinates clad in black.

Gritting her teeth, Naomi got back to her feet. "Give me a few minutes."

She headed into the room after grabbing her phone.

Watching the entrance anxiously, she ransacked the closet and retrieved a full-length dress.

Subsequently, she turned on her phone and sent Lucas a message instead of calling him; she was worried that Franklin would notice.

Still feeling unsettled, she sent Ashlyn and Blair messages to get them to rescue her.

Meanwhile, Ashlyn was sharing a meal with the Piano Association's president, deputy president, and a few other prominent pianists.

Upon hearing the notification on her phone, she checked it and was stunned by the message she received.

The next moment, a grim expression descended upon her face.

"I'm sorry, everyone. There's something I need to attend to." Just as she spoke, she got to her feet and headed for the private room's exit.

Coincidentally, Ryan's towering figure entered the room while she was on her way out.

When he saw her leaving with her bag slung over her shoulder, he cocked a brow. "What's wrong, Ms. Berry? Do you hate me that much to leave at the sight of me?"

His magnetic voice was filled with allure, sounding inexplicably seductive.

After all, he was an extremely attractive man with his dashing good looks, melodious voice, and distinguished family background.

Playing the piano all year long had conjured an air of inherent nobility around him.

In fact, every move he made was irresistibly elegant.

As a result, he was never short of women willing to throw themselves at him and was naturally the most eligible bachelor in the whole of Maredania.

However, Ashlyn didn't seem to be interested in him at all, which deeply intrigued him.

Furthermore, a strange sense of familiarity caused Ryan to take an interest in Ashlyn.

In response to his words, Ashlyn threw him a plain glance. "Mr. Yates, if you'll excuse me, I need to leave, as something just came up."

She didn't explain any further, for her mind was clouded by anxiety and frustration.

In fact, her concern for Naomi caused her to be irritated by Ryan's obstruction.

She was worried that she would be late, and something unpredictable might happen to Naomi.

While walking, she lowered her head to type a message to Lucas.

"Ms. Berry, it seems that you're unwilling to show me any respect."

Ashlyn was taken by surprise.

Looking up, she was greeted by his Adam's apple bobbing slightly while his mesmerizing voice echoed in her ears.

Ashlyn blinked abruptly. "I have to go, as I've something urgent to attend to."

Just as she spoke, she pushed Ryan's hand aside before strutting out in a hurry.

As for Lucas, he drove at breakneck speed toward Whitland Villa upon reading Naomi's message.

Meanwhile, at Whitland Villa, Naomi had finally changed into a full-length white dress that accentuated her porcelain complexion and petite figure. Her long and slender legs, in particular, looked extraordinarily alluring.

"No wonder you are qualified to be picked for a female lead role. You still look presentable in this outfit. Let's go," Livia sneered as she scrutinized Naomi from head to toe.

All dolled up, Naomi followed behind Livia with her heart pounding nervously.

Nevertheless, she was cognizant of her helplessness, for she didn't know martial arts, unlike Ashlyn.

As a result, she had no choice but to comply with her parents' instructions and play the role of an obedient child for the time being.

Or else, she would be the one to suffer.

Holding that thought, she calmly got into the back seat of the car.

Fortunately, her parents didn't confiscate her phone, allowing her to share her location with Ashlyn.

I hope Ashlyn and Lucas can follow my trail, find me, and rescue me.

Naomi kept praying hard.

Finally, the car stopped in front of a luxurious mansion.

Franklin threw her a glance with an icy expression. "Remember to put on a good show. As long as you make Mr. Zimmerman happy, you can become a star, be it in movies or drama series. With his support, receiving awards isn't going to be an issue. If you don't, I will make sure you suffer the consequences."

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Naomi's heart sank instantly.

Along the journey there, she had given the matter a lot of thought.

It was her misfortune to have such cruel parents. However, if she were to resign herself to fate, she would be responsible for her own undoing.

I am the master of my destiny, not them!

With that, she anxiously waited for Ashlyn and Lucas to rescue her.

As she glanced at her phone intermittently, she finally noticed Ashlyn's reply: Wait for me!

It was then that Naomi began to calm down. Ashlyn will find me. She definitely will.

After all, she had shared her location throughout the journey.

"What are you spacing out for? Get out of the car." When Livia gave Naomi a shove, the latter shot her a glare. "Stop pushing me! I'll get down myself."

Just as she spoke, she alighted from the car and stood still in silence.

Hearing the commotion outside, the mansion's butler came out to greet them, "This way, please."

