

The Double 351

Chapter 351

He lifted his gaze to his youngest son, only to see a look of utter cluelessness on the boy's face. Shaking his head, he let out a sigh, "Ignorance truly is bliss, isn't it?"

Asher's cheeks flushed with a hint of annoyance at the unexpected scolding. "Well, of course." he retorted. "My brother is a mid-level pharmacist with the Pharmacists' Guild. He can barely churn out three or four pills at a time. Someone cranking out a dozen or more in one go? That screams fishy to me."

In the world of potion-making, a higher yield meant less waste of ingredients. A low yield, on the other hand, indicated profligacy. But perfect yields every single time? That was unheard of. Hearing Asher's words, Nikolai shook his head once more. "Naivete!" he exclaimed. Without the patience to explain the intricacies to such a lost cause, Nikolai strode off towards his own

quarters.

Left standing there, Asher scratched his head, looking puzzled at his father's retreating figure. After a moment's thought, he pulled out his cellphone and dialed his brother.

The call connected quickly.

"Hey, I've got a question for you. Is it even possible for a real pharmacist to whip up a batch of twenty pills in one go?" Asher's voice was earnest.

On the other end of the line, his brother furrowed his brows. "Are you joking? Even asking that is laughable!"

Just as Asher had expected, even his brother agreed. So Asher relayed the day's events to his

brother in brief.

“Look, don’t sweat it. Dad’s probably just saying that in front of James. You took him seriously? Forget it. I’m busy, gotta go,” his brother dismissed before hanging up.

Asher pocketed his phone, reflecting on how the Reeves family owed their status to his brother’s standing within the Pharmacists’ Guild. A mere girl wasn’t worth the fuss.

In the car.

“Back at the Reeves residence, I heard you mention incense crafting. Do you know how to make it?” James’ eyebrows lifted slightly, and his voice was light but laden with curiosity.

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Mirabella felt a pang of something at his question. She had forgotten that she had previously denied any knowledge of incense crafting to him, even sending him a link to a incense shop online.

And speaking of incense, Wyatt, who had been eavesdropping from the driver’s seat, suddenly remembered the mountain of incense sticks still piled in his bedroom. They were enough to

last three years.

Wyatt’s feelings became complicated in a flash. Ms. Mirabella was quite the prankster.

Clearing her throat, Mirabella responded, “Incense crafting? No, I can’t do that. I just mix up some herbal remedies from time to time.”

“Heh,” James chuckled softly.

Mirabella turned her head to gaze out the car window, shifted in her seat, and remarked, “I’m really tired. I need to rest for a bit. Wake me when we get home.” After saying that, she pulled the hood of her sweatshirt over her head, leaned back in her seat, and closed her eyes.

James' lips twitched with a wry smile as he glanced at her but ultimately decided not to pursue the conversation. After all, what was the point? The kid was hardly going to spill the beans, always playing her cards close to the chest.

Up front, Wyatt silently turned off the car stereo.

By the time they reached the gated community, the clock had struck past ten. Crafting potions had taken a toll on Mirabella, so she indeed fell asleep during the ride.

When the car pulled up outside the Davis family mansion, Mirabella was still sleeping. Wyatt turned to say something, but a raised hand from James silenced him, and he cut the engine.

Without waking his companion, James too closed his eyes, and the black car sat quietly outside the mansion.

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In the villa, Zach had just finished showering and strolled over to the window with the intention of drawing the curtains closed. However, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of a black sedan parked not far from the front door, with its engine off and silent in the night.

He eyed the vehicle with a hint of suspicion before shrugging it off and pulling the curtains shut.

Feeling a bit parched, he left his room and headed downstairs to grab a bottle of water from the fridge.

Shawn was still lounging in the living room, engrossed in the late-night show flickering on the TV. Zach sauntered over and flopped down on the couch beside him, asking, "Why aren't you watching TV in your room? It's getting late."

Shawn glanced at Zach, with a hint of concern shadowing his features. "Your sister hasn't come home yet."

Zach's brow furrowed in surprise. "What? Mira's not back yet?" As far as he was concerned, his sister was a veritable bookworm. Post-dinner, she'd typically vanish into her room to hit the books. Trying to talk her into a shopping spree was like trying to move a mountain.

She was always home before ten – reliably, predictably. A genuine goody two-shoes.

