

Extraordinary 671

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“So Michael was the composer. How could he possibly plagiarize work by a kid?”

“I bet the girl must have plagiarized Michael's melody upon hearing how great it is.”

“People nowadays sure have poor character.”

The audience, gladly enjoying the drama, began making various comments.

Michael finally grasped the situation.

That girl onstage plagiarized Sounds of Ranging Winds!

He glanced at Charlotte, then asked in a patronizing tone, “Girl, you could've contacted me if you liked the pieces I composed. As long as you have an authorization letter, you can absolutely perform it in a competition. Why must you plagiarize?”

His words painted Charlotte as a plagiarizer.

Charlotte never knew people could be that shameless.

Although she wanted to retort with a smirk, just like how Ashlyn would, she seemed to lack Ashlyn's dominance and was more on the soft side.

Even when she countered, she countered in a whisper, “I didn't plagiarize your work.”

She absolutely did not do that.

While she wished to stand up for herself confidently, her heart was thumping so hard while the voice in her head seemed to be luring her back in. Come back. Don't go outside...

She wanted to rid herself of the limitations, but the voice seemed to be stalking her as it constantly rang in her ear.

Her mind was blank, and the voice only ever grew in intensity and dominance.

“She couldn't have plagiarized this. If you want to make such a claim, you'll have to present evidence to prove that you composed the piece.”

Without warning, a husky voice rang throughout the theater.

The crowd turned to look in the direction where the voice came from. At the same time, a lean man

stood up slowly from his seat. He had handsome facial features and an aura that radiated warmth and heat like the sun on a summer beach.

Joseph Field?

Someone recognized the man.

All of them were quite surprised.

Joseph was the mayor's son and was notorious for his terrifyingly tactlessness.

It was unthinkable that he would come to a girl's defense.

The situation seemed unbelievable no matter how one looked at it.

Ashlyn glanced at Joseph. Surprise, surprise. I never knew he could be this dependable!

As part of the panel of judges, she couldn't sit out of the situation.

Michael is cunning as hell. Even if he plagiarizes other people's work, he would never admit it. Besides, he has so many students. He would never admit to doing something that could tarnish his reputation.

Ashlyn walked up to him. "Mr. Underwood, since you accuse Charlotte of having committed plagiarism, you need to present evidence to prove it."

Having got a call from Hera, Michael came prepared.

He immediately retrieved a faded paper from his pocket.

"She couldn't have plagiarized this. If you want to make such a claim, you'll have to present evidence to prove that you composed the piece."

The piece of white paper had become faded and worn. It was even giving off a moldy smell.

Judging from the looks of it, the paper was aged.

"This is the manuscript from me composing the melody quite some years ago, so it's very old," Michael stated impassively.

Ashlyn showed the manuscript to the panel of judges, who passed it around among themselves.

After going through it, Ryan said, "It sure seems like an original manuscript."

Michael looked pleased when he heard that.

"Where's your evidence?" Ashlyn turned to Charlotte.

Charlotte was in a gown, so she didn't have her phone. Biting her lip, she waved at Joseph, who marched up to her and handed her her phone.

When his heated palm brushed past her cold fingertips, she felt a tingling sense of warmth that reached her heart.

Then, she heard him say, "Don't be afraid."

Charlotte took a deep breath before tapping into her photo gallery on her phone. She had always been using the same brand of phone, so she could always access photos she took in the past as soon as she logged in with her ID, even if she changed phones.

The Field family bought her a new phone after she left the Fraser family, so she managed to get her old photos back.

She found the photo of her manuscript and showed it to the panel of judges.

Laylah was the first to cry in shock. "Gosh! What's going on?"

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Ashlyn and Ryan exchanged glances before turning to look at the photo on the phone.

They were stunned when they saw the manuscript shown in the photo.

Michael's confident expression stiffened. What was going on? Was there a problem with the photo?

Hera felt her heart in her mouth when she saw the facial expressions of the panel of judges.

She needed to know the answer urgently because she couldn't wait to see Charlotte humiliated by Michael.

However, she could not see anything from the audience seat. Thus, she could only wait with bated breath.

After some time, the judges passed the phone to the host.

The host was also stunned when she saw the photo on the phone.

She placed the phone in front of the camera and faced its screen toward the camera lens directly.

"My goodness! The evidence provided by contestant Charlotte is a photo on the phone. The manuscript

in the photo looks to be identical to Mr. Underwood's manuscript. However, Charlotte's manuscript looks very clean and brand new. On the other hand, Mr. Underwood's manuscript looks slightly yellowed with age," the host exclaimed in shock loudly.

When the photo was cast onto the large screen, everyone present stared at the comparison with wide eyes.

The two manuscripts were the same. The only difference was one was new, while the other was older.

"Good heavens! How is this possible?"