The Zimmerman family dealt in sanitary wares and got rich doing so.

Nonetheless, Joshua Zimmerman wasn't cultured at all, as he was considered new money.

In fact, he was the richest among the new money and wielded significant power and influence.

Ever since his wife died a few years ago, he endeavored to remarry a young and beautiful girl from a prominent family.

Even though he philandered often, none of the girls he had been with qualified to be his wife.

Moreover, there was no way new money like him could break into the social circles of the old money.

After all, no one in their right mind would let their daughter marry an old man like him who was already sixty.

Unfortunately, the Nolans were indeed sick in the head, for they were willing to offer their daughter's hand in marriage in exchange for a three hundred million investment.

Ironically, Naomi didn't expect that she would be worth that much one day.

Upon entering the living room, she saw a coffee table in the center. There was also a TV cabinet and sofa placed neatly in it.

On the sofa sat a middle-aged man with a pot belly, smiling gleefully at her.

From his eyes, one could see how astounded he was by her beauty.

What a gorgeous girl! She has pretty features, a stunning body, and a charming aura, just as expected of a daughter from a prominent family.

"Come, come, please have a seat." Joshua got to his feet. He was extremely satisfied with Naomi's looks. Furthermore, he was elated over her age, considering how young she was.

Franklin plainly remarked, "Mr. Zimmerman, now that we have brought her, I hope you will keep your end of the bargain and transfer the money."

"Fine, fine. That goes without saying. I'll transfer it now. It's not like I'm trying to trick you," Joshua replied at once.

"Thank you, Mr. Zimmerman." Livia couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter. "Dear, let's go now. We don't want to get in Mr. Zimmerman and Naomi's way."

"You're right." Curling his lips, Franklin stared at the three hundred million that was just transferred to his account. "Mr. Zimmerman, I hope you have a good time," Franklin hinted.

However, those words sounded especially vulgar to Naomi. She felt that instead of his daughter, she was

nothing but a money-making tool for Franklin.

Overwhelmed by anguish, she felt as if a knife had been plunged right into her heart.

It was so painful that she could barely breathe.

Clutching her chest in agony, she realized that there was nowhere for her to run even if she wanted to.

Is this the fate that awaits me? To be manipulated by others without regard for my dignity or human rights? To not even be allowed to have my own opinion?

After escorting the Nolans out, Joshua dismissed all the housekeepers from the living room.

“None of you are to enter without my permission.”

With that, the servants returned to their rooms, leaving Naomi and Joshua alone in the spacious living room.

When Naomi saw how fat and ugly Joshua was, she felt the urge to retch.

With a scornful tone, she appealed, “Mr. Zimmerman, I was forced into this. Please spare me by letting me go.”

“There's no way I'm going to release you after paying three hundred million to have you.” Joshua rubbed his hands with a salacious smile. “In fact, I'm looking forward to you bearing me a son. That would certainly be wonderful.”

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“F*ck! In your dreams!” Naomi snapped.

As Joshua approached her step by step, he began to take off his clothes.

“Baby, come on, let me show you my masculinity!”

Joshua's belly jiggled as he walked.

Closing her eyes, Naomi tried to hold back her urge to puke. When she opened her eyes again, she threatened, “If you dare come any closer, I will call the police!”

“Go on then! Let's see if they come.”

Joshua was unfazed by her threat.

When he pressed both his hands on her shoulders, she slapped them away immediately while being

overwhelmed by anxiety.

Why aren't Ashlyn and Lucas here yet? Either of them will do!

The more she thought about it, the more desperate she became. In the end, she decided to flee toward the entrance, for she couldn't sit idly by and rely on someone else. By then, she realized that she had no choice but to save herself.

No sooner had she heard Joshua's footsteps behind her than her body slumped to the ground before she could get far.

D*mn it, the air in this house has been spiked!

After Joshua gradually approached, he knelt down in front of her and lifted her chin. "Are you trying to escape? It's not going to be that easy!"

While he was speaking, he unbuckled his belt. The moment it fell onto the ground, so did his pants. Subsequently, he threw them aside.

Naomi shook her head vehemently as her eyes were filled with helplessness and despair. "No, I beg of you..."

"It's useless. In fact, I'm going to have the time of my life!" Joshua thundered.

At that moment, a loud bang rang out, giving Joshua a fright.

When he turned his attention to the door, he saw that someone had kicked it open.

Following that, a tall lady made her entrance.

