

The Double 321

Chapter 321

Mirabella snagged Leo's hat from the adjacent seat and plunked it right over her face. Was she the kind of girl who needed her looks to get by? No way!

"Man, folks like you who treat money like it's dirt are a rare breed these days," Collins sighed, shaking his head with a mix of admiration and disbelief. He'd come to realize something about these siblings—their reckless streak was cut from the same cloth.

Beneath the shadow of the hat, Mirabella's eyelids fluttered.

Leo glanced at Mirabella, then grabbed a blanket from the car and draped it over her shoulders before speaking up. "Better to stay under the radar, right? Mirabella is still grinding through her senior year of high school. With those looks of hers, she'd hit the big time, no sweat. But getting recognized everywhere? That's a hassle. Plus, disguises are a pain."

Hearing Leo boast about the inevitable 'big time,' Collins' lips twitched. Was this guy just a walking hype machine for his sister? Collins had seen plenty of braggers, but this level of shamelessness was something else.

"It's all good, though. If Walker has no issues with it, then let's keep her out of the spotlight," Collins gave in, figuring a mask might even add a bit of mystery. After all, with a superstar

even if she wanted to.

brother's aura, there was no way she could keep a low profile

Leo sat up straight, his voice taking on a somber note. "Besides, it's not like we're hurting for cash."

Collins didn't respond. That statement just begged for a punch.

Just then, Mirabella flipped the hat off her face, revealing deep, almond-shaped eyes. “No, we are.”

Leo was baffled by her statement. Wait, what?

Harmony Point was a well-known tourist hub in Ashford, dotted with spots that were Instagram gold.

After a three-hour drive, they finally arrived at the filming location. Before getting out of the car. Mirabella had already slipped on her mask. She and Leo had barely stepped out when they were instantly swarmed by the crew’s cameras.

Mirabella paused, turning to Leo, “Are we late or something?” She lifted her wrist to check the time.

It’s only half past nine. Wasn’t the live broadcast supposed to start at ten sharp?

While Mirabella was visibly surprised, Leo’s expression was even more dramatic. After a moment of shock, he managed to muster, “Ah, maybe the crew’s just tweaking the cameras or something.” He’d seen this kind of thing during music video shoots.

Mirabella narrowed her eyes skeptically, then glanced at the crew’s cameras. “Doesn’t really

look like that to me.”

This was Leo’s first time on a live reality show, and he instinctively scratched his head, “Let me check with Collins...” He turned around, only to find that Collins—and the car—had vanished.

Leo was shocked.

Meanwhile, on the streaming platform:

[OMG, the last mystery guests are Juztin... I'm totally bamboozled.]

[The surprise hit me like a tornado.]

[LOL, 'tweaking the cameras? Do you not realize we're already live?]

['Tweaking the cameras' somehow hits my funny bone just right.]

[Hahaha, the look of utter confusion on Juztin's face is priceless. It's confirmed—the crew has pranked them!]

[Who's the girl with the mask? I heard her call our guest, Leo, so is this Juztin's sister?]

[Why is the girl wearing a mask? Could it be she's not exactly a looker?]

[Did anyone else notice that the girl seems quicker on the uptake than her brother? Just look at their expressions for comparison.]

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While Leo was still reeling from confusion, the show's host strolled over with a spring in his step. "Looks like our surprise guest is truly spooked," the host said, sporting a headset and glancing at the live stream's chat feed.

Leo gave the host a cool expressionless look. "Wasn't the call time at ten?" His words carried a tinge of grinding teeth.

Clearing his throat, the host handed him an earpiece and managed to keep a straight face as he said, "Well, you could think of it as us just tweaking the cameras right now."

Leo was lost for words.

The host then turned his attention to Mirabella, his eyes twinkling with unmistakable mischief, “Miss, maybe you could take off your mask...”

Mirabella shot him down. “Nope.”