"Why is this happening?"

Hera was also shocked as she stared at the screen intently.

"How is this possible? Charlotte, where did you steal this manuscript from? You must've seen Mr. Underwood's manuscript and secretly taken a picture. You went back to practice in private and came here to accuse Mr. Underwood of plagiarizing this tune, thereby claiming you're the one who composed this piece!" Hera disparaged Charlotte loudly, acting as if she was a defender of justice.

All the people present stared at the comparison of the two manuscripts in disbelief. It was truly unbelievable.

All eyes were squarely focused on Charlotte and Michael.

Michael smiled in a way that he personally considered elegant. With a hint of helplessness in his tone, he said, "Young lady, I appreciate your desire to become famous. After all, we all want to become pianists with extraordinary achievements. However, you should not take such shameful shortcuts. The best shortcut in the world is putting in your hard work."

His words clearly did not carry any hint of anger and agitation at being plagiarized.

The audience could not help but nod their heads in approval. "No wonder he's a famous musician. This refined behavior is truly praiseworthy."

"Indeed. Are you not embarrassed to hear this, Charlotte? You stole someone else's piece of music and claimed that it was of your own creation."

Charlotte bit her lip. Her bandaged face held a hint of inexplicable resilience.

"Why is this happening?"

Hera was also shocked as she stared at the screen intently.

It made Ashlyn and the rest of the Field family members feel nervous for her.

As things had already come to that point, there was no one who could help her.

She had to face this issue on her own. Could she do it?

“You can do it!” Joseph soundlessly mouthed the words of encouragement. Worry was written all across his handsome face.

From above the stage, Charlotte stared at the scant number of people who supported her, including Joseph, Fae, James, and Ashlyn.

The looks in their eyes told her that they supported her and that they believed in her.

Charlotte felt her rapidly thumping heart calm down. It was as if all the fearful emotions she felt had vanished as they had been gathered up and thrown into a dark corner.

I can do it! I absolutely can do it!

When the host saw that Charlotte remained silent, she could not resist asking, “Charlotte, is there anything else you would like to say? Why do you have a photo of the manuscript? Is it true that you accidentally saw his manuscript and secretly took a picture?”

Charlotte took a moment to calm herself down and replied softly, “The manuscript Mr. Underwood has belongs to me! I wrote it, and I composed this piano piece. I have no idea why he has it because I threw it into a trash can long ago.”

The manuscript belongs to me!

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Charlotte had thrown the manuscript into the trash can, and it somehow ended up in Michael's hands.

What had once been something that she disliked ended up being someone else's treasure.

Charlotte really couldn't understand it.

Nonplussed, Michael said, “Miss, I think there should be a limit to your jokes. This manuscript is clearly mine, but I will let the matter slide if you apologize to me. However, I'm starting to get a little angry because you keep testing my limits. How can you so deliberately twist the truth?”

“Mr. Underwood, I-I am not as good with my words as you are. Nonetheless, the manuscript belongs to me.” Charlotte's timid expression became unusually resolute. She knew that if she backed down and really took the blame for the plagiarism, she would have to carry a blackened name for the rest of her life.

I refuse to concede! I did not plagiarize!

Charlotte refused to have her sullied reputation affect her godmother's family. She did not want them to become a laughingstock for having a goddaughter who was a plagiarist. That was absolutely unacceptable for her.

At that thought, Charlotte felt as if her entire body was suddenly filled with strength and courage.

"Mr. Underwood, that is my handwriting in that manuscript. I composed that musical composition. We can compare our handwriting. I firmly believe it doesn't matter how old that manuscript is because no matter how many years have passed, a person's handwriting won't just change like that. That is unless they are trying to imitate someone else on purpose."

Charlotte had thrown the manuscript into the trash can, and it somehow ended up in Michael's hands.

The longer she spoke, the more her voice resonated and the more powerful it became. Her gaze held a hint of unquestionable firmness.

She stared at Michael steadily with clear eyes. Her tone was not aggressive, but her steady gaze caused people to be unable to behave rudely. "Mr. Underwood, I propose we compare our writings," Charlotte suggested.

The quick flash of panic in Michael's expression did not escape Ashlyn's sharp eyes. The latter smiled as she stood up. "Mr. Underwood, what do you say? It shouldn't be a problem, right?"

Without waiting to hear his reply, Ashlyn turned to a staff member nearby and ordered, "Prepare some pencils and paper. Mr. Underwood and Charlotte will rewrite the tune on the spot. At the end of this, it will be clear who is the thief."

Michael had not expected Ashlyn to act so decisively.

Thus, he was a little dazed when the staff member placed the pencil and paper before him.

Beside him, Charlotte had already picked up the pencil and was rapidly scribbling on the sheet of paper.

Michael held the pencil in his hands, but he was ultimately unable to write anything.