Dressed in a white shirt and matching pants, she exuded an intimidating vibe.

The exquisite features on her face were a sight that no one could forget.

Her cold and piercing eyes, in particular, would send a chill down anyone's spine, while the pair of white heels she was wearing added weight to her gravitas.

The moment Naomi saw her, she struggled out from underneath Joshua. Teary-eyed, she called out, "Ashlyn! Ashlyn!"

"So, you're Mrs. Nolan!" Joshua scrutinized Ashlyn with a lecherous gaze.

She keeps popping up in the news recently. Everyone knows that Lucas' hurriedly-wedded wife is an influencer named Ashlyn. She is not only a talented pianist and artist but has also invested in a few

movies! I didn't expect her to look more stunning in real life.

Joshua remarked with a disgusting tone, "Another beauty? Are you here to accompany me too? If both you and Naomi can pleasure me, it would certainly be out of this world!"

Ashlyn stared at Joshua with an icy gaze and instantly felt nauseated by what she saw.

"You piece of sh*t! You don't even deserve to breathe the same air as I do!"

"Who do you think you are? How dare you show such insolence?" Joshua's expression changed drastically at Ashlyn's words before he grabbed Naomi by the neck. "Look carefully! She was sold to me by her parents. Hence, I can do whatever I want with her!"

As Naomi felt the air in her lungs run thin, her face turned red from suffocation, leading her to cough intensely.

With Joshua maintaining a death grip on her neck, she could barely breathe at all.

At that very moment, Ashlyn snorted before a devilish smile descended upon her face.

Joshua was shocked and didn't even see when Ashlyn made her move.

In the next instant, she appeared right in front of him before sending a forceful kick into his chest.

Just as he felt excruciating pain from the impact, Joshua crashed heavily into the wall behind him.

It hurt so much that he howled in agony.

"Argh! It hurts! Men!"

"No one is coming. Even if you scream your lungs out, no one will save you!"

Suddenly, a grim male voice rang out.

Joshua widened his eyes in disbelief when he saw a towering figure in a black shirt and pants bearing down on him in a terrifying manner.

Feeling intimidated, he began to tremble uncontrollably. "L-Lucas?"

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Walking up to Joshua, Lucas raised his leg and stomped on the former's chest. As he increased the pressure in his foot, Lucas stared at Joshua indifferently. "Joshua, how dare you put your filthy hands on my sister?"

Fresh blood began to ooze out of the corner of Joshua's lips.

The greater the pressure Lucas applied, the faster the blood gushed out.

Amidst the agonizing pain in his chest, Joshua could feel that he was losing more air than he was taking in.

"L-Let me go! Your dad and mom... They sold Naomi to me. I had nothing to do with it."

As blood flowed relentlessly out of his mouth, Joshua struggled to finish his words and almost suffocated to death while doing so.

"Since Franklin and Livia were the ones dealing with you, why don't they sleep with you instead? As they are the ones who have taken your money, you should be looking for them!" Lucas looked down at Joshua with eyes filled with hostility. "Scum like you are not worthy to lay a finger on my sister. Even if she... remains single for the rest of her life, she will never marry you!"

Ashlyn was startled by Lucas' remarks.

His frosty demeanor had caused her to assume that he never cared for his siblings.

When Naomi was poisoned back then, Ashlyn had noticed the concern Lucas had for her, but it never occurred to her that his emotions were so intense.

The last time she had seen him so riled up was during his manic episode.

Upon the realization, she had finally seen through him. Underneath that expressionless face of his was a heart that was filled with passion.

Curling up feebly in Ashlyn's arms, Naomi looked at Lucas with a stunned expression.

"Lucas..."

It was the first time she felt her brother protecting her from all the hurt in the world, just like an impregnable shield.

All this while, she had thought she was closer to Blair. But in that instant, she suddenly realized that Lucas and Ashlyn were the ones who kept Blair and her safe as if they were their children.

There was a saying that the eldest sibling was like a father, while his wife was similar to a mother.

The idea had never dawned upon her until now.

Consequently, she began to hate how foolish she had been in the past. Back then, she didn't know

better when she looked down upon Ashlyn and ridiculed her.

Evidently, she couldn't have been more wrong to think that an exceptional lady like Ashlyn was a parasite trying to leech upon the Nolan family.

Regretting her actions, she felt her heart flooded with complex emotions.

Even though Ashlyn was divorced, she still came to Naomi's rescue whenever the latter was in trouble.