The host was visibly choked up by the rejection. He turned to the camera with a look of exaggerated regret, “Even I can’t glimpse this lady’s face, so folks, don’t get your hopes up.”

The live chat went wild.

[LOL, I can feel Juztin’s deep despair through the screen.]

[Host, you’re getting cheeky.]

[The girl looks super cool and heartless.]

[Not showing her face on the live stream, are we playing the mystery card?]

[Probably not a celeb, but who cares, with her brother’s good looks in the frame.]

[Ah, a big hug to Juztin, all set up by the crew.]

Once Mirabella and Leo were geared up with their earpieces, they followed the host deeper into the venue.

The recording location the crew had chosen was picturesque, with a quaint bed & breakfast, a farm, a pasture, and a little village dotting the way—a perfect reflection of the show’s pastoral life theme.

Mirabella was pleasantly surprised.

“You nervous?” Leo whispered, his voice laced with concern. After all, they were the focus of multiple cameras.

Mirabella adjusted her mask, her demeanor unfazed, “Not at all.”

“Oh.” And with that. Leo didn’t press further.

Soon, the group arrived at a B&B in the village, where the other three guest teams had been

waiting for about half an hour.

The live stream had actually started at nine, and the reason Mirabella and Leo thought it was at ten was all part of the crew’s deliberate staging.

Leo, hyped as the grand mystery guest in the show’s promotions, was meant to make a surprising entrance to drive up the excitement.

The other three guest teams were Hans, Heather, and Gabriel. Unlike Leo, these three were titans of the film industry. Hans was a veteran actor with years of fame, Heather had snagged the Best Actress award the previous year, and Gabriel was a heartthrob idol, having amassed a legion of fans with a hit fantasy series.

Leo, a chart–topping music sensation with a fanbase in the millions, had never appeared on a variety show before, so his arrival took everyone by surprise. They knew the crew had invited a mystery team but had no clue who it might be, and none had checked their phones for the live stream beforehand.

Heather, snapping out of her shock, exclaimed, “It’s J Justin, the lead of Neon Paradox! What a surprise!”

“Hmm, looks like Walker’s really gone all out,” mused Hans, stroking his chin before stepping forward to greet Leo. Then, noticing Mirabella with her mask, he inquired, “Oh, who’s this?”

Leo nodded politely and introduced her, "My sister." He paused, casting a glance at the camera, "She's a bit on the shy side."

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The implication was clear: her introversion made her wear a mask.

Hans could read between the lines, but he just chuckled and offered a greeting anyway, "Hey there, miss."

Mirabella nodded at him. "Hello to you, too." Her voice was a bit husky and low, with an alluring huskiness to it. Even with her mask on, her bright, glistening eyes were captivating.

Heather had brought along her cousin to the show. Typically, those who were brought to such events had either aspirations to break into showbiz or were already minor celebrities. Heather's cousin lit up when she saw Leo, moving toward him with graceful poise to say hello. She seemed very approachable and sweet.

Meanwhile, Heather's gaze landed on Mirabella, and with a flicker of curiosity, she asked, "Are you part of the industry too?"

"No," replied Mirabella politely before lowering her gaze, not seeming too enthusiastic to engage further. Noticing this, Heather's expression softened, and she didn't probe any further.

The chat in the live stream was buzzing with comments.

[What's with Justin's sister's cold attitude? Doesn't she realize who's talking to her?]

[Seems a bit affected to me.]

[Compared to Justin's sister, Heather's cousin seems pretty outgoing, greeting everyone. proactively.]

[Are you v

viewing this through tinted lenses? Didn't you hear Juztin just say his sister is shy?]

[Juztin is cool and aloof, so what if his sister is a bit cold? That's totally normal, right?]

[Haha, honestly, I dig this kind of quiet, cool-type chick.]

At ten o'clock sharp, the host came out with a megaphone in hand. "Let's kick off today's live stream with a chicken slaughter challenge!"

