

Perfect Match: Irresistible Desire For You – Chapter 131 - Tips

A trace of bitterness flashed through Leonard's eyes when he realized that Ashley no longer addressed him as grandfather. At this moment, Leonard was no longer as dignified like he was in his youth. Instead, he was now an old man who only longed for the company and presence of his family.

"I appreciate your concern, Ashley. But don't worry. I'm not yet going to die," he said, trying to hide his misery from Ashley as she helped him sit up.

"It's only right that I do this for you, Leonard. Please don't forget to take care of yourself. I'll be so relieved if you stay healthy."

After getting a glass of lukewarm water, she handed it to Leonard who was leaning his back against the soft cushion. "Leonard, here. Drink some water. It will help to drench your throat."

"Thank you." With a nod, he received the glass. He could see the sincere expression of the woman.

The old man had discreetly observed Ashley who was so modest and calm. At that moment, he realized that everything was back to the way it used to be. Even though her sincere care for him remained, the feeling of security and warmth had already gone. It felt like any time, she would suddenly disappear from his life.

"Leonard, you're spacing out. What are you thinking?" She noticed that the old man seemed in a daze. All she could do was look at him with troubled eyes.

While she was sitting next to the hospital bed, Ashley felt that Leonard was not in his best mood. Then, she remembered what John had told her about Leonard's sickness. In a concerned tone, she said, "You will recover quickly, but only if you will keep yourself in a good mood. Just don't think about the things that make you feel down and lonely. Health is the most important."

Leonard smiled at her and nodded. Although he wanted to say something else, he decided to remain quiet.

She took the glass from his hand. Then, she said gently, "Leonard, if there is something you want to say, you can tell me."

Leonard hesitated for a while. Finally, he managed to ask her, “Ashley, is there any chance that you and Joseph will be together again?”

She was stunned when she heard the question. Although Leonard’s expectant look pressured her, she had no idea what to say.

Ashley knew that the only thing Leonard wanted for his children and grandchildren was to be happy. She just could not bear to shatter this old man’s hope. Unfortunately, she could not go back to the man that once betrayed her.

A moment of silence had passed. While holding back her tears, Ashley said softly, “Leonard, I’ll tell you the truth. Joseph’s betrayal hurt me so much. I just don’t think that I could still trust a man who betrayed me. I hope you’ll understand that it’s not easy for me to forgive him.”

“I understand, Ashley. I know that it’s all his fault. It was unfortunate that he couldn’t be with you.” After he heard her predictable answer, Leonard let out a heavy sigh.

He always thought that Joseph had some similarity to Ashley. They were both unconcerned about material things and both had high self-respect. Joseph’s betrayal had not only seriously ruined her self-esteem but also made her feel the pain of being crushed and thrown in the dumps. It wasn’t easy for her to forgive him.

“I don’t understand why Joseph became like that though. His parents died when he was just a kid and he grew up abroad. How come he didn’t know how to cherish a person?”

Leonard couldn’t get why Joseph suddenly changed his personality. Since his grandson was once a cold person, Leonard thought that Joseph would cherish Ashley after falling in love with her.

“I think it’s all my fault because I didn’t teach him well. Maybe I shouldn’t have sent him abroad at that time. If he stayed here, he might not have cheated on you.” Leonard couldn’t help but let out a sigh again. He realized that the open culture abroad had exposed Joseph to several bad habits. One of those was to mess around with the women.

Since Leonard had to relax emotionally, all Ashley could do was listen to him without saying anything.

Even Ashley couldn't figure out why Joseph had changed so easily. If he was the one who had taken care of her while she was in a coma, why would he just disappear the moment she woke up and sleep with another woman?

Ashley never thought about it in the past. Merely picturing a reasonless betrayal was enough to pain her heart. However, after carefully thinking about it, she just realized that there were too many doubts. What could be the real reason for his sudden change? As she simmered in her thoughts, a frown flashed across her face.

"Leonard, may I know the reason why did you send Joseph abroad?"

Maybe Ashley still loved Joseph or she was just interested in his story. Nonetheless, she was still curious about the details.

After thinking for a while, Leonard answered her in a serious tone, "It's a long story. Joseph's parents died when he was just six years old. I felt like my world had shattered, but Joseph remained calm. But as time passed by, Joseph grew rather passive and timid. Later on, the doctor said that he had slight autism. It might also worsen if left without treatment."