Finally, she couldn't help but ask, "Ashlyn, why are you helping me? Don't you hate me?"

Ashlyn tousled her hair and replied softly, "That's because I know that you're a good kid at heart. Did you know that I used to have a sister? She was about your age. Often, I would think how wonderful it would be if she were still alive. Therefore, in my heart, you're like a sister to me."

"Ashlyn..." Unable to hold back her tears any longer, Naomi hugged Ashlyn tightly as a gush of emotions swept through her heart.

She had a sister who passed away? That's terrible!

Upon hearing Ashlyn's revelation, Lucas intensified the pressure on Joshua through his foot. She had a sister who died? I know too little about her!

As Joshua's body began to twitch from the pain, blood continued to flow with no signs of stopping. It hurts! It hurts!

Finally, he could no longer endure the torment. As his eyes rolled upward, he let out an agonizing scream before losing consciousness.

"We're letting him off too lightly by allowing him to faint." Helping Naomi back to her feet, Ashlyn glared at Joshua, as if she was staring at a pile of rotten meat.

"In that case, what do you propose?"

Lucas' magnetic yet insidious voice rang out through the living room.

The next moment, he moved his leg from Joshua's chest down to his crotch.

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And then, he threw his weight behind his foot and stomped on Joshua's groin.

Within a split second, Joshua was jolted awake from the tremendous pain.

"Argh! Argh! It hurts!"

His squeals of anguish reverberated throughout the entire mansion, causing his subordinates, who were being restrained by Lucas and Ashlyn's men, to tremble in horror.

That's a frightening scream.

"Next time, let's see if you dare bully women again!" After retracting his leg in satisfaction, Lucas stared at Joshua, whose head was covered in sweat and body drenched in blood.

His face had lost all color, for the pain from having his crotch squashed was worse than death itself.

"Lucas, d*mn you! I curse you to rot in hell!"

Even though he was swearing relentlessly at Lucas, the latter seemed oblivious to it all.

With a distinguished expression, Lucas gave him the side-eye. "The Zimmerman Group has done well for itself and is indeed wealthy. However, has it ever crossed your mind why Franklin and his wife approached you for money instead of me?"

"Wh-Why?" Taken by surprise, Joshua's face ashened further. Franklin and his wife had told him that the lab had invented a drug that could extend one's life and improve male virility.

That was the reason why he was willing to invest, for it would be ludicrous for him to pay three hundred million for Naomi alone.

"Even if they could come up with a drug like that, there's no way they would give it to you. Besides, it doesn't even exist yet." The moment Lucas finished, he walked toward Ashlyn and Naomi.

Behind him, Joshua rambled on in disbelief, "How can that be? That's impossible! There's no way they would lie to me!"

However, no one paid any heed to him.

As Lucas's towering figure stood in front of Ashlyn, their eyes met.

Amidst a mysterious tension in the air, he stared intently at her with an affectionate gaze.

How has she been? There was a lot he wanted to tell her, but he didn't know where to start.

Feeling the pressure from Lucas' intense gaze, Ashlyn felt the urge to flee, which was what she did by stuffing Naomi into his arms.

"If there's nothing else, you can take over."

In the blink of an eye, she left swiftly with her subordinates, as if she was being pursued by a ghost.

As Lucas watched the Land Rover disappear from his sight, his reluctance to see her go began to squeeze his heart.

He was filled with the urge to hold her in his arms so that he could feel her breathing and heartbeat.

However, he knew he had to hold himself back.

Naomi let out a sigh. "Lucas, let's go home."

Without another word, Lucas entered the car and ordered Spencer to drive.

Meanwhile, inside a five-star hotel in Lake City, Ryan's eyes glistened with discreet resentment when he saw the mother and daughter.

Nevertheless, he was very good at hiding his emotions.

His expression was indifferent yet polite as he greeted them, "Please come in."

Penelope followed behind Mary as they stepped into the presidential suite.

The suite was designed lavishly. Besides four bedrooms, it also had a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen.

I heard that such a suite costs a few hundred thousand a night. The Yates family is really rich, and that's the reason he can afford such an extravagant room.

As Mary was considered a daughter of the Yates family now, she put on the airs of a distinguished lady and strutted into the room while hiding her amazement. With an ingratiating tone, she suggested, "Ryan, it's such a waste for you to stay in such a big place alone. Why don't Penelope and I move in with you?"

Raising his gaze, Ryan threw the duo a distant look. "Mary, I'm sorry, but I'm not used to staying with someone else, especially those of a different gender, as we do not share the same living habits."