Then, he led everyone to the backyard, pointing to a pen with chickens all set for the task, "One chicken per team. Whichever team finishes first gets a feast for lunch."

"And if we're last?" Hans asked under his breath.

The host turned to him with a sly smile. "The losers get nothing but pickled veggies and plain bread, and they have to wash all the dishes for the entire crew."

"That's a bit harsh," muttered Gabriel beside him.

"How is that harsh?" the host retorted flippantly before opening the wooden pen. "You have ten minutes. The countdown starts now. Go!"

As the pen was opened, the chickens scattered in every direction. The whole yard became a

flurry of feathers and chaos, and everyone quickly got down to business.

He can feel the wickedness from the production team.]

[I'm dying, ten minutes? I bet they won't even catch a single chicken.]

[Even though the director's setup is cliché, it's still a hilarious scene.]

Leo watched the chickens scatter, then turned to his sister with a wistful sigh. "I'll take care of all the dishes at lunch."

[Pfft, is Juztin conceding defeat before even starting the battle?]

[Such a doting brother.]

[Looks like Juztin has decided to shoulder it all, hahaha.]

Mirabella was scrolling through the live comments on her phone. Hearing Leo's voice, she pocketed the device, looked up with her sparkling eyes, raised an eyebrow, and said, "They're just chickens."

Leo opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, Mirabella had already rolled up her sleeves with a calm determination.

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As Mirabella's words fell, the camera next to her immediately zoomed in on her.

She was tall and slender, clad in casual athletic wear, her nonchalant sleeve-rolling exuding a cool charm. Her ponytail cascaded over her shoulders in a carefree tumble, and the black mask hid most of her face, leaving only her deep eyes to sweep slowly over the camera before retreating.

That shot sent the live stream's chat into overdrive.

[OMG, that girl is fierce. Those eyes are killer!]

[Did she just diss the idea of slaughtering a chicken? I swear I heard disdain.]

[LOL, Juztin's getting the cold shoulder.]

Leo followed his sister, touching his nose self-consciously,

"Nope," Mirabella said coolly, not even bothering to look up.

You ever butcher a chicken?"

The yard was large, and the show's producers had provided only a few chickens. With the other guests chasing around, the whole place was a chaotic mess.

Mirabella pointed to two unclaimed chickens in the corner and tilted her head towards Leo. "Which one do you want?"

Leo's eyelids twitched. "Uh... either is fine." The main thing was catching one.

"Alright." Mirabella nodded, her tone as light and breezy as if catching chickens was just a walk in the park for her.

[Ah, so fake. Just look at Hans and Gabriel over there. They wouldn't dare talk like that. This is just for show.]

[Are you a hater or what? Can't stand people like that.]

[Go, girl! It's okay if you can't catch one. Your brother will help with the dishes.]

Meanwhile, Wyatt was glued to his phone, watching the live stream of Mirabella and Leo's channel. He frowned at some of the negative comments. "These fans don't know squat. Ms. Mirabella's hands are too precious for this. They think a chicken is worth her time?"

Sitting beside him, Curtis twitched his lip in distaste, casting a side glance at Wyatt. This guy was seriously too much, becoming Ms. Mirabella's fanboy.

"I gotta back her up." Wyatt hit the gift section as he spoke and spammed dozens of virtual roses, quickly drowning out the negative comments.

Curtis glanced at Wyatt's screen. "A few dozen roses, and you call that support?" The rose splurge was not even worth two hundred bucks. So much for being a superfan.

Wyatt touched his nose sheepishly. "I'm broke."

Curtis. "Yeah right."

James leaned back on the sofa, his phone resting on his knees. His eyes casually drifted, and his pale fingers tapped lightly on the screen.

"A hundred rockets? Where did this big spender come from?" Wyatt exclaimed.

A rocket was worth a fortune in virtual currency and a hundred of them... Wyatt instinctively looked over at James sitting across from him.