Almost everyone's gazes were fixed on the two of them.

Michael's expression turned ashen. Although he pretended to be composed on the surface, his back was slick with sweat.

Beads of sweat were also starting to form on his elegant face and rolled down his face before dripping onto the paper.

He gritted his teeth and tried to recall the handwriting on the manuscript in an attempt to replicate the handwriting.

Just then, Charlotte declared, "I'm done!" She had finished writing the tune and passed her sheet to the host.

The camera immediately panned to her sheet, prompting the panel of judges and the audience to make comparisons.

"The handwriting... it looks exactly the same."

"There is barely any difference from the handwriting on the other manuscript."

Everyone was shocked by the turn of events.

The camera turned to Michael. Until the very end, he had been unable to produce the tune. His hand trembled uncontrollably when he heard that Charlotte had finished writing.

There was only a single line on his sheet. However, it was very obviously a man's handwriting. It looked nothing like Charlotte's delicate penmanship.

"Does this mean... Michael is the plagiarizer?"

"So it's really Charlotte who composed the piece?"

"Michael is the real culprit? How was he able to act so brazenly just now?"

"Amazing! He's a thief, yet he had the guts to accuse someone else of stealing. As it turned out, that person was the real owner all along!"

"This plot twist is really shocking!"

The audience, who had previously supported Michael, now turned on him.

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Michael had specifically said things in an attempt to win everyone's hearts. He had painted himself as a mighty and forgiving senior in a respectable tone.

At the thought of that now, it was extremely disgusting.

He had to be really shameless to be able to speak those words.

The audience couldn't help but look at Charlotte with sympathy in their eyes.

They had never expected that such a young genius existed in this world.

The piece that she composed when she was sixteen shocked everyone. One could only imagine her achievements if only she continued her studies.

Ashlyn stared icily at Michael, who had cold sweat all over his face. "What else do you have to say, Michael?" she asked. "The manuscript was composed by Charlotte, which makes her the owner of it. You even backstabbed her and called her a copycat when it was you who used it without permission," she said.

"I have nothing to say. The manuscript was actually discovered by me unintentionally when passing by a trash can..." Michael explained with an embarrassed look on his face. It was extremely humiliating. His reputation was completely tarnished.

He never expected that a piece that seemed unwanted actually belonged to someone else.

"I-I'm sorry," he apologized before stepping off the stage. He then left in a hurry, as if he was being chased by a dog.

With a grim expression, Hera stared at Michael's back as he left all flustered frantically.

There was a feeling of burning embarrassment on her face, which felt like someone had just given her a kick while wearing shoes weighing a hundred or so kilograms.

Michael had specifically said things in an attempt to win everyone's hearts. He had painted himself as a mighty and forgiving senior in a respectable tone.

She wished she could sink into the ground.

However, she felt that Michael was not any better off than her.

He had been a well-known Professor of Piano who was prestigious and respectable. Now that he was involved in this issue of plagiarism, his career and reputation would definitely be greatly affected.

It would probably take a long period of time before anyone would go to him for training again.

While she was infuriated and envious of Charlotte's talent, Hera also felt hatred toward Michael.

Such a shameless old man! How dare he fool me with a plagiarized piece? Lucky for me, I did not play it during the final round. I would have been the one bearing the shame if I did. What kind of mentor is he? I thought he was a good one, but he turned out to be trash. Ugh!

Hera was secretly relieved that the plagiarism issue was exposed earlier.

She was lucky that it did not implicate her.

Meanwhile, Charlotte couldn't help but sigh in relief on the stage.

Elegantly, she smiled at Joseph who sat among the crowd. However, the smile faded when it tugged at the wound on her face.

Eventually, the judging committee gave her an average score of nine, which was a great result.

At the same time, she gained a spot in the final round right away.

Lochlan looked at the car with a gloomy gaze. Waves of frustration filled his heart.

He turned to Olivia and said, "Let's go."

"Aren't you going to congratulate me for getting into the semi-finals?" Olivia asked. She bit her lips and her eyes were fixated on Lochlan.

She continued, "Why am I always nothing in your eyes? Is she really that good? You're constantly thinking about her, and all you see is her. She's merely a poor girl. Does she have a powerful family as I do? Is she more capable than I am? She even has difficulty communicating. This girl has issues!"

Lochlan glared at Olivia fiercely with his reddened eyes. "Shut up!" he demanded.

No matter what, Charlotte was the best in his opinion. She was the apple of his eyes.

He would not allow anyone to speak ill of her. However, he seemed to have forgotten about one important matter, which was the things that his mother, Mrs. Fraser, had done to Charlotte.

Olivia's heart was filled with pain and sadness.

With her red lips trembling and eyes filled with tears, she asked, "How dare you say that? How dare you treat me this way, Lochlan!"

