

Chapter 484 Stupid And Ignorant

"I do prefer Dukeland's food," Leopold confessed to Keely.

Klein's demeanor shifted to unease. "Maybe we could consider a Dukeland-themed restaurant instead?" he proposed.

Lorraine let out a chuckle at a moment when everyone else was grappling with Leopold's wish.

"Since we've made it here, we might as well sample the native dishes. You've probably consumed Dukeland's cuisine back home quite often, Professor Zizka. This is a golden chance to experiment with something different. Moreover, it doesn't hurt us designers to embrace novelty."

Caught off guard, Leopold froze and then broke into laughter. "You make a fair point. I should try the local delicacies."

The previous tension evaporated, leaving Keely uncertain of her next step. She offered an awkward grin before rationalizing her earlier stance.

"Well then, let's give this place a shot. My only concern was whether you could handle the diverse culinary flavors."

Comparatively, she had a knack for being diplomatic and fawning.

Being a traditional scholar with a focus solely on academics,

Leopold remained oblivious to the underlying tension between the two women. He was touched by Keely's considerate nature and returned her smile, remarking, "Keely has always been the most thoughtful among my students. That's so precious!"

Klein was taken aback by his sentiment. However, knowing his place, he merely smiled and took the lead.

"Rest assured, Professor. This eatery is a local favorite in Vagow, and their cuisine is delectable. I'm certain you'll find it to your liking!"

Leopold offered a nod of approval and scanned the restaurant with curiosity. He even examined the chair under him before deciding to settle.

He observed, "This establishment has a unique design, and even the chairs have a distinctive structure. Klein, Loraine, I can't spot any screws or adhesive residues on these chairs. How have the parts been assembled?"

Lorraine sported a cheeky smile. She was about to reply when Keely, donning a flattering grin, seized the chance to elaborate.

"The assembly must have employed the cutting-edge bonding material your team has recently developed. The chairs are evidently glued together, yet there's no trace of adhesive. I'm convinced that only your innovative adhesive could achieve such a feat. Truly, only a master like you could possess such brilliance!"

Leopold reciprocated her praise with a nod.

Keely's comment, besides pleasing Leopold, showcased her insights. The recognition she received thrilled her.

Lorraine was gazing at Keely in disbelief when she glanced in her direction.

"Seems like you're unaware of Professor Zizka's newest adhesive, aren't you, Lorraine?" Keely quipped smugly.

Lorraine shook his head and exclaimed, "Keely, I always knew you were stupid and ignorant. But I didn't anticipate you being so stupid and ignorant."

Confused and irate, Keely fired back, "What do you imply, Lorraine?"

Without breaking her gaze from Leopold, Lorraine explained, "Professor Zizka, the furniture you see here embodies the primitive, yet ingenious technique of mortise and tenon, a hallmark of our ancient construction."

A grin of superiority on Keely's face was quickly replaced by a mask of shock.

Leopold asked in a surprised tone, "Mortise and tenon technique? I've only ever encountered this term in textbooks, always yearning to see it in person. Are you suggesting that these simple pieces of furniture are pieced together using that method?"

Lorraine responded with a nod and a smile, "Let me put it in simple terms for you. The mortise and tenon technique involves crafting two separate elements into interlocking pieces. These can then be assembled without additional equipment. It's cost-efficient and adds an aesthetic appeal."

Leopold was known for his academic seriousness. Despite his earlier displeasure with Lorraine, he was instantly drawn to the newfound information, even going to the extent of kneeling down to inspect the chair's joints closely.

After verifying the truth behind Loraine's claims, Leopold's sigh of wonder was audible.

"What an elegant design! Your decision to bring me to this restaurant makes complete sense now. The ambiance is as enlightening as it is spectacular!"

Keely felt a stab of humiliation at hearing Leopold's praise for Loraine. To save face, she chimed in with an attempt at a humble confession, "So, it's the mortise and tenon technique... I didn't foresee that. My apologies, Professor Zizka. I did take up architecture studies overseas, but frequent bouts of illness often confined me to the hospital. I regret not being more knowledgeable."