James' serene face showed no emotion.

Maybe Wyatt was overthinking it, so he turned his attention back to his phone.

The mystery big spender's rockets eclipsed the roses in an instant. The live stream was abuzz with the sudden influx of gifts, and Leo's channel's popularity soared.

Mirabella was oblivious to the commotion online, her gaze sweeping the yard before settling on a basket piled against the wall. She strode over, picked one up with one hand, and headed straight for the chicken she had her eye on.

Leo followed silently, watching his sister with the basket, not even approaching the chicken. Then, with a graceful arc, she tossed the basket into the air.

And then... Leo's expression froze.

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A minute later, Mirabella came strutting over, clutching a chicken like it was no big deal.

Leo snapped back to reality, gazing at the chicken in his sister's grasp. After a long pause, he finally managed to say, "You're something else."

With a nonchalant arch of her eyebrow, Mirabella carried the chicken towards the kitchen, radiating pure confidence.

Leo didn't follow. Instead, he pondered for a couple of seconds before lifting his gaze toward the basket Mirabella had flung with such ease. He strolled over to it. Reaching out, he tried to emulate his sister's effortless lift and throw of the basket. However... the moment Leo lifted the basket with one hand, he was taken aback by its weight.

The basket wasn't excessively heavy, but... how did Mirabella manage to toss it so lightly? And with just one hand?

[Pfft, what's Jzutin up to now?]

[I get the feeling he's trying out the move his sis just pulled off.]

[Go on, Juztin, let's see you chuck that basket as she did.]

Leo glanced at the camera and, as if nothing had happened, he used his other hand to hoist the basket up, awkwardly carrying it back to its original spot, his movements a tad clumsy.

"Everything in its right place," he muttered, straightening his back and heading towards the kitchen. "Ah, it's my sister's first time prepping a chicken."

[Hahaha, I'm dying. I bet Juztin totally wanted to toss that basket.]

['Everything in its right place,' did your image just crumble?]

[What a twist, LOL.]

The kitchen was spacious, with an old-fashioned wood stove, as no gas was available in the countryside. By the time Leo entered the kitchen, Mirabella was already kindling a fire under a pot of water.

He silently observed the chicken already prepared at the side, then squatted down by the stove like his sister had. "Let me do the fire," he offered.

Mirabella glanced up. "You know how?"

That shut Leo up pretty quickly.

Il can feel Juztin's introversion through the screen.]

[Sister: You know how? Juztin: I...]

(Juztin's ego is taking a hit.)

(It's amazing. How does his sister know how to do all these chores so well?)

[Country bumpkin, obviously.]

Before long, the pot was boiling. Mirabella grabbed a nearby basin, dumped the prepped chicken into it, and then ladled the steaming water over the bird.

At that moment, the other three groups of guests had only just managed to catch their chickens. They fell silent upon seeing Leo's team already plucking feathers..

Heather came to her senses and said wistfully, "I wish I had a sister who could do everything."

Hans glanced at Heather and quipped, "Maybe in your dreams."

[Haha, Hans is so savage.]

[Heather's cousin: I may not be all-powerful, but I'm super cute.]

[A nanny can do it all.]

Checking his watch, Hans exclaimed, "Shoot, we're gonna end up as dishwashers for the crew today."

As Hans spoke, Mirabella had already plucked the chicken clean, rinsed it under a tap, and placed it in a clean basin.

Mission accomplished.

Seeing this, Hans and his partner panicked, hurriedly grabbing knives to start on their chickens – anything to avoid coming in last.

Gabriel and his brother quietly moved to the side, leaving Heather and her cousin standing there, exchanging awkward glances. Her cousin cast a look down at the chicken in her hands, then approached Leo tentatively and, with the utmost politeness, asked. "Jzutin, could you lend us a hand, please?"

