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Madeline's eyes were full of condescension when she heard Elise's answer. *That's an authentic country girl for you—drooling over whatever's out of her reach! Of course she'd be happy to attend after hearing she might get a chance to meet with the world's number one billionaire. How shameless!* She then chuckled. "Sure. Do attend the banquet with Alex." When Madeline finally left, Alexander turned to Elise. "I thought you weren't interested. What gives?" She answered, "As she just said, my godfather will be attending the banquet as well! It's been a long time since I last saw him, so I decided it's time I meet him again." Consequently, Alexander recalled his mother's words. *I wonder how'd she react if she were to know that the Quentin Fassbender that she's preying on is the godfather of Elise... That'd be a blast, wouldn't it?* Nonetheless, he had no intention to reveal the truth to Madeline as he desired for her to eliminate the prejudice she had against Elise and learn to accept her wholeheartedly.

"Let's go together, then." Elise nodded. "Let's!" ... SK Group's anniversary banquet was held in a manor that belonged to the Dahlens. The banquet gathered ninety percent of celebrated business owners in Athesea. Anyone who had gotten the invitation would bring along their loved ones, and that reflected just how influential the Dahlens were in the business industry of Athesea. "Greetings, Mrs. Griffith, Young Master Alexander."

Maxwell Dahlen took the initiative and approached Madeline and Alexander with a warm welcome. As the owner of the manor, he seemed to have ignored Elise, who was right beside them, as he proceeded with his passionate chatter with Madeline. Madeline, who enjoyed being treated with utmost respect, revealed a boastful look with a subtle smirk, posing as a noblewoman. Alexander, on the other hand, wrapped his arm around Elise's waist and pulled her close to himself, appearing to be quite intimate.

Seeing that, Maxwell finally noticed Elise's presence and inquired, "And this is?" As Madeline was about to speak, Alexander swiftly replied, "My fiancée." At his answer, Maxwell couldn't help but feel slightly bewildered. Nevertheless, thanks to the countless experience he

garnered from dealing in the industry for many years, he was able to cover up his ignorance. "Oh, yes. I've heard about your engagement, but I've never expected her to be such a beauty!

If I may, which grand family do you come from?" Elise, who had nothing to hide, raised her eyes and smilingly answered, "I come from a prairie. My parents passed away when I was but a girl, and all I had left was my grandparents." Hearing her upfront answer, Maxwell couldn't help but reveal a knowing look. "I've heard about young people practicing spiritual affection nowadays, and my skepticism would have persisted had I not seen the two of you together."

Upon those words, Madeline felt somewhat embarrassed, saying, "They're just kids. They have a long way to go yet." Whether literally or implied—all of her words suggested her disagreement toward their marriage. Maxwell, on the other hand, pretended not to have sensed her meaning and simply notified his leave. "Please make yourselves at home, Mrs. Griffith, Young Master Alexander. I'm afraid duty calls." When Maxwell left the conversation, Madeline shot Elise a resentful glare.

If Alexander weren't present, she would have rebuked the young woman a thousand times over. "Alex, Maya's right there. Should we go and say hi?" Alexander rejected her without a second thought. "Go ahead. Elise needs a timeout." Before Madeline could say anything, he escorted Elise to a resting spot, to which the latter questioned, "What's wrong with you?" Alexander looked her in the eyes and suddenly hugged her tight, whispering, "You don't have to care what my mother has to say, nor do you need to care what everyone else thinks.

As long as I'm breathing, I'll always be by your side." "Mm-hmm," Elise mumbled as the unhappiness in her heart waned. "I know. But you don't have to be so anxious either. It's normal for families like yours to be into homogamy, and your mother's dissatisfaction toward me is only rooted from the idea that your family is out of mine's league. Regardless, as long as we're in love with each other, nothing else matters."

"That's right. Remember that as long as we're in love with each other, people who wish to split us apart can only dream on. You know what, Elise? I've always had this thought—why are you only eighteen? If only you were already twenty, I would have married you and brought you home." Immediately, Elise blushed and punched his chest. "Stop it!" "I'm serious. Let's get married as soon as you turn twenty, okay?"