Leopold, shaking his head in reassurance, responded, "Don't worry over it. Recognizing your weaknesses is crucial. Every building has its unique charm across the globe. Make an effort to observe and learn more. Utilize your free time to broaden your knowledge!"

Keely nodded, all the while clenching her hand in frustration.

It was clear to her that she was being contrasted with Loraine and falling short.


Even as she attempted to justify herself further, Leopold was already engaged in a passionate conversation with Loraine.

"Damn Loraine!" Keely muttered under her breath.

She clenched her teeth, her eyes flaring with anger.

In her heart, she accused Loraine of flaunting her skills to win over Leopold. She swore she wouldn't let Loraine steal

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what she believed was rightfully hers ever again!



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Chapter 485 Provocation

In a short while, the server delivered the meals. Grinning, Klein offered, "Our meals are just about ready, Professor Zizka, Loraine. How about we chat over dinner?"

Leopold didn't object. His stomach was growling. His gaze landed on the feast laid out before him, and he couldn't wait to dive in.

Loraine had thoughtfully set out cutlery and chopsticks for Leopold, which made him feel at home.

Each time a new dish arrived, Loraine introduced Leopold to its special features.

Leopold responded with appreciative exclamations now and then.

Klein, from time to time, cracked light-hearted jokes, putting everyone at ease. The entire room brimmed with conviviality, all except for Keely.

Ever since Keely could recall, she had been taught to present herself in a way that would enhance her allure and attract male attention. Moreover, her educational credentials were mostly fabricated, leaving her bereft of substantial knowledge in her field, let alone anything to contribute to the general discourse.

She found it impossible to join in their conversation.

However, she excelled in reading people's reactions.

After each dish Loraine introduced, if Keely noticed that Leopold showed interest in it, she would carefully use the serving chopsticks to dish out some into Leopold's bowl and flatteringly utter, "Professor Zizka, this dish is truly delectable. Please try it."

Leopold couldn't help but grow fonder of Keely.

Keely behaved as though she had prepared the dishes herself.

Receiving Leopold's compliments, Keely shot Loraine a defiant smile. In the end, everything only served to give her an upper hand!

Loraine simply scoffed. Other than these brazen manipulations, Keely had no other skills.

She chose to disregard Keely. Since no altercation broke out, the others remained oblivious to the underlying rivalry between the two.

Everyone at the dinner seemed to have a great time.

As Leopold and Klein conversed, Loraine quietly excused herself to settle the bill.

Unnoticed by Loraine, Keely slipped away under the pretense of a bathroom break and followed her.

After paying the bill, Loraine was ready to head back, only to spot Keely.

Without a word, Loraine tried to walk past her, maintaining a stoic expression, but was halted by Keely.

Keely lifted her gaze, greeting her with a grin. "Loraine, it feels like ages since we last talked. How about we catch up?"

Unaffected by her enthusiasm, Loraine responded in a chilly tone, "There's nothing for us to discuss."

"Really? What about Marco?"

Upon hearing his name, Loraine's demeanor shifted subtly, her breathing more pronounced.

Keely suppressed a chuckle, covering her mouth as she did so. "Being overseas for so long, I can't help but wonder how Marco's been. Loraine, have you been looking after him in my stead?"

The ice in Loraine's gaze deepened. "Look after him for you?"

"Indeed. Who understands the bond between Marco and me better than you? Could you possibly believe that he's erased me completely from his memory?"

Keely's words were a sharpened blade, striking at Loraine's heart.

The fear of Keely had kept Loraine from accepting Marco.

Loraine knew firsthand how much Marco had doted on Keely over the past three years during her marriage to Marco. It was as if Marco was blind to Loraine's status as his wife, his eyes only on Keely.

Although Marco had finally seen through Keely's deception and sent her to prison himself, lingering doubts plagued Loraine. Did Marco truly have room for her in his heart? Even the tiniest fragment?

These doubts only widened the grin on Keely's face.