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Leo always played it cool around strangers. He casted a brief glance at his sister, who had just wiped her fingers clean with a napkin, then fell silent for a couple of beats before looking away.

His gaze shifted to Heather and her cousin. They were in the middle of a live broadcast, which made it harder to decline. Heather seemed nice enough, so he said, "I might not be a pro at carving pumpkins," he said with a shrug, "but I can give it a shot."

Mirabella shot Leo a look that was rich with disdain. There was a stool nearby. She sauntered over to it, plopped down, and pulled out her smartphone.

Heather's cousin, Michelle, caught Leo's drift—the chicken was obviously his sister's handiwork. Michelle lifted her gaze to Mirabella, who showed no intention of lending a hand. With a slight drop of her eyes, Michelle decided not to push it. She nodded at Leo with a soft voice, "Thank you, that would be great."

At that moment, the comments section started to bubble up.

[Why's Jzutin's sister like that? She heard Heather's cousin ask for help, and she just sat there scrolling on her phone. She's seriously lacking some social cues, right?]

[It's such a simple thing to do, and yet she's making her brother, who's clueless about it, take over. Not cool of the sister... tsk.]

[Seems like there's a bit of tension, but it's normal for her not to help. After all, her cousin didn't ask her directly.]

[Some folks are so weird. Why should the sister have to help? Can't you see Jzutin doesn't really want her to either?]

[Right, he's just being protective of his sister and reluctantly agreed to avoid being rude. Don't push the blame onto her.]

can't stand people like Michelle, knowing full well it's Juztin's sister's job but still purposely asking him. What's the subtext here, hmm?]

Mirabella sat on the stool, legs casually crossed, and the live stream comments scrolling on her phone's screen. She glanced at them without much concern. She shook her head as she watched Leo, who seemed to be making more of a mess than progress, and withdrew her attention.

Deal with your own commitments.

Her screen lit up with a Messenger notification, and Mirabella tapped it.

Jenna: [Queen Mira, how can you let your brother deal with the chicken? Doesn't your heart hurt for him?]

The Pill: [Oh, and was your heart hurting when I was doing it just now?]

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Jenna: [Believe it or not, I'm about to expose you in the live stream!]

The Pill: (Think before you speak.)

Jenna retracted a message.

Jenna: (Listen, that Michelle is annoying. Don't let her leech off your brother's popularity.)

Mirabella looked up, eyeing Michelle, who occasionally got close to Leo, and narrowed her eyes. Then, she suddenly stood and approached them.

Leo, still holding the butcher knife, paused when he noticed his sister coming over,

“Give me the knife,” Mirabella said coolly.

Obediently, Leo handed it to her.

Michelle was still holding the pumpkin, and when she saw Mirabella, she offered a grateful smile.

“Thanks.”

“Mhm.” Mirabella nodded once, taking the knife and making a quick gesture as if she were a chef about to fillet a fine cut, the blade glinting in the light. She then turned to Michelle. “Hold it steady.”

Leo was standing by her side and felt an odd twinge in his heart at his sister’s action. It was as if she radiated a silent threat.

Michelle initially wanted to pass the chicken over to Mirabella directly, but hearing her command, she braced herself and pressed the chicken down onto the stone countertop, “Is this okay?”

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Mirabella glanced over. “Oh, sure, no problem.”

Michelle took a deep breath and was about to turn away when she saw Mirabella in front of her, swiftly swinging her arm, a knife in hand. The next second, Michelle felt something warm splatter onto her face.

Michelle’s eyes snapped open.

Everyone who witnessed the scene froze.

“Ah, sorry about that,” Mirabella said, putting down the knife and fishing a tissue out of her pocket. She only pulled out one and handed it over, “I’ve only done this once before.”

Michelle was wearing a white coat, and now her face, collar, and pants were all splattered with blood. She looked at Mirabella, who seemed apologetic but didn’t genuinely appear to be sorry.