"Ryan, isn't staying by yourself lonely? It will definitely be more fun if we move in with you."

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"I'm sorry, but I prefer to have a peaceful environment over a noisy one. Yesterday, I booked you a room. It's on the thirteenth floor, and here's the room key." Ryan handed a key card to Mary.

It was an ordinary suite. There were two bedrooms inside it together with a dining room and a kitchen.

Nevertheless, it was still a far cry from Ryan's suite in terms of lavishness.

The moment Mary heard that it was on the thirteenth floor, the smile on her face froze. In spite of that, she kept a lid on her emotions, for Ryan was the heir to the Yates family, and they would have to rely on him going forward.

I can't fall out with him... I have to keep my cool and maintain a cordial relationship instead. An ordinary suite is considered wonderful and significantly better than a standard room. At the end of the day, I'm still a daughter of the Yates family and a cut above everyone else.

Having mentally convinced herself, Mary accepted the card and replied with a smile, "Thank you for your consideration."

"Thank you, Uncle Ryan." Penelope quickly broke into a vibrant smile.

After both of them left with their luggage in tow, Ryan slammed the door behind them to express his displeasure at their behavior.

He was on a working trip as a member of the judging committee and was thoroughly annoyed that the duo wanted to tag along.

How did these two end up being members of the Yates family?

Recalling how much he had been looking forward to his sister's return, Ryan was utterly disappointed when he found out how narrow-minded and materialistic Mary turned out to be.

The sister from his childhood memories wasn't like that at all.

Instead, she was gentle, attentive, and loved to spoil him.

She was also very sensible and behaved just like how the eldest daughter of the Yates family was expected to. Moreover, she excelled in everything that she did and was once considered the future of the Yates family.

Back then, everyone expected her to become the pride of the family, but she ended up disappearing instead.

With the passage of time, he no longer remembered how she looked. All that was left was a familial bond.

The Yates family had expended significant manpower and resources in the search for his sister. Unfortunately, all their efforts were futile.

It wasn't until recently that Mary was found. Even though Ryan didn't feel that she resembled his sister

in any way, the DNA test report clearly stated that she was his mother's daughter.

Taking a deep breath, Ryan tried to push the annoying matter to the back of his mind since the final round of the International Piano Competition was on the next day.

After taking a hot shower, he changed into his pajamas and picked out the outfit he was going to wear the next day. Only then did he lie down on his bed.

For some strange reason, Ashlyn's beautiful face suddenly flashed across his mind.

Why am I thinking of her? That's strange.

The next morning, Ashlyn took her breakfast before heading to the theater where the piano competition was being held.

Just when she alighted, she saw Penelope, Jenny, and Hera walking side by side.

The three of them had some history together.

Back then, even though all three of them already knew one another, Jenny and Hera were closer to each other. They never liked hanging out with Penelope, as the Berry family was considered inferior to theirs.

However, it was Penelope who took the initiative to contact them this time, for she was now the granddaughter of a count, and her mom was the Yates family's eldest daughter.

Now that her status had been significantly elevated, she felt the need to come back and show off just to gain satisfaction from the envy of others.

That day, Penelope was dressed in a pale green full-length dress, which was from a luxury brand for youths under Maredania's Brand X. Coincidentally, Ashlyn had seen that outfit before.

Back then, she had knitted her brows curiously when the manager of the design department showed it to her. The dress utilized a large amount of lace and pleated frills that gave it a loud look.

She had wondered then if anyone would actually buy it.

But considering that the designer was a newbie who was willing to be bold and possessed some soul, she realized it was unfair to reject the design just because she didn't like it.

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Hence, she agreed to launch the products and signed the papers.

She never thought that her clothes would sell, but they did.

The only thing was that the clothes were as weird and crazy as she had imagined them.

Penelope was an average-looking girl with delicate features. However, it wasn't enough to turn heads.

As such, she had to resort to weird and crazy outfits to stand out among a group of pretty girls.

But since she couldn't carry the style, all the outfit did was made her look like a circus clown.

I wonder how she got her hands on these clothes in the first place? From what I know, everything from this brand needs advanced booking. Not only that, they're famous for being expensive.

One would have to book at least one to two months in advance and pay a ton of money just to get their hands on these clothing items.

Not many could afford this brand in Lake City.

Penelope had begged Ryan to get the dress for her as she wanted to outshine the other candidates in the piano competition that day.