Leaning in, Keely murmured into Loraine's ear. "You only managed to get close to him when I was gone. Now that I'm

back, if you're not up to the task of taking care of him, then hand him back to me. I promise to care for him well."

Lorraine's fists tightened at her sides.

She was fully aware that Keely was trying to rile her up.

She was determined to trust Marco, despite their past disagreements, and refused to believe he would toy with her while holding another woman in his heart.

But, despite knowing this, she found herself involuntarily stirred by Keely's blatant taunting.

Keely had a knack for prodding at her insecurities.

But she wasn't as easily swayed or provoked as before.

Drawing in a deep breath, Lorraine shot Keely a scornful look.

"Whatever is happening between Marco and me is none of your concern."



Chapter 486 Argument

In the exclusive, private dining establishment, Loraine and Keely exchanged intense glances. Both refusing to yield, their animosity filled the air, creating a palpable tension that seemed ready to ignite at any given moment.

Keely's facial muscles were tense, her cheeks flushed with a mix of humiliation and fury.

Deliberately, she had let slip a barbed comment, not only to provoke Loraine, but to elicit some details about Marco from her.

Ever since the day she had dared to contact Marco, he had chosen to cut her off entirely.

Keely didn't intend to accept defeat easily. She returned to her home country with all the confidence and grandeur of a queen, her heart set on reclaiming Marco's affection.

While she was incarcerated, news of Loraine and Marco had reached her. These tidbits of information painted a vivid picture of Marco's love and adoration for Loraine, something he would never have demonstrated before.

This news stoked the fires of Keely's envy, amplifying her determination to come out on top.

In her heart, she was certain Marco couldn't completely let her go. Even when he had put her behind bars, she held onto the belief that he still harbored feelings for her.

Keely rationalized that Loraine, despite being married to

Marco for three years, wouldn't be able to match her connection with him, especially after their divorce.

However, Loraine's rebuttal asserted that Marco was hers and hers alone.

A new development in their relationship was hinted at in Loraine's words, sparking jealousy within Keely to the point she wanted to let out an ear-piercing shriek.

Still, she held herself back, for she was no longer the same naive girl she had once been. Rather, she gave Loraine a composed smile and said, "Of course it has something to do with me. Aren't you aware? Even during my years of absence, Marco's mind was filled with thoughts of me. He regularly sent me gifts while I was locked up, which made my time in prison surprisingly tolerable."

She didn't bother contemplating whether Loraine would confirm the validity of her claims with Marco.

At that moment, her strategy was to infuriate Loraine and claim victory.

"If your prison stint was so enjoyable, why didn't you extend your stay? How did you manage to get out so quickly?" Loraine shot back, a smirk playing on her lips.

"Damn you!"

Keely's mind instantly filled with the harrowing experiences of her incarceration. Her fists clenched involuntarily as rage and loathing welled up within her.

Marco's heartless decision, which led to her dismal existence in prison, caused her to detest him. She had been at the receiving end of relentless cruelty, her dignity trampled on relentlessly. After exhausting all other

possibilities, she managed to find an escape by associating herself with Leopold and returning as his student.

She made a solemn vow to reclaim what was rightfully hers!

Keely retaliated with laughter. "Marco sent me gifts because he still cares. But if I remained in prison, he wouldn't get to see me. His assistance is what got me out. You're simply seething with envy because of Marco's kindness towards me."

However, Keely's provocations failed to elicit any reaction from Loraine. Her gaze remained icy, clearly displaying her disbelief in Keely's words.

"Did Marco really send you things?"

With a confident and proud nod, Keely affirmed Loraine's question.

Loraine sized her up, her lips curving into a smile before questioning, "What did Marco gift you? Can you provide any concrete evidence or records?"

Keely was caught off guard, unsure how to formulate a reply.

Quickly regaining composure, she chuckled, "Considering Marco's affection for me, he wouldn't hesitate to give me anything I ask for. Why should I hold onto the possessions I had during my confinement? Of course, I discarded them all! Is there anything else you'd like me to validate? The very fact that I am present here is the strongest proof. Marco's invitation led me to return this time."

Loraine found her words a little too harsh, even if she didn't necessarily believe them.