She grew bashful at his request. All this time, she had always pictured herself as a kid, and talking about marriage could sometimes stupefy her. "That'll depend on your performance." Alexander earnestly nodded. "I won't let you down." "Mhm." She was satisfied with his

answer. The next second, she finally realized the curious gazes directed toward them, and hastily pushed Alexander away. "Okay, that's enough.

Everyone's looking at us." Yet, Alexander didn't seem to care about it. "It's not illegal to embrace my own fiancée, is it? Plus, it's not illegal for them to watch us either, so it's out of our control." "But it's embarrassing!" Caressing her head, he replied, "Then we shall continue later." While they were conversing, Madeline had found Maya. "Maya!" Enthusiastically, Maya approached her with a hug. "Godmother, you're here! Is Alex here with you?"

"Yup, he's right there." Under Madeline's guide, she turned to the direction, only to see Alexander benignly staring at Elise. She couldn't help but feel envious of the person whom he was looking at with his bewitching gaze. *If only I was the one he's looking at...* "Here's a gift for you, Maya." As Madeline said that, she pulled out an elegant box, to which Maya quickly withdrew her eyes. "You've given me so many gifts, Godmother..."

"Oh, silly girl, don't be so courteous with me." Swiftly, she shoved the gift onto Maya's palm. "Alex is a slow one when it comes to relationships. If you want to impress him, perhaps you can come visit us more frequently, even if it's only to have a chat with me." "Thank you, Godmother." "Right! Didn't you say Fassbender's coming too? Where is he?" Madeline quizzed as if she was mindlessly blurting questions.

Despite that, Maya could easily read her mind. After all, none from families like theirs would care about emotional attachment; it was always about benefits. "Uncle Quentin will arrive a little later. He's probably en route as we speak." Hearing Maya addressing Quentin as "Uncle Quentin," Madeline couldn't help but wonder how deep the connection between the Dahlens and the Fassbenders went.

For a mighty figure like Quentin, who would never attend an ordinary banquet, to attend the Dahlens' banquet would mean that he shared a healthy, terrific relationship with them. "I'll be honest, Maya. We, the Griffiths, wish to expand our business worldwide, and we know your Uncle Quentin's business is developing pretty good out there, so I'd like to ask for a favor—could you perhaps introduce me to him?"

Maya was stunned by Madeline's straightforwardness. To be fair, she wasn't exactly close with Quentin, nor was she sure whether he would even attend the banquet. All the words she had uttered was solely to impress Madeline by using Quentin's name. "It's not that I'm unwilling to help you, Godmother, but Uncle Quentin's a busy man. How about this? I can bring you to him shortly after, but that's all I'm able to help you with."

Madeline was pleased by Maya's reply. After all, Quentin was not a typical man whom one could easily meet with during normal days. Now, thanks to Maya's connection, things were rather convenient for Madeline. "Thank you, Maya! Don't worry. I'll remember everything you did for me."

Maya responded with a subtle smile, though her heart was enjoying the sensation of being ingratiated. She then added, "Uncle Quentin's a kind man. He once complimented the art I made, and even told my dad that he would consider taking me in as his goddaughter." Quentin Fassbender's goddaughter—an identity every woman would die to have. Although Quentin was an international billionaire, he didn't have a child of his own blood.

If one were to be recognized by him as his goddaughter, it would mean more than just being his goddaughter. It would be an iconic identity, and possibly a gateway to the Fassbenders' limitless wealth. Madeline was dumbfounded, her eyes wide and still. "Did he really say that, Maya?"

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Indubitably, what Maya said didn't actually happen. She was aware that Madeline had no way of approaching Quentin, so she persisted with her lie. "Of course! Would I joke about such a thing?" Madeline cackled. "I know you wouldn't. Like I said, our Maya's a smart, kind, beautiful, and generous girl! There's not another person in the entire Athesea that could match up with your perfection, and you've proved that today.

I trust my instinct about you. Don't forget that I'm still waiting for you to get married with Alex, okay? I can't wait to have you as my daughter-in-law!" Feeling somewhat bashful, Maya turned to Alexander's direction. "Well, I won't mind if he doesn't..." Madeline was highly impressed by Maya. She thought that anyone that deserved to marry her son should at least have a solid family background and the capability to lead the Griffiths' businesses to success. As for Elise, she had been disdaining her all this while; she could never find it in herself to accept her.