Michelle’s expression soured slightly, but mindful of the live broadcast, she mustered a forced smile and said with faux generosity, “No, no worries.”

She lowered her gaze, not taking the tissue from Mirabella, and turned to the host to excuse herself to clean up, quickly walking away.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow, feeling not the slightest bit embarrassed as she used the tissue to wipe her fingers.

In the live stream chat,

[OMG, that was totally on purpose.]

(You ask my brother to carve a turkey, and you get a face full of ‘blood,’ lol. I can totally see the boss–lady vibes on Juztin’s little sister.)

[Jeez, Michelle gets splashed, and you only gave her one tissue? Who does that?]

[This country bumpkin should be kicked off the show.]

(This girl is badass, keeping all those fame–hungry flies away from her brother.)

[Some people have no shame trying to cling to the spotlight. I’m glad my girl handled it like a pro!]

Beside them, Heather's gaze flitted across Mirabella, who was untouched by any blood, her eyes devoid of warmth. She didn't believe for a second it wasn't intentional.

A few minutes later, Michelle returned, her clothes changed, and blood wiped clean from her face. It was a good thing she had packed an extra outfit, expecting the rustic setting.

Because of the delay caused by Michelle's wardrobe change, the first task of carving had been concluded, leaving Heather and Michelle in last place.

Faced with the host's merciless announcement, Heather sighed to the camera, "Alas, the crew

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has finally struck against us delicate flowers, so heartless."

"Heather, It's all my fault for the delay. I'll take care of the dishes for lunch," Michelle said, looking genuinely upset.

Is it just me, or does that sound like a loaded statement?)

[If it weren't for Juztin's sister pulling that stunt, Michelle's team wouldn't be last, would it?)

[She didn't plan to help at first, then changed her mind midway... Hah, talk about playing games.]

[If she did not help, you say Juztin's sister was clueless; she helped, and now she's playing. games. Some people just love to nitpick for fun.]

[Serves you right for involving the wrong person.]

Controversy always spiked the ratings, and the live stream's popularity soared once again. Backstage, Walker was very pleased with the outcome. If the guests were always harmonious. there'd be no drama

to watch. Justin's sister seemed rather interesting. Walker pondered for a moment, planning to give her more screen time.

Come lunchtime, all the guests were seated in the yard around a long table, eagerly anticipating the show's catering.

"I wonder what lavish lunch you have in store for us." Sitting next to Mirabella, Hans propped his chin with one hand as he struck up a conversation.

Engrossed in her phone, Mirabella responded without looking up. "I've got a hunch it won't be that lavish."

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Hans furrowed his brow and turned to Mirabella, "Why so?"

"Just a pattern," Mirabella said nonchalantly, her delicate features betraying a casual indifference.

"At least that's better than us. We're stuck with the standard issue of pickles and cornbread," Hans lamented with a sigh, then glanced over at Mirabella's phone screen. "Hey, what game are you playing?"

"Chicken Farm."

Her words brought an immediate pause to the group gathered around the table. A sense of dread, ruled by the morning's challenges, surged forth. Michelle's face couldn't help but stiffen a bit as her fingers curled on her lap.

Heather glanced at her cousin and then, with a smile, suddenly asked. "You look quite young, dear. Still in school, I presume? High school?"

"Yeah," Mirabella answered succinctly, her tone polite.

Heather hummed in response and casually inquired further, “No weekend tutoring, then?” The implication was clear: What was a high school student doing at an event like this instead of studying?

Finally lifting her head, Mirabella met Heather’s gaze with a smile, “Never needed extra lessons.”

The chat exploded with comments.

[Never needed extra lessons? Does that mean she’s a genius or just beyond help academically?]

[Love the confidence, so cool]

[Here comes the show-off again.]

Heather was momentarily dazzled by her smile and felt a twinge of discomfort, but she maintained her grin. “It sounds like you must be quite the student.”

“More or less,” Mirabella brushed off the compliment.