"Yeah, I tried calling her, but no answer. No clue what she's up to," Shawn sighed. A father's worry etched deeper lines into his face. She'd left a note saying she might be late, but silence had followed.

Zach patted his pockets, remembering his phone was upstairs. "I'll go up and grab my phone."

He thundered back upstairs and quickly dialed Mirabella's number, only to be greeted by the endless ring of an unanswered call. Frowning, he pulled back the curtains, stepped out onto the balcony, and

once again, his gaze landed on the black sedan parked outside.

Who the heck parked in front of their house?

He glanced at the car a few more times, decided not to concern himself with it, and leaned against the balcony railing while shooting a few messages to Mirabella on Messenger.

Five minutes later, still no reply.

Clutching his phone, Zach contemplated setting a new house rule with his parents, a curfew that didn't allow anyone to come home past eight, especially his sister.

As he turned back, his eyes casually swept over the driveway. That was when he saw the car's headlights flick on. He didn't want to pry, but then the car door opened, and a familiar figure stepped out, accompanied by a man whose face was hidden in the shadows. Zach's eyes went wide.

Holy crap, that was Mirabella!

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Gripping his phone, Zach dashed inside. He pounded down the stairs. His face was pale and tense.

Shawn watched his son make a second frantic trip up and down the stairs. And his expression was strangely alarming. "Zach, what's up? Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

Zach, fuming, didn't even pause. "I'll be right back."

Shawn was left staring after him. This didn't look like a boy stepping out for a moment; this looked like someone ready to start a rumble.

What on earth was riling him up this late at night? Shawn shook his head and decided to let it

90. 90.

Zach flung open the front door and bolted out, reaching the entrance just as Mirabella swiped her card, and the door swung open.

She nearly collided with Zach, taking a moment to register the scene before her. As it dawned on her, she noticed his face, red with anger, and he was still wearing the pristine slippers from indoors. She asked with a frown, "Zach, what's wrong? Are you going out?"

Zach glared at his sister with tight lips, then quickly turned to look behind her. "Where's the car? And that weird guy?"

Mirabella was taken aback. Her face was a mask of confusion.

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Zach ignored his sister's confusion and stepped outside the front door, scanning the street left and right, but there was no sign of any black sedan.

Puzzled, Mirabella touched her nose and turned to face Zach. "Zach, what car, what weird people are you talking about?"

"I saw everything!" Zach huffed, walking back towards her.

"What did you see?" Mirabella paused, then recalling the recent events. She realized what he meant. "Are you talking about the car that dropped me off?"

Zach nodded, "Yeah, and there was a guy!" That was the main point.

After a moment's thought, he added, "That car must've been parked in front of our house for at least ten minutes."

Well, she didn't need to guess what Zach had misunderstood. Mirabella spread her hands. Her gaze was clear and direct. "What if I told you it was just a friend? Would you believe me?"

"Of course, I believe what my sister says." But he wouldn't put the same trust in anyone else. After all, his sister was so pretty, so charming, so innocent – what if some no-good jerk tried to take advantage of her?

Mirabella nodded, "Good, let's go back inside." After saying that, she headed back into the

house.

Zach was momentarily stunned. Was that it? No further explanation? He glanced outside one more time, then reluctantly closed the door and followed her in.

Once inside...

"Mira, you are home," Shawn noted, not as suspicious as his son had been.

"Why are you still up, Dad?" Mirabella asked as she poured herself a glass of water.

"I was waiting for you to come home before I hit the hay." Shawn yawned, and then said, "I'm heading to bed now. You kids should get some sleep too."

Shawn took a few steps, then turned back to glance at Zach, whose expression seemed a bit sour. Shaking his head, Shawn made his way upstairs.

Mirabella took a sip of water and felt Zach's gaze on her like a shadow since she had entered the house. Placing down the glass, she rubbed her forehead with a sense of resignation. "Zach, this is only going to hurt our sibling bond."

Zach perked up, "There's a way to not hurt our bond."

Mirabella glanced at him, staying silent. It seemed she was saying, "You're asking for a punch." Somehow, Zach picked up that unspoken sentiment from just that one look from his sister.

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Clearing his throat, he approached and laid

w his rules, "From now on, you need to be home by 8 PM. It's not safe for a girl to be out alone. If you're going somewhere, you can call me, and I'll pick you up."

Mirabella watched him silently. When Zach felt her gaze, his once confident stance wavered, and his eyes shifted. "Just... never accept rides from strange men, okay?"

