

Love's Second Chance

Chapter 2

One of Jonathan's friends was getting married and had arranged for a bachelor party.

Zara accompanied Jonathan in attending the party. They entered the private room, which was full of familiar faces. Even Harper was there.

Yet, Jonathan's expression dimmed once he saw her. He approached to ask, "Who allowed you to come to such a place?"

Indeed, Harper was dripping with innocence and clashed with the wild environment.

"My brother's abroad on a business trip, so I'm here to pass a gift to the groom on his behalf."

Jonathan's frown eased slightly after hearing that. Still, he reminded her countless times not to drink any alcohol before returning to Zara's side.

Zara subtly suppressed any ruffled emotions in her heart as she watched Jonathan show concern for Harper.

Just then, the star of the party arrived. Everyone gathered around to congratulate him. That also shifted Zara's focus off Jonathan and Harper.

Everyone sipped on wine while chatting.

"Dude, I never imagined you'd be the first among us to get married."

"Yeah! I always thought Jonathan and Zara would be the first."

"I agree. They've been dating for eight years. It's about time they tied the knot."

Zara forced a tense smile while turning to look at Jonathan. As expected, the latter maintained a neutral expression as if he hadn't heard it.

Marriage was a banned topic between them.

Zara had proposed to Jonathan three times before, but she always got rejected. She had a slight desire to get married after she turned 25. However, Jonathan never brought up marriage, so she decided to propose.

The first proposal was on her 26th birthday. Jonathan wanted to wait a little longer, declaring they weren't mature enough for marriage.

The second time was after he had secured a big business project. He claimed to be overwhelmed with work at the company, so he wanted to wait until he was free to discuss a marriage.

The third proposal was half a year ago.

At the time, Jonathan said, "Zar, I don't believe in marriage. My love for you is genuine, but I don't want to get married. Nothing will change between us, apart from us not getting married. Let's keep going on this way, okay?"

Because of that, Zara continued to do things his way until now. She was 28 years old at the present.

Zara didn't wish to partake in that conversation anymore, so she stood to get some snacks from the dessert table. She leaned against the table while taking a bite of her snack. Just then, a decently tall and handsome man approached her.

His gaze filled with noticeable surprise toward her.

Zara was the ideal beauty standard. She had beguiling facial features, but they also gave the impression that she was unapproachable. That kind of beauty ignited men's desires to win her over.

"Hey there, gorgeous. Can I get your phone number?" the man asked candidly.

Zara glanced at him. The man had clearly just joined this social group because he didn't even know she was dating Jonathan.

She was about to respond when some of Jonathan's friends noticed what was happening. With smiles on their faces, they approached to ask, "Are you serious, dude?"

The man froze, unsure of what they meant.

Then, the group of friends brought the man to Jonathan, eager to watch things play out. They chuckled while saying, "Hey, Mr. Zarr. This guy wants to pursue Zara. How do you feel about that?"

That was also when the man realized Zara already had a boyfriend. To make things worse, her boyfriend was Jonathan, a wealthy heir. His face paled while his brows furrowed into a deep V as he scurried off.

Zara knew best how intensely possessive Jonathan was. He could never tolerate any males lingering around her.

Once, a guy didn't know any better and confessed his feelings to Zara. He ended up getting kicked so hard by Jonathan that his ribs broke. He was even ordered never to show up in front of Zara.

Jonathan's friends intentionally wanted to see something like that happen again.

Zara was about to calm Jonathan down, but she was shocked to see a very composed reaction on his face. He shot a cold stare at the man but didn't bother saying anything, much less beat up the man.

That caused Zara to freeze mid-step.

Yet, in the next second, Jonathan looked up and noticed that Harper was being flirted with by a man in a corner of the private room. His demeanor grew grim as he got up and headed over.

"Hey, beautiful, just tell me your phone number—"

A thud interrupted the man's words. He hadn't finished speaking before he got aggressively kicked, causing him to land about three feet away.

The entire private room fell silent as alarmed gazes snapped in that direction. Everyone then noticed an upset Jonathan shielding Harper behind him. His glare alone could have killed the man, and he spoke with the frostiest tone. "Do you have a death wish?"

Jonathan had learned combat skills, so he was more brutal when beating up others. He continued to attack the man as if one kick wasn't enough, and he wanted to kill the man.

All at once, the massive private room fell into an uproar. The sounds of fighting, shouting to stop, and various shattering wine bottles rang out.

Harper hid in the corner, feeling frightened by everything. "I'm scared, Jonathan..."

Zara had been holding Jonathan back from the fight, but she felt him stiffen in her arms for a split second. Then, he stopped fighting at once and turned around to look at Harper, whose eyes had reddened.

Jonathan sped past the people who tried to stop the fight and approached the crying Harper. "Don't be afraid. I'll take you away from this place right now."

He covered Harper's eyes before gingerly leading her out of the room. While doing so, he didn't acknowledge Zara, who stood nearby.

Zara remained on the spot, her muscles stiffening like she had fallen into a frozen lake. Jonathan's aggressive attack on the man and his gentleness when taking Harper away played in her mind repeatedly.

Whispers and discussions about her had also broken out in the room. She didn't wish to deal with that situation, so she composed herself, picked up her bag, and left.

Yet, she soon realized it had rained at some point once she got outside.

She looked at the heavy rain and recalled a rainy day many years ago. Her divorced parents had finally made time to spend the day out with her. Alas, they got into a car accident and died.

Since then, rainy days and driving had become a type of trauma to Zara. She didn't even dare to learn to drive, so she always traveled by taxi.