Leo, sitting silently beside his sister, watched the exchange. He was well accustomed to Mirabella’s habit of downplaying her abilities.

“By the way. Jzutin.” Heather turned her attention to Leo, her tone laced with concern, “there were some rumors online about you being injured... that’s not true, is it?”

Bringing up such a topic during the show seemed a bit too deliberate, but given the recent online buzz, it went largely unchallenged. Everyone present, as well as the fans watching the live stream, were eager to know the truth.

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Leo pursed his lips, his cool and handsome demeanor unchanged. His hand tapped the table as he spoke. "If I were injured, Walker probably wouldn't have invited me to join this show."

Heather's eyes flickered. She laughed it off with a. "Of course, what was I thinking? But there's no truth to the Neon Paradox's breakup rumors, right?"

The question hit like a bombshell.

Hans and Gabriel exchanged surprised glances. Asking about the Injury was already a bit. thoughtless, but now this?

Leo didn't answer. He just gave Heather a look. The air thickened with awkwardness.

Heather seemed oblivious to the inappropriateness of her question and added, "Neon Paradox has been around for years. It'd be such a shame if you guys disbanded."

The silence was taken as confirmation. Immediately, the live chat erupted.

[No way, if Neon Paradox disbands, what's left of my years of fandom?]

[Justin says he's not injured but didn't address the breakup. Looks like he's going solo for real.] (It's sad. Once some people get famous, they just kick their former mates to the curb. So cold.) [No wonder he didn't clear the air before. This is really disappointing.]

Mirabella glanced at the chat, her fingertips grazing her phone. She looked up at Heather, her expression unreadable.

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Heather seemed oblivious to the sharp look Mirabella was giving her. After a beat, she realized she might have stepped on a landmine. "Ah, shoot, I'm sorry. I don't know how I got onto that subject."

Swiftly changing tack, Heather turned to Michelle sitting beside her. "Michelle, which high school did you go to before?"

Michelle lifted her head. Her makeup was perfectly applied. "Oh, it was Parkside High School."

"Parkside High School, top five in the nation, eh? You're quite the achiever, girl," Hans interjected with a chuckle, smoothly steering away from the uncomfortable topic Heather had inadvertently brought up.

Michelle offered a modest smile. Her lips were barely parting. "It was nothing, I suppose. That's all behind me now."

After a brief pause, Michelle turned her attention to Mirabella. "Which high school are you attending? If it's Parkside as well, we might have crossed paths. I was on the student council." Her comment carried a hint of a boast. Being on the student council at Parkside High School was a badge of honor, a sign that teachers had recognized you as one of the best and

brightest.

Before Mirabella could respond, Leo spoke up in her defense. "Then I'm sure you two have never met."

Michelle raised an eyebrow. "Oh? So, Mirabella didn't attend Parkside?!"

Leo sat up a little straighter. His pride was almost tangible. "No, what I mean is, my sister never bothered with such trivial clubs."

Michelle's face stiffened momentarily.

Leo continued, undeterred, "Though she's often in the mix when it comes to competitions." Competitions were the realm of the truly capable students.

[Pfft, Michelle's turning green with envy.]

[Haha, Leo is so proud of his sister. She doesn't care for student councils, just acing competitions.]

(So is she a Parkside High School student after all?)

[Anyone from Parkside High School? Recognize your top dog?]

[I'm from Parkside, but... doesn't ring a bell.]

[Probably just a narrative setup, boring.]

[No way, our girl gotta be a champion.]

The chat quickly moved on, and the previous comments were lost in a sea of new messages.

After her small defeat, Michelle withdrew to her phone, disengaging from the conversation.

That was when the host came in, carrying two nondescript but stylish paper bags, placing them on the table.

Hans eyed the bags curiously. "Feels like it could be a gourmet meal from a five-star hotel."

Gabriel, who rarely chimed in, added, "Too bad it's not for us."