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she coldly retorted, "Regardless of whether Marco sent you aid, I am indifferent. The more a person craves, the more he or she tends to show off. Only a fool is keen to parade the pathetic things he or she owns. Kindly step aside, Keely. My time is of great value to me."

Lorraine sidestepped the woman before her and strode away. From behind, Keely raised her voice in fury.

"Are you under the illusion that you have the upper hand, Lorraine? I assure you, Marco will always reserve a unique spot for me in his heart. He'll forgive me, no matter how often I make mistakes!"

Lorraine continued her stride, dismissing Keely's words, but Keely persisted. "Aren't you curious why I returned to the country? Did Marco mention that I'm here to uphold a promise I made to him?"

Lorraine halted in her tracks. "What are you implying?" she questioned icily, reaching into her pocket to retrieve her phone.

Spotting Lorraine's irritation, Keely smirked maliciously, "Lorraine, I'm the one who holds a special place in Marco's heart, and you can't take my spot! Even if you go above and beyond, you won't win his affection! I'm back now. If you possess an ounce of wisdom, you'd abandon him. Stop meddling in affairs that don't concern you!"

Lorraine let out a scoff and closed in on Keely.

"Me, meddling in someone else's affairs? Keely, you've got some nerve! Who interfered in another's marriage? Who brazenly disrupted a couple's relationship? Are you pretending to be oblivious?"

Keely stepped back cautiously.

Loraine had never displayed such aggression before, which left her feeling uneasy.

Upon seeing Loraine approach, Keely retreated a few paces and stammered, "Loraine, don't get closer. What are your intentions? I am under the guidance of Professor Zizka. If you dare lay a finger on me, you will be excluded from this project!"

Loraine smirked at her.

Before Loraine could make a move, Keely shrieked, "Help! Loraine intends to assault me!"



Chapter 487 Recording

Leopold and Klein strolled down the corridor, jolted by a sudden scream. Swiftly, they traced the sound.

Loraine was seen advancing, her face impassive, while Keely was huddled in the corner, visibly petrified.

The scene led everyone to presume that Loraine was on the brink of menacing Keely, which further distressed Leopold, especially since he had just heard Keely's terrified shriek.

"Miss Torres, what on earth are you up to?" Leopold demanded, pointing sternly in her direction.

Dressed in an innocent white dress, Keely presented a picture of vulnerability. As she quivered, she tearfully confided in Leopold.

"Loraine attempted to bribe me, Professor Zizka! She wanted me to convince you to let her join the airport project. And when I declined, she tried to strike me."

Upon hearing Keely's declaration, astonishment rippled through the crowd, and Leopold's anger soared. His gaze hardened as he addressed Loraine, "Miss Torres, participation in this project is based on your abilities, not your threats. Your underhanded tactics make it impossible for me to consider collaboration."

Klein interjected anxiously, "But Professor Zizka, Loraine isn't the sort of person to resort to such measures. There must be a misunderstanding."

His eyes sought Loraine's, pleading for an explanation.

But Leopold, firmly on Keely's side, dismissed Klein with an icy smirk, "Enough! No more justifications. It's clear that my student has been mistreated here, in your city. Klein, you're not trying to shield Loraine, are you?"

In the face of the accusation, Klein remained mute, beads of sweat dotting his forehead.

Leopold's public renouncement of Loraine not only threatened to sink the airport project but also cast a shadow over Universe Group's professionalism and credibility. The fallout was sure to turn Loraine into a laughingstock and attract scorn.

Even Klein found himself at a loss for words to defend Loraine, especially after Leopold accused him of "shielding" for her. Sighing inwardly, he considered that Loraine was typically rational. Why this rash behavior now?

Keely's face bore a self-satisfied grin.

All Loraine did was shake her head, her soft laughter echoing in the tense silence, an expression of contempt on her face.

"Why are you still laughing, Loraine?" Keely spat out, livid. "Do you actually think that as the president of Universe Group, you can do whatever you want?"

Loraine calmly raised her hand and unveiled her phone.