"I'm telling my parents to withdraw their investment from Fraser Corporation. After all, no one has faith in the movie that your mother is investing," said Olivia.

She then went on, "That small amount of funds was nothing. It was all spent on handling scandals and suppressing the trend, so not much was left. You people have also angered the Haddock Group. They will not provide any additional investment."

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"Just think of the consequences of offending me, Lochlan," Olivia threatened.

She felt very terrible. It was as if her heart had been slashed by a knife.

Olivia kept wondering how Charlotte was better than her.

Not only was she from a prominent family, but she also had good looks and was very capable. She would be the public relations manager of the Warhol Corporation once she graduated. She had already led the Public Relations Department to successfully manage a few crises previously.

How am I no match for that girl without any qualifications or looks? She's just an orphan.

Olivia wiped away her tears and walked toward her car.

She raised her head. It's just Lochlan. One day, I'll make him realize how great am I.

Meanwhile, at The Peacock, Ashlyn sat beside Charlotte with a trace of happiness on her pale face. "Why are you back for the competition? How are you? How was the surgery?" she asked Charlotte.

Charlotte looked at her shyly and answered, "The first surgery was done, but I'll undergo another surgery after this."

The reason she was there for the competition this time was all due to Joseph's encouragement.

Not only did she know how to play the cello, but she also played the piano.

If it wasn't for Joseph's support, she would not have made it.

However, Charlotte was aware that she had to overcome the challenges by herself and escape that ice-cold world.

She could not constantly be a person who relied on others. Not wanting to be a worthless person, she needed to be courageous enough to break through the cages and locks holding her back. "Just think of the consequences of offending me, Lochlan," Olivia threatened.

She had to be braver and more determined.

"Good looks are essential to everyone, regardless if you're a guy or a girl. Since recovery is possible, you should work toward that. There will be some suffering, but that's exactly why you should toughen up," Ashlyn said while patting Charlotte's hands.

Charlotte tried very hard to convince herself. I'm the best, I'm great. I can do this.

She looked at Ashlyn with her bright eyes and said, "Thank you for searching for a doctor to help me. I'm also very grateful for Mum, Dad, and Joseph. Uncle Lochlan has also been taking care of me over the years. I'm very thankful for him. But, I have never felt a sense of closeness and intimacy toward him."

She continued, "I used to rely on him a lot because I treated him as my closest family, but it was clear that he did not feel the same way toward me."

As Charlotte rambled on, her voice shook. However, she did not tear up. She wanted to be strong.

Therefore, she did not allow herself to cry easily.

"I know that all of you are sincere to me. Back then, Uncle Lochlan brought me home, I will still repay his kindness one day. I'll also do the same for all of you," she said.

Ashlyn knew all along that Charlotte was autistic. After years of treatment, there had been a huge improvement.

The confrontation between Charlotte and Michael on stage that day had given Ashlyn a big shock. She felt that Charlotte had changed for the better.

She could even come face to face with someone else and defeated Michael with her reasonings.

That certainly was an incredible improvement for Charlotte.

Upon hearing the touching words, Ashlyn felt a sense of relief.

Strangely, she felt emotional.

However, there was no one more excited than Fae. She was filled with pride as if her daughter had finally grown up. She said, "This kid has improved so much. When she first joined our family, we felt so bad for her. She did not even talk or eat anything."

"Lottie did well this time, she got into the finals straight away." James smiled. His eyes brightened with encouragement.

"Mom, Dad, we're going back to Maredania tomorrow. Since she has entered the finals, there's no reason for her to stay in the country for the semi-finals. Meanwhile, her treatment has to go on," Joseph explained while passing some food to his parents.

"No problem. We will wait for you at home. Please don't push yourself too hard, Lottie. It's bad for the wound recovery," Fae reminded her.

Ashlyn then sent a few piano pieces along with some training techniques to Charlotte's phone. "Just let me know if you have any doubts," she reassured.

Just as they were leaving after dinner, they bumped into Lochlan and Olivia who came out of the private room opposite them.

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They also saw Kate and her husband, Raphael Fraser. Besides, Will, Mabel, and her husband, Aaron Warhol, were there as well.

Both parties were stunned to see each other. Especially when Olivia saw Charlotte with the Field family and Ashlyn, a trace of jealousy flashed across Olivia's eyes.

However, she soon kept her jealousy away.

Charlotte is an orphan, but she wins the favor of Ms. Saunders. She must have gotten a good result in the preliminary round because she's Ms. Saunders' student. Olivia was upset when she remembered how she had offended Madeline Saunders previously.

"Hi, Mr. Field!" Aaron was the first person to react. He quickly reached out his hand and shook hands with James.

James smiled and replied, "Mr. Warhol, how have you been?"

Will also greeted Joseph awkwardly.