"It's okay. I know what you're thinking. Come, let's go see Alex." Meanwhile, Alex fetched some tidbits over to Elise, who found herself feeling relieved after eating some dessert. At that moment, Madeline brought Maya over and said, "Alex, go dance with Maya when the banquet starts."

Disregarding her words, Alexander had his full attention on Elise. "Do you like this one? Do you want more?" "No, thanks," Elise answered. Then, the man withdrew his gaze and said, "Sorry, I'll only dance with my fiancée." Ignoring his answer, Madeline countered, "Elise wouldn't know how to dance. You're gonna make a fool out of her if you bring her onto the dance floor. Maya, on the other hand, has learned various styles of ballroom dances, and she'd mastered every single genre of them, so bring her. You'll surely impress everyone." Alexander was upset by his mother's condescending words toward Elise.

Glowing, he was obviously offended. "Since Miss Dahlen's so exceptional at dancing, I'm sure she'd have a line of men waiting to dance with her, whereas I, having no talent in dancing, would only be a drag to her." "I don't mind at all, Alex..." Maya gently mumbled. Though, Alexander didn't seem to care what she said. The four were surrounded by nothing but awkwardness then. Seeing that, Madeline gazed viciously at Elise, thinking that she was the root of all of her disconcertment.

She then pleaded, "Alex, save your mother some pride, will you? Maya's the host today. You shouldn't treat her like a joke in front of everyone." Without any intention to compromise, Alexander apathetically declined. "What does that have to do with me?" At his reply, Madeline was shocked speechless, while Maya's face reddened. The latter let out a scoff and vexedly fled. "Maya!" Madeline yelled, though Maya didn't seem to have the desire to turn around as she coldly left.

Madeline then turned to his son and confronted him in a suppressed voice. "What's wrong with you, Alex? Are you in love with this woman so much you won't even care about your mother's pride?" As if she was heartbroken, she pointed at Elise. "Is this woman so important that you'd forgotten I'm your mother? You really disappoint me, Alex." "I'm sorry." Alexander instinctively stood before Elise, calmly clarifying, "Elise is my fiancée.

She'll soon be my wife—the one person I'll spend the rest of my life with; the one purpose of my life. And you, Mom, are someone whom I respect the most in the whole world, so I truly hope that you can accept the person I love. But if you can't get yourself to... Well, not that it matters." Finished, he reached out his hand to Elise, who, filled with joy, slowly put her hand

onto his palm. "Care for a dance?" As Elise stared at him, there was an inexplicable feeling in her heart.

She grasped his hand regardless. When he unconditionally chose her, she decided to respond to him with her unwavering commitment. "Sure!" At her answer, Alexander quickly tugged her entire body into his arms. The two held each other tightly like the most perfect couple—a sight that stung Madeline's eyes. Silently, Madeline clenched her fists, trembling as she gazed at the couple who were walking side by side onto the dance floor.

At the same time, Maya, too, was led to the middle of the dance floor by a tall, slender man. She boastfully raised her chin, and there was a dash of hostility in her eyes when she looked at Elise and Alexander. As the music started playing, there was not a tinge of fright in Maya as the main dancer for the opening. Her elegance swayed across the dance floor, and none could resist looking at her. "Don't be nervous.

Just follow my lead. It's okay if you make a mistake," Alexander whispered to Elise, who had the urge to tell him that she'd learned the same style of ballroom dance when she was a kid, so she was no stranger to the dance moves. "Don't worry. I'll be fine." Staring at her glistening eyes, he grinned. "Let's go, then." Slowly, the two slipped onto the dance floor. Elise followed Alexander's every step closely, and her ability to match him astounded him.

"You know this dance?" She subtly smiled. "A little. I dabbled." Alexander bluntly replied, "A little? Look at you, you're a professional! You must have spent years learning it, huh? There's no way 'I dabbled' can get you here." Elise wordlessly beamed. Her movements were gracious and in no way inferior to Maya's.