Mirabella shook her head. "I'm going to my room, Zach."

Without another word and no desire to hear any more lectures, she turned and headed upstairs. Zach, undeterred, followed close behind. "Miras, you gotta understand, there are too many con artists out there. You're young. Don't get taken in by sweet-talking strangers."

Mirabella's pace quickened.

"And another thing I've been meaning to tell you. Those boys at school, stay away from them. They're all bad news..."

Zach continued his monologue right up to Mirabella's bedroom door, which promptly shut in his face, cutting off his protective tirade.

Zach stood there and felt speechless. Was being a big brother ever easy?

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The weekend rolled around once more, ushering in the second live broadcast of the hit show, "Country Comfort," nestled in the picturesque Harmony Point village.

Mirabella, as per her usual, was decked out in sporty gear, and to complement her, Leo rocked a matching athletic outfit. The tall and lean siblings stood side by side, oozing coolness with a vibe that screamed 'camera-ready. Of course, Mirabella's black face mask added an aura of mystery, drawing even more attention than her brother.

By half-past nine, they arrived at the set, joining the trio from last week's episode—Hans, Gabriel and Heather—who were all present and accounted for.

The show was now streaming live. Greetings were exchanged briskly as the host wasted no time revealing the morning's task. Soon, the crew hauled out four bushel baskets.

Catching sight of the baskets, Hans quipped, "For some reason, these baskets remind me of last week when Jzutin's sister was chasing chickens around."

A wry smile tugged at the corner of Mirabella's lips, cued by Hans' remark.

The host chuckled at Hans' observation. "You're not wrong, Hans. Same baskets, but today they've got a different purpose."

Heather faced the camera and let out an exaggerated sigh, "Looks like we're in for another day of shenanigans courtesy of the showrunners."

Gabriel chimed in with two words, "No doubt."

"Pretending I didn't hear that," the host playfully snorted and then pulled waterproof overalls from the baskets. "Alrighty, here's the deal for this morning's task."

Hans sauntered over, dead serious. "What are these? Wetsuits?"

[LOL, wetsuits. I can see the host's face cracking.]

[Hans' banter is legendary.]

[The host thinks: My life is too hard.]

Regaining composure, the host shot Hans a glare before continuing, "Correct, these are for going into the water, not diving...oops, I mean, they're waterproof overalls. For this morning's challenge, you will don these overalls and harvest lotus roots from the pond. The first team to fill their basket wins."

Hans spread his hands. "Alrighty, this task is tougher than last week's chicken ordeal. The show really isn't satisfied until they've put us through the wringer, huh?"

The host locked eyes with him silently, then purposefully placed the largest basket in front of Hans. "Congratulations, you played yourself."

Hans was stunned.

[LOL, the host is holding a grudge.]

[Hans: Why must I always tempt fate with my smart mouth?]

Before long, the teams were suited up in their waterproof gear, and with a seasoned lotus root farmer leading the way, they trekked to a sprawling lotus pond. On the water's edge, four small boats awaited, designated for the camera crew.

Before the challenge officially kicked off, everyone spent a good while learning the art of lotus root harvesting from the farmer, then split off into their respective teams.

Mirabella twisted her long ponytail into a tidy bun, pulled her mask up, and turned to Leo, "Got the hang of it yet?"

Leo nodded, though even if he hadn't, he'd claim he had. The chicken debacle from the last episode had already provided enough fodder for the fans. He couldn't afford to be the weak link in this lotus root digging challenge.

As if she hadn't seen his nod, Mirabella said in an unruffled tone, "No worries if you haven't. Just follow me and hold the basket." She had long since accepted Leo's 'good at nothing' approach to tasks.

Leo remained silent. A little respect for your brother, maybe?

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The water in the pond wasn't particularly deep, but trudging through the muck was another story.

Leo had barely taken two steps before he'd sunk in twice, and it was only with Mirabella's help that he was pulled free.

"Stick with me," Mirabella commanded, her voice low and steady, gripping Leo's arm. She sounded like the protective older sibling. It's like their roles were reversed.

Leo was feeling pretty downcast.

Meanwhile, in the live stream chat.

[LOL, she is such an alpha female. She's giving strong vibes here.]

[Did you catch that adorable, confused look on Juztin? Too cute!]

[Juztin, stand up for yourself, man! You're supposed to be the big brother, or your persona is going to crash and burn!!]