Meanwhile, Kate sized Charlotte up like how she would do with some goods.

Then, she commented sarcastically, "This is Ms. Saunders, right? I didn't know you have such a good relationship with Ms. Saunders and that you can have a meal together."

The extremely dazzling woman raised her eyebrow, and her gaze remained cold. Ashlyn smiled and carelessly flicked her fingernails. "Mrs. Fraser, I have great relationships with many people. For instance, Greg Maxwell and Naomi Nolan. I'm surprised that you're not afraid of scorpions anymore because you still can't stop lying. To be honest, I'm impressed."

They also saw Kate and her husband, Raphael Fraser. Besides, Will, Mabel, and her husband, Aaron Warhol, were there as well.

"You!" Kate's face turned crimson red in anger as the fear of being threatened with a poisonous scorpion by Ashlyn resurfaced again.

That would be a humiliating incident that scarred Kate forever.

This b*tch! How dare she do that to me because of Charlotte?

Suddenly, she laughed. "Ms. Saunders, although you're one of the judges, you can't possibly let Charlotte have easy access to advance to the next round, right? This is so unfair to the other participants."

"Mrs. Fraser, you're good at making up stories. Just because I had a meal with her, I'll let her pass easily?"

Do you think I can control every other judge?" Ashlyn almost laughed out loud in anger.

"I saw you were whispering to the Piano Prince, and you two looked close. Besides, I saw you hugging Laylah too. Three of you gave Charlotte a very high score," Kate snapped furiously. "Olivia's performance was so good, and you gave her a score of seven point five. You've crossed the line!"

Instantly, Olivia's expression turned awkward as though she had swallowed a fly.

Her performance was above average, but Charlotte was a gifted genius. Ordinary people were not comparable to her.

There was a special aura when Charlotte played the piano. Her notes sounded full of life and energy.

Olivia knew she received a score of seven point five because she was not skilled enough, but she could not help but feel embarrassed when Kate mentioned it.

Can she not make Ms. Saunders hate me even more?

"Mrs. Fraser, it's because my performance was not that good—" Olivia wanted to stop Kate, but the latter interrupted, "You played really well!"

"If you want the score to be given according to your standards, you can become one of the judges," Ashlyn commented as she shot a look at Kate.

Lochlan did not expect to meet Charlotte under such circumstances.

He could not stop staring at Charlotte, but the latter did not even look at him.

"Mom, stop it. You're making a scene." When Lochlan heard Kate's words that did not make any sense, he could not help but stop her from continuing her speech.

"No! I must stand up for Olivia. You've never cared about her. If I also don't care about her and don't speak up for her, she would keep getting bullied by other people," Kate chided furiously.

Olivia felt awkward and embarrassed. She explained, "No one bullied me. I've advanced to the next round, and the panel of judges did not simply give my score."

Mabel did not expect Kate to be infuriated after meeting Charlotte, Ashlyn, and the Field family because she used to think that Kate was rather a calm and composed person.

The way she scolded people in anger was slightly frightening.

Though the Warhol family was not a part of the wealthiest, most elite families, they were in the middle-

top class too.

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Usually, the Warhol family kept a low profile and avoided messing with other people. They did not like to show off as well.

Therefore, they managed to turn things around during several corporate crises.

Mabel was usually a kind and calm person in her social circle, so she was slightly shocked to see Kate acting so recklessly.

"Ashlyn, let's go." Fae gently tugged on Ashlyn's arm.

Ashlyn caught on and stopped arguing with Kate. She felt there was no point arguing with a shrewish woman like her.

"This is too much! How dare you just leave like that?" Kate stared at their backs with hatred and said to Mabel, "Don't worry. No matter what, Lochlan only has Olivia in his heart, and he will never look at another woman."

Mabel flashed an awkward smile. "That's great."

Back at home, Mabel was in a bad mood. She brought Olivia over to let her sit on the couch and said, "Olivia, you witnessed the scene with your eyes today. Mrs. Fraser is a tough nut. If you get married to Lochlan, your father and I won't be around to take care of you."

"Mom, you're overthinking things. Besides, as long as Lochlan goes along with Olivia, everything will be fine," Will commented.

He did not think so much as he knew there was rarely any harmonious family in their social circle. Many couples appeared to be in a great relationship, but they each had their lovers in private.

Usually, the Warhol family kept a low profile and avoided messing with other people. They did not like to show off as well.

Mabel glared at him. "Go away. You know nothing!"

Then, she patiently persuaded Olivia while holding her hand. "Though our family is considered wealthy, it is the wealth accumulated by our ancestors. Your father has been cautious over these years because we don't have a strong background. We're incomparable to the Jaquin family, the Nolan Family, the Quickton family, and the Haddock family. Sooner or later, something will happen due to the way Mrs. Fraser handles matters. You'd better forget about marrying Lochlan..." Mabel sighed.