It was an audio recording.

With a smirk playing on her lips, she confidently walked towards Keely.

"Keely, your game plan hasn't changed one bit, has it? Can't you come up with something original?"

Paralyzed by the sight of the recording, Keely tried to maintain her composure. She was doubtful Loraine would have captured their confrontation. "I really don't understand your accusation. You did threaten me!"

"Fear not, I'm not one to fight fire with fire when a peaceful resolution is possible. I have captured our entire interaction. The truth of your claims will reveal itself once we listen to it."

Previously being trapped by Keely's schemes had been a bitter lesson for Loraine. Sensing Keely's escalating aggression, she had cleverly initiated a recording on her concealed mobile device.

Leopold wore a look of displeasure, but defended his student anyway. "I'm certain Keely would never resort to deceit."

When Loraine played the recording, Keely's confrontational tone was laid bare. The nature of their dispute was crystal clear.

Leopold was stunned as he tried to digest the contents of the recording.

Loraine turned her gaze to Leopold. "Professor Zizka, I have always looked up to you as an esteemed veteran of our field. However, today my perception of you has been altered. It seems you are capable of favoring your students and blaming others based solely on their words."

Leopold's face creased into a frown.

Keely was visibly shaken, her fingers twitching anxiously at the edge of her coat.

Leopold, after a moment's pause, extended an earnest apology to Loraine.

"Miss Torres, I misunderstood your intentions because I was not privy to the complete scenario. I was mistaken. I apologize."

Loraine acknowledged his apology with a small nod. To her astonishment, Leopold added, "I'm not certain about the details of your issue with Keely. Nonetheless, your actions intimidated Keely, causing her to potentially misconstrue your intentions."

Loraine was taken aback by his statement.

She couldn't fathom Leopold's continued defense of Keely, even after hearing the recording.

Keely was quick to chime in, "Indeed. I was so taken aback that I assumed Loraine was about to strike me..."

With a scornful smile, Loraine interjected, "Is that so? The recording seems to tell a different story, showcasing your instigation. You didn't seem frightened in the slightest."

Keely hastily added, "I... I was consumed by rage. I didn't want to involve anyone else in this, but I'm left with no other options now. The animosity between Loraine and me actually stems from a romantic rivalry over the same man."

In response, Leopold questioned Keely, "Keely, is that gentleman the source of your inspiration?"

Caught off-guard, Keely stared back, unsure of how to

respond.

The revelation left everyone present in a state of bewildered silence.



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Chapter 488 Her Muse

Loraine watched Keely with a sneer, suspecting that she had concocted some tale to deceive Leopold, even though she couldn't remember explicitly stating so.

Leopold, renowned for his talent appreciation, had taken a liking to Keely. Despite her past incarceration, he held her in high regard, even referring to her muse as the trigger point of their dispute.

Curiosity piqued, Loraine wondered what unique "talent" Keely might possess that could so capture Leopold's admiration.

Sensing their confusion, Leopold chuckled and revealed, "The reason I chose Keely as my student was because her design sketches caught my eye."

Keely, registering his words, blinked nervously.

When she had presented her sketches to Leopold, he was so taken aback by her talent that he insisted on meeting her immediately. Their first encounter began with an unexpected question.

"What emotions fueled this design, Miss Haywood?"

Keely had a host of flattering compliments and rehearsed expert knowledge at her disposal. However, she was taken aback by Leopold's question, which left her momentarily speechless.

She was uncertain about the origin of the inspiration for the

design.

Leopold offered her a kind, contemplative look.

"I perceive immense emotion in this drawing. Was it someone special that inspired you to use such vivid colors in your design?"

Keely started crying after a moment of reflection. Adapting the narrative of her and Marco's relationship, she narrated it to Leopold.

In her version, she and Marco were deeply in love. She alleged she was framed and unjustly imprisoned in a foreign country, and the design sketches were her way of expressing her longing for her lover and her homeland.

Leopold recounted Keely's romantic tale to Loraine and the others, his voice rich with emotion. As he concluded the story, he sighed, dabbing at the corners of his eyes.