Besides, with Alexander as her partner, the scene was definitely a sight for sore eyes. "Who's the woman beside Young Master Alex? I've never seen her before." "He must have gotten a new girlfriend after hearing everyone calling his fiancée hideous. This one's really beautiful though." "He always seemed so professional, like he had no interest in women. I guess there's this side to Young Master Alex too, huh?"

"Haha, I know right! He's a man after all, and one that, too, can't get himself to resist beautiful faces at that. I've always thought he was different from us, but I guess I was wrong." ... All of a sudden, the crowd suddenly opened up a path. Maxwell was seen leading a middle-aged man into the venue.

The latter's presence attracted the approaches of many. "You actually came, Mr. Fassbender! It's a surprise to see you here. What an honor to meet you! I am..." Despite

everyone's warm welcome, Quentin merely responded with short, polite greetings and nothing more.

The man who spoke to him moments ago was seen wiping the sweat off his forehead, proposing, "Mr. Fassbender, our company is currently..." Before he could finish, however, Quentin's assistant came and interrupted him. "Excuse me, but Mr. Fassbender's not discussing work tonight." Rejected, the man tactfully walked away.

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Quentin then scanned across his surroundings before stopping his gaze at Elise and Alexander. Instantly, his face turned much gentler. Seeing that, Maxwell turned to the direction he was looking at, but had no idea what he was thinking. "Mr. Fassbender, your arrival truly brings delight to the mass. Shall we head upstairs for a rest, where no one can disturb you?" Straightforwardly, Quentin refused his offer. "No need, Mr. Dahlen. I'm just a normal guest like any other. Don't be so courteous with me." Maxwell obsequiously laughed. "There's no courtesy, Mr. Fassbender.

Just my obligation as the host." At that moment, Maya, who was on the dance floor, noticed Quentin, who was looking in her direction. Swiftly, she straightened her back and danced more gracefully, hinting at her dance partner to take control of the dance floor together. Consequently, every other dancer stopped dancing and gave them the spotlight. With that, only two pairs of dancers remained—Maya and her partner, as well as Elise and Alexander.

Although Elise was confused, she didn't stop her steps given that the music had yet to stop. Alexander then wrapped his arm around her waist and whispered, "Let's leave after this one." "Okay," she answered, and followed Alexander's tempo as they continued to dance. The next second, she noticed Quentin, who was standing outside the dance floor. Thrilled at his arrival, she gave him a big smile, to which Quentin responded with a much more benign, subtle grin. Although Maxwell had noticed his change, he still didn't manage to find out what caused it.

He tracked Quentin's vision to her own daughter, who was on the dance floor, and instinctively assumed that Quentin's sudden change was caused by Maya. Instantly, there was an uncontrollable joy in his heart, which he suppressed as he calmly uttered, "Mr. Fassbender, this is my daughter, Maya. I'll have her walk you through the surroundings later." Quentin turned to him. "Your daughter's quite the dancer, Mr. Dahlen."

Hearing that, Maxwell seemed to have an epiphany. *Is he into my daughter?* Although Quentin was over forty, he did a fine job maintaining his youthful look. One would assume he was only in his early thirties. And Maya was twenty years old this year. Even though there was quite a big gap between their ages, the man in question was the Quentin Fassbender. Therefore, out of courtesy, trivial details such as age could be easily overlooked. Bearing that in mind, Maxwell had a hard time containing his excitement. "Thank you, Mr. Fassbender."

The girl's been to dancing classes since she was a kid. It seems her hard work has paid off!" Unaware of his underlying intentions, Quentin politely praised, "Yes, she's a very talented dancer indeed." Finished, he turned away. In that instant, Madeline walked over to him from among the crowd and greeted, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Fassbender. I'm Madeline Bowen from Griffith Group." As Quentin was about to leave, he halted his steps when he heard the company name. He then turned to Madeline and had roughly figured out her identity. "Nice to meet you too, Mrs. Griffith."

Before Madeline approached him, she was feeling somewhat uneasy, fearing that a giant figure like him wouldn't respond to her. However, a pleasant surprise was that he would care to entertain her. "Mr. Fassbender, I've heard that you're planning to establish subsidiaries within the country. Not sure if it's true or false, but I would like to tell you that Griffith Group has great advantages that could benefit your expansion."