"Mom, I like him! I really like him." Olivia was frustrated too.

The Fraser family wanted to be in-laws with the Warhol family, but Kate's temper was too odd, and not everyone could handle someone like her.

Besides, the major problem was that Lochlan did not like her, which frustrated Olivia.

Now my mom wants me to break up with him too...

She felt sad and anguished at the same time.

Previously, Olivia was an arrogant and prideful young lady who loved to spend money on shopping.

She wanted people to treat her exceptionally because her family was wealthy.

Now that she had known that Ashlyn did not avenge her by giving her a low score and the autistic Charlotte could express herself well, Olivia suddenly understood that she shouldn't live like this anymore. At least, she should be more open-minded.

If I continue to be narrow-minded, will I end up as a shallow person like Mrs. Fraser?

She took a deep breath to calm her nerves.

"After we got married, we can move elsewhere and not stay with his parents. I heard currently he's living alone in a mansion." Olivia hesitated for a moment and realized she did not want to give up Lochlan just yet.

"Olivia, you're a girl. You need to think it through. I saw Lochlan kept staring at the ugly girl, Charlotte, today. Isn't it because he has not given up on her yet?"

"Mom, I don't know..."

"Forget about it. If he still refuses to forget about Charlotte, don't blame me for what I will do to that woman!" said Mabel impatiently.

"Mom, don't be like this. Charlotte had already left the Fraser residence. She did not do anything wrong, and it's because she's an orphan..." Olivia did not know what had happened to her, and she could not believe that she was defending Charlotte.

She was jealous of Charlotte and envious of Ashlyn.

Her mind was in a mess.

After all, no single woman in the world did not want to become Ashlyn.

The next day, Joseph flew to Maredania with Charlotte to continue the treatment for the injuries on her face.

Meanwhile, Ashlyn went to the hospital right after the hospital informed her that Naomi was awake.

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Ashlyn rushed to the hospital after receiving the call. When she arrived, she saw the young woman sitting on the edge of the bed, ready to put on slippers and get out of bed.

“Naomi, are you all right?”

Ashlyn dashed toward the bed and held Naomi. “Do you feel any discomfort?”

However, it took a long time for Naomi to respond and smile back at her. “Ashlyn, you're here!”

“Naomi?” Feeling perplexed, Ashlyn frowned at her.

Why aren't you answering my question?

“Ashlyn, I-I can't hear what you're saying.” Looking at the woman in front of her, Naomi saw her red lips moving, but there was no sound in her world.

The dead silence was terrifying.

She could not hear anything whatsoever.

Realization dawned on Naomi that she had lost her sense of hearing.

She could only see Ashlyn's moving lips without hearing a single word the latter said.

Worse, Naomi could not even hear her own voice.

Ashlyn's heart ached terribly, as though she was being stabbed repeatedly.

In a split second, she came to the realization that something had gone wrong with Naomi.

Naomi can't hear anything. Judging by her reactions, she's now deaf. I'm the cause of all her suffering.

Originally, Helena wanted to spike Ashlyn's drink, but Naomi ended up ingesting the poison.

“Ashlyn, I need to go to the bathroom,” she muttered in a raspy voice.

Ashlyn quickly helped her to the bathroom.

Naomi walked to the bathroom door with Ashlyn's assistance and entered by herself.

Ashlyn rushed to the hospital after receiving the call. When she arrived, she saw the young woman sitting on the edge of the bed, ready to put on slippers and get out of bed.

After they waited in the ward for a while, Jonathan returned with some items. He also bought nutritious soup for Naomi.

As soon as the lid was lifted, the aroma of the soup permeated the room.

The tantalizing smell would whet most people's appetite.

Nevertheless, Naomi remained unresponsive.

Ashlyn scooped up a spoonful of the delicious soup, intending to feed her. Shaking her head, Naomi pushed it away with her hand.

She wanted to persuade Naomi to take a sip or two of the soup. However, she decided against it when she recalled Naomi could not hear anything.

In the end, she tried to feed Naomi another spoonful.

Unfortunately, the latter felt nauseous at the smell of the soup and quickly reached out to push the bowl away.

Not feeling annoyed, Ashlyn put down the bowl.

The moment Ashlyn looked up, she saw Naomi biting her lip and glancing at her cautiously.

On the other hand, Jonathan was annoyed. "I went out early in the morning just to buy this soup for you."

"Let her be if she doesn't want to eat. Thank you for your hard work." Ashlyn looked at the handsome young man and added, "Give me the pen and paper."

Nodding, Jonathan brought those items from the side table to Ashlyn. She immediately picked up the pen and started writing: You might have lost your sense of hearing. However, these symptoms are temporary.