"I was touched by Keely's authentic emotions. Her innocence warranted her release from prison. The blame should be placed on the cruel woman who incarcerated her, not her. Don't you agree, Mr. Moore, Miss Torres?"

Loraine cast a pensive look at Keely, remaining silent under a sneer.

Klein cringed in embarrassment, recognizing the twisted story of what had happened between Loraine, Marco, and Keely, but was astonished that Leopold would believe such a tale.

Leopold sighed, stating, "This time, I brought Keely back not solely for her talent, which I highly esteem. Mr. Moore, Miss Torres, I believe anyone with a decent aesthetic sense wouldn't question her abilities after witnessing her designs.

Primarily, I brought her back to reconnect with her muse, the one who inspired her."

Lorraine, unable to tolerate any more, questioned, "Are you planning to assist your student in reuniting with her lover, Professor Zizka?"

Leopold shot Lorraine a disapproving look.

"From the beginning, Miss Torres, you've persistently antagonized Keely. Keely just asserted that both of you were involved with the same man. Were you the one who ended her relationship with her lover?"

Laughing in disbelief, Lorraine threw a frosty glare at Keely.

"What do you think, Keely? Why not ask Marco, your so-called 'lover' himself?"

Keely's face blanched. "I'm not lying," she stammered, shifting her gaze from Leopold to Lorraine, "I was the first one to meet Marco! Lorraine, you came into his life after me!"

"Miss Torres, are you threatening my student in my presence?" Leopold asked, anger flaring in his voice.

With a sneer, Lorraine retorted, "She spread a rumor that I failed in bribing her and planned to assault her. After hearing the recording, you should have known that Keely was lying. Could you trust a person so steeped in falsehood over the truth?"

Leopold paused for a moment before responding solemnly, "I'm sorry, I apologize on her behalf. She shouldn't have said those things to you. I believe Keely's impulsivity stems from love. After all, love is her main source of inspiration. I hope you could forgive her, for my sake."

Lorraine pursed her lips, her expression turning serious.

Though she admired the esteemed designer, his high-handed insistence on her forgiving Keely rankled her immensely.

She couldn't comprehend why he was so quick to absolve Keely and shift blame elsewhere.

With a smirk, Loraine retorted, "I'm afraid I can't accept this insubstantial apology. I would prefer a personal apology from Keely."

In a panic, Keely turned to Leopold, stammering, "Professor..."

With a comforting nod towards Keely, Leopold addressed Loraine in a frosty tone, "Miss Torres, I've already apologized to you on her behalf. What more do you expect from her? You're the president of Universe Group, while Keely is just a student. Please, don't be unreasonable!"

Keely interjected, "Yes, Loraine, can't you see the significance and influence of my teacher? He's already apologized on my behalf! You should be forgiving me!"

Bolstered by Leopold's presence, Keely used the opportunity to provoke Loraine again. This elicited an even more disgruntled look from Leopold.

"In that case, we have nothing more to discuss. We're leaving." Without giving Loraine a chance to retort, Leopold abruptly exited with Keely.

"Hey! Wait! Don't leave!" Klein, glancing between Loraine and the departing Leopold, sighed before deciding to follow them.

As Loraine watched them leave, she was left standing alone, a frown furrowing her brows.



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Chapter 489 The Guidance Meeting

Leopold and Loraine's meeting ended on a sour note, with no agreement in sight.

When Loraine got back home, she received a call from Klein, who said with a sigh, "Keely must have said something bad about you in front of Professor Zizka. If things continue like this, you may lose your chance to participate in the airport project."

Loraine's response was one of nonchalance. She scoffed and countered, "Even without Professor Zizka's backing, I'm still capable of joining the airport project on my terms."

Leopold's favoritism for Keely left a bad taste in Loraine's mouth. A recommendation from him, if given, would not bring her joy.

Days later, Vagow's architectural association convened a strategic consultation meeting for the renovation of White Cloud Airport.

The aim was to onboard Leopold promptly so they could reach a consensus on the airport redesign without delay.