If you like that, perhaps you could consider collaborating with our company." Quentin nodded. "It's true that Griffith Group excels in this aspect. Each of the young masters of the Griffiths is outstanding, especially Alexander. He's really an exceptional young man." Hearing his compliment for her son, she was overjoyed. She then hastily replied, "To think that Mr. Fassbender knows Alex! What an honor!" "It's nothing, Mrs. Griffith. Young Master Alex truly is one of a kind!" Quentin turned to the dance floor, looking at Alexander and Elise with his admiring eyes.

"Besides, I admire his extraordinary vision. We shall work together in the future when we get the chance." Never had Madeline expected things to develop so smoothly. "That's great

news!" Having said that, she turned to her son, but was immediately angered when she saw Elise. "Oh, Alex! He's good at everything, and never let me and his father worry about him. Among all things, he just had to be stubborn at picking his partner." From those words, Quentin sensed something odd. The woman was blatantly insulting his own daughter! "That's a pretty biased statement, is it not, Mrs. Griffith?"

Young people nowadays are into romantic freedom. Now is no longer what it used to be. Arranged marriage is nothing but a matter of the past." Failing to acknowledge the message in his words, Madeline hastily replied, "Even so, homogamy still matters! The Griffiths would become a joke to society if that country girl without a solid family background were to get into our family!" *Ah, so that's how it is. She doesn't think Elise is worth her family.* "Are you perhaps talking about Young Master Alex's fiancée, Mrs. Griffith?" "That's exactly who I'm talking about!

Mr. Fassbender, you can laugh all you want, because even I am utterly displeased with that woman. Unfortunately, it was the Griffiths' old man who had determined the marriage. Now that he has passed away, I was thinking if I could revoke the engagement. I'll be satisfied if Alex finds someone who at least meets the standards of our family." Hearing that, Quentin mocked, "I totally agree with you, Mrs. Griffith. Indeed, you have to find someone of your own standards. In this case, you may have overestimated yourself." *Overestimated?* Baffled, as she was about to quiz him, she realized that Quentin looked rather displeased compared to earlier.

She grew frustrated, not knowing what she said that upset him. "I'm just thinking out loud, Mr. Fassbender. About our collaboration..." "We'll talk about it later. It'll depend on Alexander's performance." *If Alexander does Elise even the slightest wrong one day, he'll be getting it from me.* Meanwhile, the song playing on the dance floor stopped. Elise eagerly walked out of the dance floor, to which Alexander questioned her exhilaration. "What made you so excited?" She explained, "My godfather's here! I wanna see him!" Reminded by her words, he turned to Quentin, who was apparently right beside Madeline.

For some reason, he couldn't help but feel uneasy, as if something bad was about to happen. "I'll come with you." And so, both of them walked toward Quentin. Elise, having noticed Madeline's presence, instantly felt nervous, and her steps grew hesitant. "What's wrong?" Alexander asked out of concern. As she was about to answer, Quentin waved at her. She then smilingly replied, "Nothing. Let's go."

Thereupon, they headed toward Quentin. Nonetheless, this time, instead of calling out "Papa," Elise greeted, "Uncle Quentin." Hearing her addressing himself as that, Quentin scowled in confusion, though he was able to grasp the reason for her change. Someone had

been bullying his daughter, and was about to receive their payoff. He could allow anything, even the worst, to happen to himself, but to have anyone bully her daughter was strictly forbidden.

"You're here too, Ellie! What a coincidence!" Madeline was dumbfounded. "You know each other, Mr. Fassbender?" Quentin forthrightly stated, "Why, I've been looking after the girl as she grew." At the revelation, Madeline's face blanched, realizing that she had been flagrantly criticizing the girl right in front of him. *Hell, they knew each other?*

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Madeline's face instantly shifted between an interesting range of colors. Wasn't the most slightly thing to see, but Quentin ignored her. "Ellie, I've heard that you were the highest scorer in the college entrance examination for your city. That's an amazing feat! Which university did you apply to?" Elise chuckled. "Tissote University! But I still haven't gotten my letter of admission yet. It'll probably arrive in a few more days."