Naomi did not eat anything, and there was not much strength left in her. Holding the pen unsteadily, she tried writing several times. Eventually, she had to speak again in a voice that she could not even hear. "Don't lie to me, Ashlyn. Are these the effects of being poisoned?"

A sudden pang of pain hit Ashlyn's chest, and she forced a smile, trying to hide her agony.

Then she wrote: No. These symptoms are temporary. You'll recover soon. Don't think too much about it.

Naomi curled her lips as she finished reading the words, but she was not smiling at all. "Ashlyn, I may not be able to continue filming anymore. You have to find another female lead."

Listening to Naomi's hoarse voice brought a lump to Ashlyn's throat.

She wrote again: It's okay. We'll resume filming when you recover.

Staring at those words, Naomi got lost in thought. It's unknown whether I can make a full recovery or not.

Shaking her head, Naomi persuaded, "There's no need for that, Ashlyn. If there's any suitable actress—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Ashlyn held her hands tightly.

Ashlyn stared at Naomi, who pretended to be nonchalant about her predicament.

Feeling a bit heartbroken, she wrote: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

Right then, someone knocked on the door.

"Come in," said Ashlyn.

A nurse walked in carrying a thermal lunch box. "Ms. Nolan, this is the breakfast sent by Mr. Nolan."

Unfortunately, Naomi could not hear a single word uttered by the nurse.

Hence, she glanced at Ashlyn curiously.

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Looking at the nurse, Ashlyn uttered, "Thank you for bringing this."

Seeing that, Jonathan hurriedly stood up and accepted the lunch box.

The rich aroma of the breakfast filled the air the moment he opened the lid.

Opening the lunch box, he noted that it contained oatmeal porridge with a few side dishes.

Even so, as soon as Naomi smelled the food, she could not help shaking her head in disgust.

She felt nauseous and uncomfortable.

Ashlyn became worried about Naomi's current condition. Naomi hasn't eaten anything since she woke up. Besides, she seems very weak at the moment. She's so fragile that she can be blown away by a gust of wind.

With that thought in mind, she wrote on the paper again: What do you want to eat? I'll have someone prepare it for you.

"Can you cook me a plate of pasta? It doesn't matter if it's spaghetti bolognese or anything. I just want to eat something you cook." Naomi looked at her with red-rimmed eyes.

She had no appetite to eat anything at that moment. Even if Jonathan had just prepared some fruits for her, she would still refuse to eat.

Listening to Naomi's croaky voice, Ashlyn naturally did not refuse her.

She wrote I'll go to the hospital's kitchen to prepare the dish for you. Wait for me.

After Ashlyn left, Naomi fell asleep again.

While she was sleeping, Jonathan watched over her.

All of a sudden, the manager pushed the door open. "Jonathan."

Jonathan immediately signaled Isaac to be quiet.

After a pause, he suddenly recalled that Naomi could not hear any noise, no matter how loud it was. Looking at the nurse, Ashlyn uttered, "Thank you for bringing this."

Well, my cautiousness seems unnecessary in this case.

Bending over, he tucked Naomi in with the quilt. Then he strode to the door. "What's wrong?"

"You have a program scheduled for this afternoon. It's a publicity activity for your sponsor. You must go now," informed Isaac.

After listening to the manager's explanation, Jonathan looked hesitantly toward the bed. Suddenly, he heard a weak voice coming from behind.

Turning around, Jonathan noticed Naomi was looking at him. He hurriedly replied to Isaac, "I'll go when Ashlyn is back."

He felt uneasy about leaving Naomi all alone in the ward.

Observing the expressions of Jonathan and Isaac, the beautiful young lady knew something was amiss.

Biting her lip, Naomi looked at Jonathan with a smile. "You can leave first if you're busy. Lucas and Blair will come to visit me later."

Jonathan wrote in reply: It's all right. I can leave later.

Shaking her head, Naomi pursed her pale lips at him. "You're a celebrity. They'll blacklist you if you don't attend these publicity activities. No one will work with you in the future."

It's heartbreaking to see how mature and thoughtful she is despite her condition.

At that moment, Ashlyn returned with the pasta.

"Now that Ashlyn is back, you can stop worrying, right?" Naomi stated playfully.

Upon hearing that, Jonathan nodded. "I'll come back to keep you company when I'm done."

Jonathan's heart sank as he stared at Naomi. She was his assistant as well as his partner in acting. If it were not for his carelessness, she would not have ingested the spiked drink.

Deep down, Jonathan's heart was filled with guilt. He kept blaming himself for not taking good care of her.

In truth, Naomi still had not regained her appetite.

She felt like throwing up at the sight of food.

Still, she suppressed the waves of nausea by pretending to eat cheerfully, slowly, one bite at a time.

Naomi did not want to tell Ashlyn that she could not taste any flavor at that moment.