[Juztin's sister: You're only fit to ride my coattails to victory.]

[She rocks! Juztin, keep up with her!]

After 'a short walk, Mirabella stopped and said, "This is the spot. Let's get to work."

No sooner had she spoken than her hand plunged into the mud, and before you knew it, she'd unearthed a whole lotus root.

Leo remarked, "Wow, you're amazing. How did you get it in one go?" It looked surprisingly easy. Mirabella just arched her brow, and even behind her mask, her confidence was unmistakable.

Facing the camera, Leo suddenly turned and declared, "My sister is awesome, and I can do it too, believe in me!"

[Haha, we believe you.]

[Waiting for the epic fail.]

[Waiting for the facepalm moment.]

Leo, imitating his sister, bent over and reached into the muck, following the stem of the lotus leaf down. He tugged firmly, but all he managed to pull out was the stem. Not a hint of lotus root in sight.

The corner of Leo's mouth twitched, and he avoided looking at the camera, muttering, "First tries can go wrong. I'll get it next time."

Thus, after several attempts that yielded only stems, a local villager finally had to intervene, "Young man, please, have mercy on my crops. I need them to make a living."

Leo was so embarrassed. Yep, this reality show was full of malice towards him.

[Dude, just carry the basket for your sister, please. If you keep this up, we're going to unfollow you.]

[I can feel Jzutin's despair through the screen.]

[Typical country bumpkin, making farm work look easy.]

Eventually, Leo gave up and settled for carrying the basket – he'd been laid-back in the last episode, so there was no harm in doing it again.

Half an hour later, Leo could barely lift the basket. It was filled to the brim.

Mirabella watched him struggle, almost falling into the pond a few times, and just shook her head in silent judgment. After washing the mud from her hands, she effortlessly took the basket and carried it ashore.

Leo was speechless. It was as if they weren't carrying the same basket at all.

Back on dry land, Mirabella handed over their harvest. She watched at the other groups, who were all still busy digging.

Aside from Hans' group making some progress, Gabriel and Heather, especially Heather's team, had a pitiful two or three broken roots in their basket.

With their task complete, Mirabella and Leo each grabbed a stool and sat by the pond's edge, watching the others. The scene was so funny, and the live stream viewers nearly died of laughter.

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As the other groups wrapped up their tasks, the clock struck midnight, Heather's team, in a now familiar turn of events, had once again finished last.

Today's punishment for coming in last wasn't dish duty but cooking duty. This left Heather and her cousin Michelle, both of whom had never really cooked, utterly flabbergasted. Thankfully, with Hans and Gabriel lending a hand, they managed to cobble together a passable lunch.

Meanwhile, Mirabella hadn't lifted a finger to help in the kitchen. Instead, she sat idly in the backyard, having borrowed some paper and a pen from the production crew. Sprawled across the table with a nonchalant air, she began to tackle some questions.

The questions had been sent to her by the physics professor from Prestige College. They had connected on Messenger during the last competition, and ever since, he occasionally pinged her with challenging problems to mull over.

Initially, the production team hadn't planned on focusing the camera too much on Mirabella, but with viewers in the live chat constantly asking what the young girl was up to, the host felt compelled to check in.

"So, miss, are you working on some problems?" As the host spoke, the camera zoomed in for a close-up of the paper, filled with dense equations and formulas that were just gibberish at a glance.

"Whoa, I can't make heads or tails of this. Are high school problems this tough nowadays?" The host craned his neck, trying to make sense of the math, a look of bewilderment on his face.

The live chat began to buzz with activity.

[Wow, is she really doing homework now? Talk about a publicity stunt!]

[LOL, I don't get it at all. Did I attend a fake high school or something?]

[Isn't that a question from this year's freshman physics course at Prestige College? Didn't she say she was still in high school in the last episode? Why is she doing college-level work?]

[I don't understand the question, but her handwriting is strangely beautiful.]

[Yep, that's a college freshman question, and she's got it solved perfectly. This is seriously impressive if this wasn't part of the script.]

Leo pulled out his phone and glanced at the live chat before leaning in to whisper to his sister, “Hey, isn’t this a college–level problem?”

Without looking up, Mirabella hummed an affirmation.

Leo touched his nose and sighed internally. He should have gotten used to his sister’s extraordinary intellect by now.

Mirabella soon finished solving the problem and snapped a photo to send to the physics

professor.