"Tissote University is among the *crème de la crème* nationally! Since you managed to get a spot there, it just shows how smart you are! I'm so proud of you!" Quentin had a look of pride on his face. He couldn't wait to announce this piece of good news to the world. "Thank you for all the compliments. I'll continue to work hard." "Do your best! I have high expectations of you." Everybody could see every one of the pair's interactions. Madeline was well and thoroughly stunned. She never once thought that Elise and Quentin would know each other, and from the looks of things, they were close as well.

The bystanders were smart; they had been a little taken aback by Elise when they saw her, a strange girl, dancing with Alexander, earlier. Now that they saw her interacting affectionately with Quentin, they surmised that Elise was no ordinary girl. Right then, Maya approached them with her father, Maxwell, alongside. "Mr. Fassbender, this is my daughter, Maya." Maya was all smiles as she greeted Quentin. "Pleased to meet you, Uncle Quentin!" Quentin raised an eyebrow slightly. He couldn't accept others calling him that, so he gave Maya a terse reply. "No need for such stiff politeness, Miss Dahlen!"

His curt response was enough to establish his attitude; his tone with her and with Elise seemingly came from two different people! Maya couldn't quite hide her expression now, but she was mindful of her family's business, so she didn't dare to raise her voice at Quentin. She simply smiled instead. "I've heard about you for a long time, Uncle Quentin. Now that I've met you in person, you seem to be a little different from what all the legends say. After all, the Quentin Fassbender that people whisper of is a solemn and serious businessman. However, I feel like you're far friendlier than what the rumors said about you."

Her choice of words was absolutely beautiful; no regular person would have been able to find a flaw in her spiel. But Quentin was no regular man; he had long since gotten used to hearing people trying to get into his good books like this, so he didn't feel any way toward Maya. He just didn't feel right with how she addressed him. "Miss Dahlen, we aren't that close to each other. Please, call me Mr. Fassbender."

Maya wasn't the only one affected by this, her expression changing upon hearing that; even Madeline began to ruminate on this turn of events. Prior to this, Maya had been talking about how close she was with Quentin and how highly he thought of her. Now that Madeline saw what just happened, things weren't as how Maya said they were. On the contrary, Elise seemed even closer to Quentin than Maya was! *However, Elise is just a country bumpkin. How did she get to know a man of high status like Quentin? Is there something that I'm not aware of?*

Maxwell swiftly came to Maya's rescue. "You're absolutely right, Mr. Fassbender! Maya calling you 'Uncle Quentin' isn't exactly appropriate. After all, you look so young, and you don't look like you're much older than Maya. She didn't quite notice this, so please, don't take offense to my daughter." It was simple, but there was an extra layer to his words when he placed Quentin on the same level as Maya—Maxwell's motives were plain as day.

The only reason Quentin came here today was to see Elise. If he hadn't known that Elise would be here at this banquet, he wouldn't have attended such an occasion to socialize with others. Now that he had met Elise, he was no longer willing to spend another minute here. So, he said, "I have some other business to attend to, Mr. Dahlen, so I'll be on my way!" "Don't you want to stay a little longer? If there's anything you need, I can make the arrangements—" However, Quentin didn't give Maxwell a chance to finish as he simply turned to Elise. "Ellie, my girl, remember to let me know if you need anything, okay?"

Elise nodded, having picked up on his intentions. "Got it!" Quentin dipped his head before turning around and leaving with his entourage, completely ignoring everyone else. The

moment he left, the atmosphere in the hall immediately changed. Everyone had seen how Quentin treated Elise, and they quickly approached her, clamoring for her attention like groveling limpets. "Hello there, Miss Sinclair. I'm Sprowls from Bluestar Enterprises. Nice to meet you." "Miss Sinclair, you're such a beautiful lady. Please take a look at our company if you have the time.

It's a company with a bright future ahead." "Here's my name card, Miss Sinclair! I hope that you'll keep an eye on our company in the future." Elise was wordless. She knew that their sudden one-eighty was because of Quentin. She also knew what their thoughts truly were. The next moment, Madeline changed her tune as well, and she grabbed Elise's hand. "It was my fault earlier, Elise! You're a grown woman; please don't hold it against me." Elise raised an eyebrow slightly and glanced at Alexander, who was off to the side. He answered her with a smile, but he didn't speak.