It was as if her taste buds had been affected by the poison.

When Ashlyn noticed Naomi was willingly eating, she let out a sigh of relief.

It was a gut-wrenching sight for them when Naomi did not even drink water or take the soup earlier.

Seeing that Naomi was eating again, Jonathan eventually left the hospital.

He could not afford to be late for the afternoon schedule.

After finishing the pasta, Naomi remarked, "I'm done eating, Ashlyn. It's very delicious."

Ashlyn took a tissue and handed it to Naomi for her to wipe her mouth.

“Ashlyn, you should go back first. The nurses here can take care of me. You don't have to worry,” Naomi reassured.

Then she added, “Blair will come to visit me later.”

Nodding, Ashlyn responded, “Okay. I'll consult with other doctors later this afternoon. We'll see what the most suitable treatment is based on your current situation.”

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Not long after Ashlyn left, Naomi rushed into the bathroom and began to vomit like mad.

She threw up all the spaghetti bolognese that she had just eaten.

Naomi wanted to eat, but her weak stomach could not tolerate any food, to her dismay. A wave of nausea engulfed her every time she tried to eat.

Nevertheless, she did not want Ashlyn, Jonathan, and other people to worry about her.

Ashlyn has been very kind to me. I don't want to make her sad and feel concerned about me.

Tears began to trickle down Naomi's cheeks as she thought of the people dearest to her.

After vomiting, Naomi went back to the bed and lay down again, dozing off after some time.

When Naomi woke up, she found a man standing inside the room.

The sudden appearance startled her. Taking a closer look, Naomi noticed it was her elder brother, Lucas. Only then did she sigh in relief.

“Lucas, why didn't you wake me up?”

Her voice was still rough. Naomi was afraid that if she did not speak now, she might not get another chance to talk the following day, even though she could not hear a single word she said.

Lucas' heart sank when he recalled the doctor's words.

His sister had become deaf; she could not hear anymore.

Walking to the door, Lucas turned on the light.

Staring at her quietly for a while, Lucas asked, “Are you hungry?”

Only then did he realize she could not hear his question.

Grabbing the pen and a piece of paper, he wrote: Are you hungry? I can ask Spencer to bring the soup made by the maid.

Not long after Ashlyn left, Naomi rushed into the bathroom and began to vomit like mad.

Naomi shook her head. Despite her empty stomach and discomfort, she had no appetite whatsoever.

Shaking her head, Naomi grabbed Lucas' hands.

Even though they were siblings, they had never been this close before.

For the first time, Lucas did not push her away.

"Lucas, I think I'm dying soon. I don't want to die," Naomi remarked hoarsely.

I'm too young to leave this world! I still have tons of things to do in my life.

Looking compassionately at her, Lucas picked up the pen and wrote: You'll be fine.

Lucas' handwriting was firm, just like his resolute personality.

"Lucas, can you do me a favor? You must promise me one thing. Otherwise, I won't die in peace."

Naomi tugged on Lucas' sleeve. She glanced at him with misty tears, making it impossible to refuse her wish.

He wrote: What is it?

"Can you please remarry Ashlyn, Lucas? Both of you shouldn't be separated anymore. Please?" Naomi looked at him with a sorrowful expression.

She cared deeply for Ashlyn. A wave of mixed feelings flooded Naomi's heart at that moment. It was indescribable for her.

Naomi was terrified that one day when she passed away, she would just be a stranger who had no relationship with Ashlyn.

I want to become Ashlyn's family.

Her voice was croaky and weak. Still, Lucas heard her plead crystal clear.

The man's thin lips moved, but he did not know how to respond to her request.

When Lucas found out from the doctor that Naomi might be deaf forever, he thought the doctor had misdiagnosed her condition.

The doctor comes from First Hospital, though. How could there be a mistake?

“Lucas, I can barely speak right now. Maybe in a few more days, I won't be able to talk anymore. They say if someone loses their hearing for too long, the person will forget how to speak, eventually.”

Does it mean that one day I will also become mute?

Naomi's heart throbbed as she thought of that scenario.

Unless they were in her shoes, no one could understand Naomi's feelings at that moment

“Lucas, why aren't you answering me?” Naomi stared intently at Lucas' handsome face. She knew how powerful her elder brother was in the whole of Lake City.

Is it beyond his reach to win Ashlyn back?

Unbeknownst to Naomi, it was indeed a daunting task for him.

Lucas' expression darkened as he looked at Naomi. He eventually replied to her, even though he knew she could not hear his answer. His low voice echoed through the ward.

“It's not that I don't want to reconcile with Ashlyn. I want her back. However, it's not possible for the time being. Our parents- I have to bide my time and wait until I'm stronger than both of them. Only then can I win Ashlyn back. I need to be more powerful and become invincible!”