Just then, Heather and the rest finally finished preparing lunch and came out with dishes and cutlery in hand. Noticing the crowd around Mirabella, Heather set down her dishes and approached. “What’s going on here, everyone?”

The host looked up at Heather, his voice laced with a hint of awe, “The younger generation is truly outdoing us. She can even solve college–level physics problems. Impressive.”

Heather looked puzzled for a moment before responding with surprise, “Really now?”

After a brief pause, she added with a smile, “Funny you should mention that. Michelle is actually a freshman in the physics department.”

Michelle, walking out with her own plate, caught the tail end of her cousin’s comment about being a physics student and shot her a curious glance.

Mirabella, ever the low–key genius, ignored Heather’s remarks and was about to crumple up the solved problems to throw them away.

Heather quickly interjected, “Hey, Michelle is a physics student. Why don’t you show her your work? If there’s anything you don’t understand, she could help you out.”

Turning to her cousin, Heather smiled, “Michelle, I remember your physics grades are pretty good, right?”

In a humble tone, Michelle replied, “Oh, they’re alright, nothing special.”

Heather raised an eyebrow. “Why don’t you help her out and take a look at what she’s solved?”

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Michelle paused for a second, then considered that Mirabella was just a high schooler and nodded. “Sure, that could work.”

Mirabella stopped her fidgeting with the crumpled paper in her hand and lifted her head to stare at the pair. A playful smirk was hidden beneath her mask. “Are you sure you want to see the problems I’ve been working on?”

Heather felt it was a tell-tale sign of covering something up, so she chuckled, “We could all benefit from sharing and learning together, right?”

Leo cast a sideways glance at Heather without a word.

“Alright then.” Mirabella smoothed out the wad of paper she had been toying with.

Michelle walked over and took the paper from Mirabella, her expression humble. “Even though physics isn’t exactly my strong suit, taking a look at a high school problem shouldn’t be a...” She didn’t get to finish the sentence; her voice suddenly cut off.

The viewers in the live stream began to flood the chat with messages as they noticed her

reaction.

[What's happening? Why has Michelle stopped talking?]

[Look's like she's in shock, doesn't it?]

[Seems like there's something profound about that problem on the paper. Did anyone manage to snap a screenshot of it?]

[A high school problem stumping a college student?]

[Haha, it feels like there's a awkward moment coming.]

Seeing her cousin's odd expression, Heather leaned in and asked, "What's wrong, Michelle?"

Michelle's grip on the paper faltered for a moment before she regained her composure and said, "This isn't a high school problem; it's a university-level physics research question, quite a tough one. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit I wouldn't know how to solve this one either. How did you come up with the solution?"

The implication was clear in her words. First, it seemed a bit fishy that a high school student like Mirabella was tackling university-level problems. Second, if Michelle, who specialized in physics at the university level, couldn't solve it, but Mirabella could, it suggested that Mirabella must have prepared the solutions in advance and brought them to the show to boast.

"You're doing university problems? Aren't you a high schooler?" Heather feigned surprise.

"Maybe she is just that much of a brainiac. After all, the students at Parkside High School are no slouches," Michelle said with a smile that thinly veiled her sarcasm.

Heather nodded. "True, there aren't many simple students around these days."

Hearing this exchange, Leo's face darkened in an instant, and he was about to stand up when someone grabbed his arm. He turned to look at his sister beside him.

Mirabella's eyes twinkled with mirth as she nonchalantly stood up and walked over to Heather. Standing tall in front of her, her presence was commanding, completely overshadowing

Heather's.

Heather met Mirabella's gaze, that innate clarity making her involuntarily step back, breaking eye contact after a few seconds.

"Weren't you a high school student once?" Mirabella asked earnestly.

Heather opened her mouth to reply but was cut off as Mirabella continued. "I guess I'm too blunt sometimes. To use your words, there really aren't many simple people around, especially those who think before speaking."

Mirabella laughed, then turned to Michelle. "And as for you, you don't tell me you can't even understand the Laplace equation?"

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When Mirabella hit Michelle with that retort, you could see Michelle's face flush a shade of pink that didn't come from her blush palette. Then, in a flash Mirabella was waving a sheet of paper in the air like a magic wand, schooling Michelle on the ways of Laplace. "—and that's the long and short of it, Michelle. You get all that?" Mirabella's voice had slowed to a creak reminiscent of a patient teacher explaining long division to a room full of wide-eyed third graders.