Elise was grateful for his trust in her, so she withdrew her gaze and looked at Madeline. "Don't be a stranger, Mrs. Griffith. We're family, after all. We don't have to be so stiff with each other." Madeline was so touched by this that she nearly cried. "You're so understanding, Elise! I was blind earlier. That being said, how did you know Mr. Fassbender?" All Elise said was, "He was a neighbor of mine ages ago. There's nothing else to it."

This revelation immediately dropped a roadblock in Madeline's plans. She had been thinking that if Elise and Quentin were that close, it wouldn't be entirely impossible for the Griffiths to make inroads with the Fassbenders. But now that Elise said so, her plan wouldn't work anymore. *Well, I suppose that's to be expected. How could anyone just easily worm their way into the Fassbender Family's graces, when they were a single, large trove of wealth?* Madeline's demeanor promptly chilled. Elise didn't mind this change. "It's getting late now. I'll be going first."

Madeline made a noise of affirmation. "Sure. You may take your leave." Alexander then called out from the side, "I'll go with you." Madeline wanted to stop him, but this time, she caught sight of Elise, and she decided to drop the notion. She just allowed the pair to leave. After they left the banquet, Elise's eyes darted around. Alexander got a little curious then. "What are you looking for?" Elise fixed her gaze on her target, her eyes glinting.

"Over there." Alexander followed her gaze, and he saw a Rolls-Royce parked by the side of the road. He could already guess who owned it. "Is it Mr. Fassbender?" Elise made a sound of affirmation. "Papa signaled to me before he left to come out and find him. That's why I was in such a hurry to leave." Elise walked over to the car with quick steps as she explained

to Alexander. When she neared the car, the chauffeur got out and opened the door for her most respectfully.

"Please take a seat, Miss!" Elise thanked him and got into the car. Alexander followed suit. With the door now closed, the car began to slowly take off and leave the grounds. "Papa!" A smile bloomed on Quentin's face when Elise called out to him. "Ah, Ellie, you didn't acknowledge me as your godfather earlier in front of everyone. Were you worried I would embarrass you?"

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"No way, you got it all wrong; that wasn't my intention. I was just worried about the possible trouble that'll crop up." After all, many people would try to suck up to Quentin, considering his identity. Elise had only expressed that they were on somewhat close terms, and already, there was a whole queue of people trying to get to him through her. And Quentin knew this better than anyone else. "You're getting even more crafty by the day, my girl!" Having said that, Quentin looked at Alexander, his eyes narrowing slightly when he recalled Madeline's words earlier.

He then quickly continued, "How has life been treating you recently, Ellie? If anything happens, come straight to me! You'll always have my full support." "I know, Papa! Don't worry about that! I've been doing just fine." "That's all I need to hear!" After saying that, Quentin seemingly thought of something. He then dug out a bunch of keys from his pocket and handed it over to her. "I'm very proud of you, knowing that you got into Tissote University. These are the keys to the house that I bought for you near campus. You can stay there. It'll be more convenient for you that way."

Elise stared at the keys. Her heart wouldn't stop thumping furiously in her chest. Property prices in Tissote were sky-high; just a single studio apartment would set one back millions already. "This is too expensive a gift. I can't accept this." Much to her surprise, Quentin became unhappy when she said that, and he shoved the keys right into her hands. "This is

for my darling daughter, so it's not expensive to me at all! I'm going to be upset if you don't accept it."

"Okay, Papa! I'll take it." It was only then that Quentin's expression lightened up. "That's my girl, being so considerate and polite even with her godfather! Say, when are you going to Tissote? It'll be easier for me to help you make the necessary arrangements." "Early September, I guess!" "Okay, got it. Let me send you two back. Or, do you want to go to the Griffith Residence instead?" "No, I already moved out. I currently stay at a place at Bollinger Gardens that I bought myself," Elise quickly said. Quentin's eyes narrowed slightly at that before he asked, "Ellie, did something upsetting happen to you recently?"