She wanted to attract everyone's attention even though she didn't participate in the competition.

"Penelope, these clothes look like they're from Brand X. It must have cost you a lot, right?"

Hera felt a little envious of Penelope. After all, she couldn't get her hands on any branded clothing items after being blacklisted from the fashion industry. She, too, wanted Brand X's clothes but had no means of getting them.

She could only afford clothes that had gone out of fashion even if she shopped overseas. The Chapmans couldn't afford to buy her the latest season clothes these days.

Moreover, Bob had reduced her allowance since he was unhappy with her.

Penelope blushed at Hera's words. "Hera, do you think this looks good on me? My uncle says it fits me well, but I'm not confident enough to say so."

"This dress looks really good on you, Penelope." Hera lied through her teeth. "You'll surely be the center of attention with this dress."

Jenny scoffed inwardly. However, she played along and said, "Yeah, it's indeed quite nice. After all, it's an exceptional brand. Their designers are recognized for their iconic sense of style and are well respected in the industry. I even heard that their design director, X, is extremely strict. Also, I heard that they're very mysterious. No one has actually seen them before."

"X?" Ms. X from LX Corporation was the only X Penelope knew. Moreover, she firmly believed that

Ashlyn was the mysterious X during London Fashion Week.

So, X has appeared again. I wonder if Ashlyn is the same director X from X Corporation? But how is that possible? She's just a designer from H Nation. How is it possible that she has become the design director of X Corporation in Maredania?

After all, one would have to stand out to become a design director.

Hmm... they probably just have the same stage name.

Penelope pondered to herself.

"That's right. I heard that it's not easy to get X to design something new. They only come out with three designs every year and those designs would usually be gifted to the president's wife or royalty. Moreover, they specializes in designing jewelry. They would come up with a new series every year."

Jenny gave Penelope a disdainful look. How could she be wearing Brand X's dress when she hasn't even heard of Director X? I guess she's still a country bumpkin even though she has returned to the Yates family.

"Yeah. I heard that they designed new pieces of jewelry this year. It's very pretty and elegant from the pictures on the internet."

Hera was filled with jealousy as she asked on purpose, "Penelope, did your uncle refer you to X since he managed to get you this dress?"

Penelope froze. She was riddled with guilt as she replied, "My uncle is a viscount. It would be a piece of cake to for him to meet someone like X."

Her voice faltered toward the end. In truth, Ryan only managed to get his hands on this dress through his connections. Moreover, she had never heard of the infamous design director X in the fashion industry before this.

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The only X Penelope knew was Ms. X from LX Corporation.

Hence, it wasn't possible that she had met X before this.

Whatever. My uncle is a viscount. It will be a piece of cake for me to meet X. I'll just have to ask. Anyway, there's no harm in lying since both Jenny and Hera hails from Lake City in H Nation. They won't know if I'm lying through my teeth or not.

Penelope felt rather smug upon that thought. I'm so glad I come from such an influential family and have such a good uncle.

"Have you really met X before? I bet he must be a very handsome man, right? His designs are bold, youthful, and stylish."

Penelope smiled and pretended to be cool about it. "X is a mysterious person. I can't give away his details just like that. I'll introduce you to him once I get the chance."

"Really?"

Jenny's eyes lit up as her interest was piqued. She stared at Penelope in disbelief. She had a feeling that Penelope was bluffing.

"Why would I lie to you?" Penelope smiled and patted Jenny on the back.

Ashlyn watched on as Penelope bluffed her way through the conversation like a madman. She arched a brow and kept quiet as she passed them by.

It had been a long time since Penelope met Ashlyn.

The woman was beautiful and poised, and she possessed a commanding presence. Penelope couldn't help but feel jealous when she saw how much confidence Ashlyn carried.

Even as a woman herself, she couldn't deny the fact that she was attracted to Ashlyn's aura.

Penelope gritted her teeth in anger. Urgh, I can't stand her.

Nevertheless, she couldn't help but feel smug when she recalled she was in a higher social class than Ashlyn.

Penelope managed her facial expressions and smiled at Ashlyn. "It's been a long time since we've met, Ashlyn."

"Does it make any difference if we meet or not?" Ashlyn retorted.

Penelope kept her cool and replied, "Ashlyn, have you heard of Director X? It seems like Ms. X from LX Corporation is no match for Director X from X Corporation at all!"

She scrutinized Ashlyn's face closely, trying to work out if she was indeed Director X.

However, much to her disappointment, Ashlyn's face gave nothing away as she remained stoic.

