

"Merissa," Cartland said, ignoring Maddie and greeting Merissa as he followed Edgar. "Let's go, Mr. Collins is already here."

With that, Cartland motioned for Merissa to follow.

"Wait, is that Bernard Collins, the owner of Nexus Media and the movie investor?"

Edgar's eyes lit up as he overheard Cartland whispering to Merissa. Like an excited kid, he wedged himself between them.

Knowing Edgar had been itching to meet Bernard, Cartland smiled, offering him a chance, "Why don't you join us?"

Edgar beamed; he knew Cartland got his hint. He threw an arm around Cartland's shoulder.
"Thanks!"

As they walked off laughing, they didn't notice someone sneaking along behind them!

"Alright, here we are."

Cartland pointed at a room sign and knocked on the door.

Almost immediately, the door swung open and a



joyful voice welcomed them. "Cartland, it's been ages."

It was a man about Cartland's age, wearing a beige trench coat with neatly styled brown hair, looking quite distinguished.

"Great to see you again!" Cartland stepped forward and embraced him.

Bernard and Cartland had been friends since university; they were equally accomplished and appreciated each other.

This time, Bernard was eager to collaborate with Kangster Films, so he had asked Cartland to set up the meeting.

"This is Merissa," Cartland said, pulling her forward, and then gestured to Edgar. "And this is Edgar Mortiz, the director."

Bernard nodded politely at the two and invited everyone into the room.

Just as Bernard was about to shut the door, someone showed up, startling everyone!

It was Maddie.

"Whoa! When did you get here?!" Edgar blurted out.



Flashing a smile, Maddie said, "Just bringing some coffee."

She then showed him the coffee she'd snatched from a waiter.

Smilingly, she set down the coffee, flipped her hair casually, and introduced herself in a flirtatious tone, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Collins. I'm Maddie Ford, an actress."

Cartland frowned slightly.

Merissa rolled her eyes.

And Edgar's face turned sour.

Each of them displayed their displeasure.

Bernard remained composed, taking it all in, and quickly understood what kind of person Maddie was. He had seen too many women like her before!

Bernard, totally ignoring Maddie, turned straight to Merissa and said, "Ms. Narth, Cartland told me a lot about you. You're talented, sharp, and insightful. I would be honored to work with you sometime. Would you consider it?"

Merissa smiled, gracefully accepting the praise, "Mr. Collins, The honor is all mine. I'm looking forward to it!"



Merissa surely loved the idea as well since it could be a great opportunity for Kangster Films.

Maddie, feeling snubbed as Bernard showered

Merissa with praise, couldn't help but feel jealous,
though she tried to hide it behind held-back tears.

Merissa saw right through Maddie's act and rolled her eyes dismissively.

Worried that the chat might accidentally spill too much about her identity, Merissa changed the subject. "So, Mr. Collins, what's keeping you busy these days?"

The conversation shifted smoothly, putting Merissa at ease.

As the chat went on, Maddie was completely ignored.

Trying to keep up, she forced a smile, feeling totally out of place.

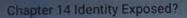
And she felt more and more puzzled.

What's so special about this Merissa?

Why would someone so accomplished like Bernard want to collaborate with her?

Was it all because of Cartland?

And why did Cartland treat Merissa so special?





Could Merissa have some hidden identity or background they didn't know about?

As all these questions buzzed in her head, Maddie couldn't take it anymore. She interrupted, "Mr. Collins, I'm actually quite close to Merissa. But from what I know, she's been a homemaker. How did you even know her?"

The room went quiet at her question. Merissa shot a quick glance at Bernard, her heart racing.





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