Elise shook her head. "I'm fine! I just thought that I was imposing too much on the Griffiths' hospitality, so I decided to move out myself." Quentin clearly wasn't buying any of that, but he didn't call her out on her lie either. He simply said, "No matter what happens, remember to tell me, okay? Don't keep everything to yourself." "Don't worry, Papa. I'm fine, really!" Quentin felt even more heartbroken when he heard her say that, but he didn't show any sign of it on his face. Elise was the first one to get out of the car when he dropped Elise and Alexander off at their destination.

However, seeing how Alexander still remained seated in the car, she proceeded to call him. But then, Alexander said, "Head in first. There's something that I want to talk to Mr. Fassbender about." Elise asked, "Why are you guys acting so mysterious all of a sudden, Papa? Can't I listen in too?" Quentin chuckled. "How can a woman listen in on a conversation between two men? Hurry upstairs now! Get some rest!" Elise pouted.

"Okay, Papa! I'm going now. See you later." She then waved and proceeded to make her way into the building. After the car door was closed again, the atmosphere between Alexander and Quentin inexplicably changed. Neither of them spoke, but Alexander could sense a certain pressure weighing down on him. It was the first time someone made him feel that way. Quentin quirked an eyebrow slightly and said, "I'm not going to beat around the bush, Alex, so let me just cut right to the chase. I've watched Ellie grow up with my own eyes. I know her personality and her feelings better than anyone.

Since you've chosen her, then I ask you to take good care of her. Do not let her suffer, ever. As for your mother, there are certain things that I can't possibly say. Still, I will have to remind you of this: regardless of anything, Ellie has me watching her back..." Alexander understood Quentin's intentions. "Rest assured, Mr. Fassbender! Elise is my fiancée, so

naturally, I'll protect her from anything. Even my mother cannot challenge my decision! I ask you to not worry about this."

Having heard his reply, Quentin felt a lot more at ease. "All right, I'll trust you for now because of what you've said." Having gotten out of the car, Alexander then watched the car drive off into the distance. Elise appeared out of nowhere after the car left and gently tapped him on the shoulder. "What did Papa say to you? You don't exactly look good." Alexander looked at Elise standing before him, and then he reached out to hug her, saying to her in the softest and gentlest of tones, "Your godfather asked me to take good care of you." "Just that?" "That's not all." "What else did he say?"

"He also told me not to bully you, or he will make me regret it." A huge smile spread across Elise's face upon hearing that before she ribbed him. "Haha, now you know, don't you? I've got someone powerful backing me." "Mhm, I know now, so I have to be even nicer to you." Elise couldn't restrain herself anymore. She burst into laughter. "Isn't that something you should be doing in the first place?" "That's right! Mr. Fassbender's words just strengthened my resolve." Alexander was serious when he said that. However, deep down, he knew that nothing had changed even though Quentin's words had had an effect on him.

His original desires aligned perfectly with what Quentin said. This was a tacit understanding between two men, all for someone that they both wanted to protect. "Let's go home! It's getting late already." Alexander took the initiative and led her inside. The two of them then went upstairs. They had just arrived home when Elise got a phone call from Danny. "Hey Boss, your letter of admission is here. When should I bring it over?"

"Tomorrow, then." "Sure do, Boss! Once again, congratulations! By the way, lemme tell you another piece of good news: my own admission letter is here too. When the time comes, we can go to Tissote for university together, even if we won't be attending the same uni..." Elise could hear the excitement in his voice. "Congrats! You got what you wished for!" "Thanks, Boss! I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for you."

Danny was absolutely sincere when he said that. Elise smiled. "It's all thanks to your own hard work. I just gave you a little push." She might have said that, but Danny knew that if it wasn't for Elise, he might not even have gotten into university. After hanging up, Elise absentmindedly placed her phone on the table. She walked over to the French window, taking in the night view of the city. *Time sure flies. It's been nearly a year since I came to this city.*

Many things have happened during this one year. And during this period, I've grown a lot... The next day, Elise went to the studio. She had just taken one step into her office when Brendan

came over to her. "Elise!" Elise raised her head to look at him. "What is it? Did something happen?"