Penelope was secretly delighted. Looks like Ms. X from LX Corporation and Director X is not the same person. This is great. Ashlyn is already very fortunate to be working as a designer for LX Corporation in Lake City. How is it possible that she's the director of a multinational company like X Corporation? It

seems like I've been overthinking. I'm the cream of the crop. We're at a totally different level. I'm a noble, granddaughter of a count; while Ashlyn is just a designer and a doctor in a small town like Lake City.

Penelope was pleased upon that thought and cast Ashlyn a contemptuous look.

Ashlyn stopped in her tracks and gave her a look. "Are you referring to Director X? Is knowing that person such a big deal? In that case, is it an even bigger deal if I know the president of X Corporation then?" she said coldly.

Penelope froze. What does she mean? Does she really know the president of X Corporation?

Before Penelope could come up with a reply, however, Jenny, who was a huge fan of Director X, spoke up.

"Ashlyn, what is the meaning of this? You're talking as if you know them at a personal level. I bet you've never even heard of X. He's not just some random designer in a small company, he's the best of the best. I heard that he even rejected Mr. Shaw's invitation to attend the Shaws' fashion event. Nobody knows what X looks like up till now!" she said sharply.

"Yeah, Ms. Ashlyn. Do you think Director X is the X from a small company like LX Corporation? These two are incomparable!" Hera added pretentiously.

She would never give up on an opportunity to talk down to Ashlyn.

Penelope smiled. "Forget it. She would never understand. How could she when she has no idea what we're even talking about?"

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She's just a doctor with a small web of connections. She's nothing but a small fry.

At most, she's a designer under LX Fashion. Even then, that background of hers is nothing compared to mine as the granddaughter of a Count.

What right does she have to stand here talking to me about the director and president of X Corporation? It's probably difficult for her to even go overseas.

Ashlyn arched her brow as she trained her cold gaze on Penelope. "Penelope, since you've met Director X before, has the director ever given you anything?"

Confusion crossed Penelope's face at Ashlyn's question.

I've never even met Director X before. So there's no way in hell I would have received anything.

Despite being clueless, Penelope continued on with her act. "It was difficult for me to meet the director since I wasn't close to him, but Uncle Ryan knows him well. The director did give Uncle Ryan a gift before."

"Really? May I know what the gift was?"

The corner of Ashlyn's eyes raised slightly, exuding a charming vibe.

"J-Just a gold-plated business card," Penelope lied, thinking that since Ashlyn didn't know Ryan, she wouldn't be able to clarify with him. There's no way a woman like her can possibly know a world-renowned pianist like Ryan.

"Well, I'm sorry to say that Director X never hands out business cards." Ashlyn shot her a knowing grin.

X would usually present a self-made embroidered handkerchief with an X on the bottom right corner of it during the first meeting.

"How would you know? You're just bluffing, aren't you? You're talking like you're close to X," Penelope barked.

With an annoyed glance at Ashlyn, she purposely said, "Since we used to be sisters, let me give you some advice. Don't try to show off because if someone exposes you, you'll be embarrassed."

Ashlyn snickered as she stared at Penelope like she was a joke.

Is there something wrong with this woman's mind? I was just asking if Director X had given her anything. Yet she's accusing me of being a showoff?

Before she could refute, Penelope acted as though she was worried for Ashlyn's sake and expressed, "You never even been abroad before and stayed at Lake City your whole life, so how could you possibly know Director X? How would you even know whether the director even gave me anything? You're speaking like you've received something from X before."

Ashlyn snapped, "Do I even need X's gifts? Hah! What a joke!"

Before Penelope could react, Ashlyn had turned on her heels and left.

D*mn that wench!

A menacing expression crossed Penelope's face. She's such a b*tch! What right does she have to be so arrogant? How could she be so conceited? She is nothing more than a designer and doctor. Horace has already been taken into custody, so she doesn't have any support anymore.

I'm sure she has no idea how powerful Uncle Ryan is. I bet she'll be furious once she knows about it. Her tone earlier made it seem like she didn't care for the present from Director X. But there's no way she knows X! What a load of bull! She's just full of sh*t!

Hera pretended to comfort Penelope. "She's a psycho. Just ignore her. She thinks she's in the upper class now that she's Mrs. Nolan."

"Mrs. Nolan? When did she become Mrs. Nolan? Which Mrs. Nolan?"

Penelope had been staying at Maredania, so she hadn't been paying much attention to any news on Twitter and wasn't in the loop of any local gossip.