A plethora of renowned designers in Vagow were invited, including representatives from associated companies. Among the invitees were Loraine and Marco.

The meeting day dawned, and Loraine arrived at the venue carrying her design blueprint. She was greeted at the

entrance by Klein.

Loraine scanned the crowd but didn't see the person she was anticipating. Her disappointment was evident.

Klein picked up on her facial expression. He teased her with a cryptic smile, "Mr. Bryant was caught up with some pressing matters and will arrive later."

Caught off guard, Loraine responded indignantly, "Why are you bringing him up? I couldn't care less if he shows up or not... Let's head in. Professor Zizka will be here shortly."

She entered the meeting hall alongside Klein, locating and taking her seat. Shortly after, Leopold and Keely entered the hall amidst a crowd of people.

Leopold, with a smile on his face, sat down and began perusing the submitted blueprints, nodding occasionally.

Suddenly, his expression turned grim and he tossed a paper onto the table.

Noticing this, the host rushed to ask, "Professor Zizka, is there an issue?"

Leopold pointed to a name on the list and replied coldly, "Apologies, but I refuse to work with this individual."

The name he pointed to was Loraine.

A hushed silence filled the hall as all eyes turned to Loraine.

Klein quickly got to his feet and defended, "Professor Zizka, Miss Torres is an esteemed architect in Vagow."

However, Leopold cut him off, "If you're concerned about not having a fitting design for the airport project, rest

assured. My team is brimming with talent. In fact, my student has a proposal that aligns perfectly with this project. You might consider adopting it outright."

Keely, standing elegantly next to him, shared a warm smile with everyone. Her eyes shimmered with satisfaction and pride.

Loraine's grip tightened in frustration, her knuckles whitening. The blatant favoritism shown to Keely by Leopold, without even offering her a fair shot, was unexpected.

Inhaling deeply, she challenged with a chilly tone, "Professor Zizka, aren't you apprehensive about the reproach that might follow your hasty decision? This feels unjust to all other contestants in the bidding. Your complete disregard for their proposals entirely seems rather thoughtless."

Klein was caught in a quandary. He felt clueless and lost, torn between sides.

"Loraine, let's cool down. Professor Zizka's intentions weren't harmful. We're here to finalize the airport project, not to engage in petty disputes."

In consideration of Klein's discomfort, Loraine kept her retort to herself. Klein immediately shot Leopold a congenial smile.

"Professor Zizka, perhaps you've misunderstood Loraine. I can vouch for her skills and expertise, which will surely win you over. It seems rather unjust to rule her out without assessing her abilities. Why not take a peek at Loraine's proposal before reaching a conclusion?"

Leopold's face was icy, his obstinacy reflecting the typical

demeanor of those hailing from Dukeland. His unfavorable initial impression of Loraine had given rise to bias, leading him to assume her work to be mediocre.

Witnessing Klein's strong defense, Leopold couldn't help a tinge of disdain. True to Keely's words, Loraine seemed to have a group of followers eager to please her. Her fame could easily be attributed to her influential family, rather than her skills.

However, with Klein's insistence, Leopold decided to peruse her work. Regardless of his anticipations, it would quell the situation and satisfy the audience.

With these thoughts, he gave Loraine an icy nod, stating, "Fine, you have three minutes to present your design concepts."

Knowing he'd extracted the maximum concession from Leopold, Klein gave Loraine a sympathetic glance.

Though irate, Loraine was determined to make the most of this chance. She was thoroughly prepared and was not poised to back down now.

Advancing towards the podium, she confidently initiated the projection, delving into her design explanation.

As the design blueprint filled the screen, Keely's countenance took a peculiar turn, blending guilt and triumph.

Leopold's face turned stormy.

On the stage, Loraine completed her pitch, her eyes seeking Leopold.

She was hopeful for his professional evaluation.

However, Leopold's countenance grew even darker. He retorted with bitterness, "Loraine, your work is gravely disappointing. You are not cut out for the construction design industry. I regret that I can't offer any worthwhile critique!"

As he finished, his anger surged, causing him to rise and make for the exit!