The explanation was so clear that even the folks hanging out in the livestream chat felt like they'd been enlightened in the span of a heartbeat

(Holy smokes, who were those trolls again saying the kid was just stirring the pot for attention? A high schooler schooling a college kid – if that's not legit, I don't know what is.)

[Do Heather and Michelle feel the burn yet?

(LOL, remember when Juztin's little sis was about to toss that paper, and some folks just had to kick her while she was down? And now— well tak about a cringy moment

(Girl, she is slaying, live tutorial style. Bye, bye, bye to the scrubs.)

Michelle and Heather, blissfully unaware of the savage commentary flying through the chat, were left speechless until Hans and Gabriel ever the peacemakers, smoothly changed the subject and eased the tension.

At that moment, Heather and Michelle realized that Mirabella was not to be trifled with. Though fuming inside, they wisely chose not to poke the bear again.

Come dinner time, Mirabella, true to form, wasn't joining the rest for a meal Just as she stepped out of the yard, a crew member from the production team approached her with an invitation to dine with them

backstage.

Mirabella pondered for a second and, seeing no harm, followed the staffer to the green room. There, Walker was distributing boxed meals when he spotted Mirabella. He gestured to the table, offering her a box that hadn't been touched, "Grab a seat. Let's eat together." The offer came with an unexpected warmth.

The crew member cast a puzzled glance at Walker, who was known for his cool demeanor and eccentric ways. Why the sudden change of heart for the young lady?

"Thanks," Mirabella replied, acknowledging the gesture with a nod and a polite smile as she removed her mask.

It was the first time Walker had seen her face clearly – beautiful and poised, the family

resemblance with Leo unmistakable.

“You’re wasting a pretty penny not being in show biz,” Walker commented after a moment’s pause.

Mirabella’s eyebrows arched slightly. “You’re not the first to say so.”

*Clearly, they’re people of taste,” Walker said, nodding solemnly.

A small smile played on Mirabella’s lips, but she said no more.

“Ever think about making an appearance on the show?” Walker inquired, looking up at her.

Mirabella shook her head without much deliberation, “No need. It would be too much of a hassle.” She paused, then added, “But you could consider reducing my screen time to the minimum.”

Hearing this, Walker’s expression became a mix of disbelief and intrigue. “Some people would kill for screen time, and you’re turning it down?”

“It’s not meaningful to me. I’m not part of the scene,” Mirabella said with a shrug, her honesty refreshing.

“What a shame!” Walker sighed. She had been a rock-solid presence on the show, sparking conversations left and right, yet had zero interest in the limelight.

Walker wasn’t one to push. “Alright, I got it,” he said, resigning himself to the fact. Maybe he’d just give Juztin a little extra screen time instead.

Mirabella bowed her head and continued her meal, the picture of tranquility amidst the backstage hustle.

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It wasn't long before Mirabella had polished off her meal and stood up, nodding at Walker with a smile. "Thanks for the treat today. That takeout was pretty good. It tasted almost like

something you'd get at a five-star hotel."

Walker cleared his throat and said, "Glad you liked it."

Mirabella didn't read too much into his words and soon left.

Once she was gone, Walker's assistant couldn't help but voice his curiosity. "Boss, why are you so polite to that girl?" Sure, her brother Juztin was a top-tier celeb, but that didn't warrant such special treatment, did it?

Walker gave his assistant a side glance and dropped a hint. "Why do you think our catering has been top-notch this season?"

The assistant had his 'aha' moment. Right, those who brought funding to the show were the big shots. They deserved the VIP treatment.

Back at the live stream set, it seemed that Walker had taken Mirabella's words from earlier to

heart. That afternoon, the cameras focused less on her, shining the spotlight more on Leo instead. Mirabella was quite pleased with this arrangement. After all, her brother was the real

star of the show.

Meanwhile, as the live show went on, a bombshell dropped elsewhere about Leo. [Neon Paradox's Juztin Accused of Plagiarizing Bandmate's Songs and Lyrics]

Leo had over a hundred million followers, so the news shook Twitter to its core. The company scrambled with marketing strategies, buying trending spots, and trying to downplay the news, but it was futile. The scandal only grew more heated.

After the live show ended, on the ride back to Ashford, Collins didn't dare tell Leo about the Twitter storm. Driving with a distracted mind, he nearly ran several red lights.