Yet, there were places where she sometimes struggled to hail a taxi. After she met Jonathan, he would always show up on time in his car and offer her the utmost reassurance, regardless of where she wanted to go.

Zara stared into the space while standing at the club's entrance. She remained that way until the sound of an engine rang out from not far away. Then, a Maybach suddenly pulled over before her.

A handsome man got out of the car after that. He held an umbrella while walking toward Zara. "Zara? What are you doing here alone?"

That was when Zara looked up at the towering man before her. It was Hayden Gavino, Harper's older brother. She was surprised to see he had returned to the country.

She assumed he had rushed back after hearing about Harper's incident earlier. With a polite nod, she explained, "Harper's fine. Jonathan has just brought her away from here."

To her surprise, Hayden frowned and didn't ask about Harper. Instead, he gazed at Zara's bruised ankle. "You're hurt."

Zara hadn't realized it until now. However, she figured she had likely injured her ankle by accident earlier. "It's a minor injury. It shouldn't be a problem."

She didn't expect Hayden's face to darken even more. In the next second, he dumped his umbrella aside, wrapped an arm around her waist, and carried her off the ground. Before she could even process her surprise, Hayden locked the car door and vanished into the rainy night.

Hayden later returned with some cotton swabs and a medicated cream. His expression stayed stern as he removed Zara's shoe before gently applying the cream to her bruise.

Zara couldn't help but try to break free, yet Hayden grabbed her leg and prevented her from moving again.

She wasn't close with Hayden. Moreover, Hayden was part of Jonathan's friend group. He was also considered a highly desired but unattainable type because he was always cold to everyone.

Zara knew Hayden first during her university days because they were in the same club. However, they were only acquaintances because they didn't spend long in the club. Afterward, Zara spent even less time around Hayden because she started dating Jonathan.

She never imagined Hayden would treat her wound himself at this moment.

Fortunately, he didn't do anything apart from dealing with her bruise. Following that, he disposed of the cotton swabs and started the car engine.

Hayden said nothing as he tacitly drove to the area Zara lived in.

Zara finally snapped out of her daze when the car stopped outside her building. Although she found Hayden's behavior too overbearing, she still felt obliged to thank him for his help. "Thanks."

Only a hum of acknowledgment came from Hayden before he drove off.

Zara thought, "He's as aloof as always."

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Jonathan only came home late at night. Once he did, he apologized to Zara at once. "Sorry, Zar. I didn't mean to ditch you. The place was just too chaotic, and I feared something bad would happen to Harper."

Zara's emotions had significantly settled down by then. She was silent while meeting the former's gaze, then said, "Don't you think you're looking after Harper a little too much?"

Harper was only being flirted with by a man, yet Jonathan kicked up such a big fuss and ruined someone else's bachelor party.

"Do you not want other men to be close with Harper that badly?" Zara questioned.

Jonathan was rocked to his core by that statement. "I was entrusted to look after her. She's still young, so I'm worried men will deceive her. That's all."

Many emotions stirred in Zara. No matter how much Jonathan explained it, she could tell his reaction at the party was identical to when he used to scare off Zara's suitors. She wasn't a naive little girl anymore, after all.

Zara ultimately replied, "Well, Hayden's back now. So, you can stop being Harper's temporary older brother now, right?"

Jonathan's gaze dimmed. "Zara, I've explained it to you many times. I only see her as a little sister. You've never been this unreasonable before."

All warmth had left his face as he stormed out of the bedroom and into the study.

Zara was left standing in the same spot, a prickly sensation eating at her heart.

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After that night, Zara and Jonathan's relationship turned inexplicably tense. Although they hadn't argued, they weren't as close as before.

They stayed like that until the Xarr family invited the couple to the Xarr residence for a family meal.

Bernard Xarr and Lydia Carter, Jonathan's father and mother, mentioned a topic they always discussed at the dining table. "When do you guys plan on getting married? When will you give us grandchildren?"

Jonathan had never told his family that he didn't believe in marriage.

Not to mention, Lydia never approved of Zara, an orphan whose parents had died. If Jonathan hadn't insisted on being with Zara, she never would have accepted Zara into the family. Now that the two had dated for eight years but didn't marry, Lydia felt even more discontent with Zara.

"Zara, are you unwilling to marry because you're in that dance company? Didn't I tell you long ago to quit your job, get married, and have children?" Lydia scowled at Zara, who lowered her head and kept silent.

Jonathan finally spoke up. "It was my idea not to marry. Work at the company has been overwhelming, so we're not in a rush to get married."

Bernard frowned. "You're already 30. How can you not be in a rush?"

"I told you to choose someone more suitable for you—someone who can aid you even when your company's busy. What's the use of having a partner whose only strength is her good looks?" Lydia sneered.

"Please stop it, Mom." Darkness shrouded Jonathan's face.

Only then did Lydia unwillingly shut her mouth.

After dinner, Jonathan went with Bernard into the study to talk about work. As for Lydia, she naturally headed to her room because she refused to spend time with Zara.

Zara felt uncomfortable and decided waiting in the car outside was best.

Jonathan's assistant, Joel Robshaw, had driven the couple here today.

Joel noticed how worn out Zara seemed through the rearview mirror. Wanting to make things less awkward, he spoke up. "You're attending the company's gala next week, right, Ms. Cardellini?"

While saying that, he showed a picture on his phone to her. "Look. Mr. Xarr asked me to order a custom gown for the company's 60th anniversary gala this year. I bet he's planning to surprise you."

He figured Jonathan would definitely ask Zara to attend the event. After all, she was a professional dancer and Jonathan's girlfriend.