Hence, she was clueless about how popular Ashlyn was on Twitter.

"Mrs. Nolan as in the wife of Lucas Nolan," Hera replied through clenched teeth. Ashlyn is Lucas' wife? No wonder he kept protecting her.

"Those are nothing but fake news and baseless rumors. They've been on the news sites forever, but have you ever seen Lucas step up to confirm the rumors? I'm sure Ashlyn and Mr. White were the ones who spread those rumors."

Jenny knew about Hera's feelings for Lucas, so she wasn't planning on revealing the possible engagement between the Holt and Nolan family to avoid any possible mishap.

She knew well enough that the three of them were merely plastic friends.

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"I see..." Penelope nodded and didn't say anything else.

Meanwhile, Ashlyn returned to the piano competition venue and went straight backstage.

There were a couple of dressing rooms back there, and all the participants were inside getting styled by stylists. Some even brought their own personal stylists.

Charlotte sat on her seat obediently with a thin gauze covering her face. She only had simple eye makeup done with red lipstick on her lips.

Delight filled her eyes when she saw Ashlyn approaching. "Ashlyn."

She figured it was rude to continue calling Ashlyn Ms. Berry after all the help she received from her.

"Hey, Lottie. How are you doing?" Ashlyn retrieved a necklace and fastened it over Charlottes' fair neck. "It looks good on you."

The necklace was fresh on the market, and was only released that day. Coincidentally, Ashlyn had just received a sample the day before. Thinking it might suit Charlotte, she brought one over.

Charlotte admired the cool necklace on her neck through the vanity mirror. Tiny diamonds were embellished along the chain with a star-shaped diamond pendant at the center, sparkling under the light's reflection like a night sky full of stars. The beautiful jewelry had her eyes wide open as she exclaimed, "It's stunning!"

"I'm glad that you like it." Ashlyn chuckled. "I hope it can bring you good luck."

Olivia, who sat not far away, had also made it into the finals.

Two of her friends were on her sides whispering, "That Penelope whose father got taken away is here too. Say, why do you think she's here when she's not even competing?"

"Well, she had tongues wagging after wearing the outfit from brand X. She's strutting around like a peacock shaking its feathers open."

"I heard a Count has reclaimed her into the family, effectively turning her into a socialite of nobility."

"Oh right, I heard the president of the International Piano Association is here as a guest. Have you guys heard anything about that?"

Naturally, Olivia also noticed the ostentatious dress on Penelope.

She commented with contempt, "Penelope is nothing but a pauper that finally got the chance to show off now. But it doesn't matter since the Berrys are still too far beneath to even compare to the standings of our families."

"You're right. She is just a nouveau-riche no matter where she goes. It's disgusting. Only Hera and Jenny would lower their standards to hang around her."

The three, Penelope, Jenny, and Hera, were vain and arrogant.

They might act low-key, but their deepest desires were to catch everyone's attention.

That was why socialites like Olivia didn't like hanging around them.

Hence the small group of posse she had.

"Let's not talk about her. I'm losing my appetite." Olivia lifted her brow and said, "I want to get a look at the president of the International Piano Association. I heard he's a very talented man and a genius pianist ever since he was a child. I also heard that he was about to announce the heir that would be the

next president. I wonder if that's true."

"The heir that would be the next president? Then, it must be Ryan, the Piano Prince, right?"

Penelope, Jenny, and Hera coincidentally overheard their conversation as they drew closer.

With a pause, Penelope intentionally flipped her hair. "Are you guys talking about Uncle Ryan? What about him? Is he about to become the president of the International Piano Association?"

With an exaggerated and embarrassed expression, she added, "He always keeps a low profile. Even I don't know about this despite being his relative."

Olivia couldn't stand Penelope's attitude and snapped, "Oh, we were just speculating, so it's not even confirmed yet. We're not sure if it's your Uncle Ryan, so stop sticking feathers in your cap."

Clenching her fist in anger, Penelope barked, "I'm telling Uncle Ryan to give you guys a low score."

"Well, in order to do that, your Uncle Ryan will have to listen to you first," Olivia mocked.

"Come on, forget about them, and let's go." Hera tugged on Penelope. "I still haven't put on my makeup yet."

"Don't ruin Hera's mood before the competition," Jenny chipped in as she yanked Penelope too.

Hearing the women almost getting into a fight, Ashlyn opened her eyes and glanced in their direction, feeling a slight headache at the commotion.