Mirabella noticed his unease and blurted out, "Collins, what's going on?"

Leo lifted his head, a trace of confusion on his face, and looked towards Collins at the wheel.

Collins gripped the steering wheel tighter, his face stretched into a forced smile. "Nothing

much."

Compared to a physical injury, plagiarism was a whole different ball game. One misstep could lead to an internet-wide backlash. While Collins trusted that his artist would never plagiarize, so many innocent celebrities had been maliciously slandered and never fully cleared their names. Even if cleared, their careers would always remain tainted.

"You two must be tired after a whole day of streaming. Just relax when we get home." Collins deflected.

11:42

you're acting kind of weird" Leo observed, frowning slightly.

Arabella raised an eyebrow and glanced at Collins again.

“No, not at all. You must be mistaken” Collins laughed it off.

“Really? I feel like you’re hiding something from me,’ Leo said skeptically.

Collins’ voice sounded more normal. “Don’t overthink it. If there was something, I would’ve told you by now”

Mirabella pulled out her phone and checked Twitter, Leo’s plagiarism scandal dominated the trending topics. She glanced at his Twitter page and noticed a slight drop in his follower count. She gave Collins a knowing look, understanding he probably wanted to keep Lea in the dark for

Then, turning to Leo, she said, “You worry too much. And let me borrow your phone for a sec.”

Without hesitation, Leo fished out his phone and handed it to her.

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Mirabella snatched up her phone, her gaze locked onto the screen with unwavering focus. Her fingers danced lightly across the surface, while Leo, sitting beside her, couldn’t for the life of him figure out what she was up to. His attention drifted to the world outside the car window.

After a short while, Mirabella handed the phone back to him. Leo took the device, glanced at the homepage, and, with a nonchalant shrug, pocketed the phone once more.

It was past ten when Collins’ SUV rolled to a gentle stop outside the Davis family’s sprawling estate.

“Leo, you head inside. I need a word with Collins,” Mirabella said, stepping out of the vehicle. Under the cloak of night, her expression was unreadable, her eyes betraying no emotion.

Leo shot his sister a quizzical look. “Is there something you can’t tell me?”

Mirabella simply arched an eyebrow. "Just do as I say."

Leo let out a resigned sigh and made his way into the mansion.

Once he was out of earshot, Mirabella returned to the SUV, opened the passenger door, and settled herself inside. "What's the deal with this Jay character?" she asked without preamble.

Collins looked taken aback for a moment before responding. "Did you catch something on Twitter?"

Mirabella tapped her fingers gently on her knees. "Yeah."

Collins fell silent, his expression darkening. "Jay's part of Neon Paradox, too. He and Leo used to be tight, but as Leo's fanbase grew, so did the rift between them..."

"A classic tale of envy turning ugly," Mirabella thought, summarizing the situation in her mind

within a minute.

"Leo would never rip off Jay's lyrics or music. They're part of the same band, so some stylistic overlap is natural. And honestly, Jay's talents don't hold a candle to Leo's," Collins scoffed.

Mirabella nodded, her voice even. "I believe that. But is there any chance Leo's work could've accidentally ended up in Jay's hands?"

Collins scratched his head. "Hard to say. They're in the same band, after all. And we're talking about new material that's still in the works."

"How do we prove that the new tracks are my brother's original creations?" Mirabella pressed.

Collins grimaced. "We'll need solid proof from both parties."

He paused, then continued, "What baffles me is that Jay's version seems even more polished than your brother's drafts. From what I've heard of Leo's work so far, it's nowhere near Jay's version. The fans are comparing the two and starting to lean towards Jay."

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Which meant the situation was turning against Leo.

Collins had faith in Leo's talent and knew the man's pride wouldn't allow for any imitation or theft. There had to be some trickery at play, but without evidence, Collins was at a loss.

Mirabella's eyes narrowed. "A knock-off will always be just that."

Collins let out a heavy sigh. "I'll keep working the social media angles and get the marketing teams on it. We can't let this blow up any further."

Mirabella turned to him. "Appreciate your efforts."

Collins waved it off. "It's nothing. And hey, try to keep Leo in the dark for now. When this all dies down, I'll break it to him."

"Alright," Mirabella agreed with a nod. "Call me if anything comes up."

With that, she stepped out of the SUV. But after a few paces, she spun around and tapped on the window.

Collins rolled it down, a puzzled look on his face as he met Mirabella's gaze.