

## Desperation 126

### Chapter 126

As Ashley, Joseph, and Jaden stepped out of the venue, they ran into a group of young designers.

The moment these designers saw Ashley, they hurried over, their faces filled with admiration as they exclaimed, "Ashley, the

starry nightgown you designed for the contest was absolutely stunning! It looked amazing!"

Ashley smiled a bit shyly, "Thank you!"

One of the designers, a slender man, scratched his head, his tone full of regret. "I'm sorry for the misunderstanding before..."

During the competition, they had been overly critical from the sidelines, saying Ashley's participation would only lead to a more

humiliating defeat for the Zyrrinthia Team.

But, in the end, it was Ashley who salvaged the reputation of Zyrrinthia's design community.

Hearing these apologies, Joseph couldn't help but snort, still visibly annoyed.

Hearing that cold snort, Jaden narrowed his eyes and looked at Joseph, sensing his unusual protectiveness towards Ashley.

After the designers apologized to Ashley, they briefly discussed some design matters.

One of the designers asked, "Ashley, the starry night dress you designed has a style reminiscent of Attelia's. Are you a fan of

Attelia?"

Ashley raised an eyebrow at the question, responding in a playful tone, "Of course, I'm a fan."

Jaden struggled to hold back laughter, thinking how bold it was for Ashley to express admiration for her own work.

Another designer took out his phone, visibly excited. "Ms. Ramos, your design skills are impressive. Could we exchange contact

information? I'd love to consult you on design matters in the future if that's okay?"

Joseph, who always backed his brother, immediately went on high alert.

Men understood men the best. That man said he wanted to discuss design, but it was just a pretext to get Ashley's phone

number.

Joseph stepped forward with a sneer. "Buddy, if you want to talk design, let's talk design. Why the need to exchange contact

info? And hey, why don't you add me while you're at it?"

That designer's cheeks turned a slight red as he sheepishly put away his phone.

As everyone was chatting, Kevin walked over with an assistant following him, carrying documents and other items.

After the designers apologized to Ashley, they left.

Kevin approached Ashley with a genuine smile. "I haven't congratulated you yet. Winning over Eric with a design sketch

damaged by water is impressive."

Ashley smiled, "Thank you."

Kevin smiled warmly, "Although we were classmates, we lost touch. I never expected you to pursue fashion design, let alone be

so talented at it."

Ashley replied, "Your design draft is pretty good, too. You really have your own ideas."

Kevin smiled and shook his head, acknowledging his shortcomings. "I'm not as good as you even though I'm a few years older. I

can see that."

Jaden looked curiously at Kevin and interrupted, "Didn't you just say you were classmates? How come you're a few years older

than Ashley?"

Kevin smiled and explained, "She skipped a grade in high school, so she was younger than her peers."

"Skipped a grade?" Jaden was of mixed heritage. He didn't quite

understand what that meant. It took a few seconds for him to understand the term, squinting his eyes in thought.

Then, looking at Ashley with a mix of surprise and admiration, he exclaims, "Sweetheart, you were really something special even

as a kid! Why haven't you ever told me about this?"

Ashley didn't take it seriously at all. "What's there to talk about?"

Jaden fell silent. "You've mentioned your childhood fiancé to me twice, yet you never brought up skipping a grade, which is a big

deal!”

Jaden turned to Joseph, who was standing nearby, and asked, “Did she ever mention this to you?”

Joseph answered distractedly, “No.”

Jaden felt a bit more balanced mentally. He then realized that Joseph was answering his question absentmindedly, his eyes almost glued to Kevin.

Jaden narrowed his eyes as he pulled Joseph under a nearby billboard.

Joseph frowned, “Why did you bring me here?”

Seeing Joseph constantly looking at Ashley and Kevin a few feet away, Jaden smiled slyly, raising his eyebrows, “Are you a friend of Ashley’s?”

Joseph didn’t even look at him. “Isn’t that obvious?”

Jaden smirked as he spoke with a hint of double meaning. “Why do I get the feeling that you’re not really Ashley’s friend, huh?”

Finally, Joseph turned to face him, sizing Jaden up. “What are you implying?”

With a hand casually in his pocket and a mischievous glint in his eyes, Jaden teased, “We’ve only known each other for half a day, but I can tell that you like Ashley, don’t you?”

At those words, Joseph nearly choked. His face turned to shock and panic. “What the hell are you talking about!” he exclaimed.

Jaden clicked his tongue, his eyes charming. He listed his observations. “You were hostile towards me. You thought I had a crush on Ashley, right?”

“And now, you’re constantly watching Kevin, obviously guarding against him.

“So, if it’s not that you like Ashley, what is it?”

Joseph was silent.

It wasn’t that the guess was entirely wrong.

The first two points were quite accurate.

But the final conclusion was totally off the mark. It was so wrong.

Joseph's face turned sullen. He gritted his teeth and said, "Jaden, for heaven's sake, if you don't know, don't guess! Ashley is my

brother's girlfriend!"

"Your brother's girlfriend?"

This revelation struck Jaden with shock. 'His brother's girlfriend? What the world is going on?"

While Jaden was in shock, he suddenly thought about something. "I get it now! You're the brother of Ashley's childhood fiancé!"

Joseph looked bewildered. "Childhood fiancé?"

Jaden didn't elaborate, just feeling speechless. "Why would you even think I like Ashley? I'm her close friend, her best partner,

get it?"

Joseph gave a false smile. "Which partner calls the other 'sweetheart'?"

Jaden raised an eyebrow, casually wrapping an arm over his shoulder. "What's the big deal? I can call you sweetheart too, huh?"

Joseph was at a loss for words.

He felt a chill run down his spine, and he blurted out a curse, "Damn it, man. You're annoying!"

After that, he swatted Jaden's arm off his shoulder.

On the other side, Kevin glanced at his watch, his voice gentle. "It's almost noon. How about we grab lunch together?"

Ashley instinctively declined. "Today's not a good day. I already made plans to have dinner with some friends."

Kevin glanced towards Joseph and Jaden not far away and nodded in understanding. "Alright, some other time then."

After chatting a bit, Ashley said goodbye to Kevin.

Once Kevin had left, Ashley looked at Joseph and Jaden, teasing, "What are you two up to? Are you whispering secrets behind

my back?"

Hearing Ashley's call, Joseph immediately ran back, his expression somewhat weird. "Ashley, your friend is..."