Hans shot him a look. "Ouch, bro. That hits where it hurts."

In full view of everyone, the host slowly pulled out two drinks, a pair of burgers, a side of fries, and an assorted snack platter from the bags.

Pushing the food towards Mirabella and Leo, the host announced with deadpan seriousness, "Five-star dining is out of the question, but a KFC Deluxe lunch spread – that, our show can afford."

Everyone was flabbergasted.

[Pfft, this is the deluxe lunch?]

[I was ready with forks and knives, and you give me this??]

[I can't help but laugh.]

[Mr. Director, how much did KFC slip into your pocket?]

[My girl's intuition is spot on!]

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Hans glanced over at Mirabella with a playful smirk. "Don't tell me you swiped the director's script when we weren't looking?" Why else would she have made that quip about her gut feeling that things weren't going to be too fancy when he had asked earlier?

Caught off-guard, Mirabella blinked in confusion before responding. "I'm broke. I can't afford to bribe the director."

Hans let out a snort of laughter.

[No, she didn't snag the director's script behind your backs. She's been sneakily reading the live comments.]

(Suddenly finding her so adorable.)

Hans cleared his throat and, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, said, “Young lady, time to dig into your lavish lunch.”

[LOL, Hans is up to no good.]

[Quick, take off the mask and chow down.]

Mirabella shot Hans a sidelong look, then stood up, grabbing a burger and a soda. “I think I’d rather go and slip a thank-you card with a little something to the director.”

Mirabella didn’t wait for a response and started walking out of the yard.

The cameraman made to follow her but stopped when the director’s voice came through his earpiece, instructing him otherwise.

As soon as Mirabella stepped out, Collins approached her from where he had been waiting.

Mirabella turned off her headset. “Collins.”

“How’s it going?” Collins asked with a smile, having also tuned into the live stream. He had noticed that Mirabella was truly a gem, especially with her impressive coping skills.

Mirabella pulled down her mask for a moment to sip her drink and replied, “Not bad.” After a brief pause, she inquired, “So, who is Heather exactly?”

She must have some clout to brazenly ask about Leo live on air, and both Hans and Gabriel seemed to treat her with respect. A nobody couldn’t pull that off, right?

Collins guessed why she was curious and answered, “Rumor has it she comes from a pretty influential family, some big clan or other. I don’t mingle much with them, so I haven’t paid much attention.”

Mirabella nodded thoughtfully.

“But you and Leo should probably give her a wide berth,” Collins added.

“Got it,” Mirabella responded coolly.

After her meal, Mirabella put her mask back on and returned to the yard.

The challenges the production team set in the afternoon proved even more tricky than the morning’s tasks. By the end of the day, everyone was thoroughly wiped out. The live recording wrapped up at five o’clock.

The first live session was a hit, with the popularity and buzz surpassing the director’s

expectations, especially regarding the enigmatic Mirabella who quickly became a highlight of the show.

Following the live stream, several entertainment networks reached out to Walker.

After the broadcast ended, Mirabella, Leo, and Collins headed back to Ashford. It was past nine when they arrived home.

“I swear, my girl is a jack-of-all-trades. You absolutely killed it on the show!” Delilah gushed, sitting beside Mirabella, massaging her hands while beaming with pride. She had been glued to the live stream all day and even got her coworkers hooked on it. It was the weekend, after all, so no harm done.

Leo, feeling a tad overlooked, chimed in, “And what about me?”

Before Delilah could answer, Shawn jumped in with a disdainful snort. “What did you even do? Besides lounging around and being dead weight, you were practically invisible. If I were you, I’d be too embarrassed to even ask.” You could tell someone’s standing in the family just by the tone of voice.

Leo, feeling the sting of those words, thought to himself, "So, the only real child in this house is my sister, huh? The rest of us must be adopted."

Heh, suddenly the idea of running away from home didn't seem so bad.