As he looked at Ashley, Leonard found out that the woman was listening to him attentively. He just thought that telling her about Joseph's story would help the possibility for them to get back together. Then, he added, "The doctor said that changing the environment would have an apparent effect on him, a patient with autism. It just happens that there is a friend in America who can help arrange the accommodations so that Joseph can acquire the advanced treatment. When Joseph decided to go abroad, I chose to send him to America."

Ashley was looking down and lost in her thoughts as she listened to Leonard's story. It seemed like Joseph had experienced too much at such a young age. His indifference was the result of the sad experience from his childhood. Leonard was in a trance from his memories of the past. She looked at him and felt that the old man was still sad and helpless about Joseph's parents' death.

"So, what happened next?" Ashley craved to know more about Joseph's life.

“Eventually, Joseph turned 21. He returned to take control of the Empire Group. Despite his successful career, he remained cold.” Leonard turned his head to Ashley. “I thought his life would be full of sunshine and happiness when he met you. I never expect that it would turn out like this.”

It looked like even Leonard hadn’t had any idea of what had happened to Joseph in America. The story of ‘Jason’ wasn’t even known to him.

Looking at the past, Ashley hoped that she could help get rid of Joseph’s indifference and warm his heart. But even though she still loved him until now, she just knew that they didn’t have any chance to get back together.

“Leonard, don’t think about it too much. Sooner or later, he’ll surely find a better woman for himself.” Ashley stared at Leonard who was lost in his own thoughts. “If you need me, I can always come here to accompany you. Cheer up! Why don’t we just talk about something happy?”

Leonard looked at her when he heard her speak. Although he didn’t approve of what Ashley said to him earlier, he just knew that he couldn’t do anything to change her mind. Leonard just nodded lightly and said, “Okay, just don’t forget to come here so you can accompany me.” Even though he didn’t have any chance to make Ashley the granddaughter-in-law of the Marshall family, Leonard quietly hoped that this good and lovely girl would still keep in touch with them for the rest of their lives.

The moment Leonard finished his words, the door suddenly burst open. John came in with a pleasant smile while carrying a big and a small bag in his hand.

“Mr. Marshall, how are you feeling? I hope you’re feeling well. I was terrified when you fainted in front of me. You almost scared me to death.” John placed the fruits he just bought on the table. He took a box of food from another bag. Finally, he approached his master whose face still seemed a little pale.

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“Thank you. Ever since Ashley’s visit, my recovery has been rapid.” Leonard beamed at John with pleasure.

“I knew that seeing you would make Mr. Marshall extremely happy, Ashley,” John echoed and flashed her a smile.

“I am very flattered,” Ashley said, blushing a little from their compliments. And then, she added, “Leonard has always been in good health. I simply came here to confirm it and I am glad I have been right.”

“Ha-ha! Ashley has a way with words!” Leonard exclaimed and laughed. He then listened to the arrangement and obediently ate the nutritious porridge which John had just bought. As he ate, he looked up and said, “I’m quite fine. I will be leaving the hospital soon.”

Leonard had joined the army at a very young age. He had always been strong. And if there was something he hated, it was the stench of the hospital. He felt suffocated and wished to leave this place as soon as possible.

“Leonard, don’t be in a hurry. Once a thorough examination has been done, you are free to leave. It won’t take much time. Plus the last thing you want is to return here again. Let’s get done with a thorough examination. If everything seems fine, you can leave the hospital. Does that sound okay?”

Ashley said in a patient and comforting voice. Listening to her, Leonard found himself nodding his head. No objection came out of him. John, who knew persuading Leonard was a herculean task, watched the conversation in surprise. He understood Ashley’s worth in Leonard’s heart. If he had tried the same thing, Leonard would have come up with a million objections and have insisted on going back home as soon as he finished eating the porridge.

Thanks to Ashley, Leonard was nodding his head like an obedient school-boy. Ashley broke into a smile watching him.

After this, the three people in the room indulged in a harmonious chat. Ashley’s presence had lifted Leonard’s spirits. He seemed to be in a good mood, color returning to his pale face.

Just when they were busy chatting, they were interrupted by someone’s entrance. It was Zachary. He rushed into the ward and exclaimed, “Leonard, what’s wrong with you?”

He regarded the old man, checking he was fine. Once he was certain Leonard was in good health, Zachary let out a sigh of relief. He then took the time to notice the other two people in the room, John and Ashley.

“Zachary, I’m fine.” Leonard assured Zachary.

Zachary's eyes had already fallen on Ashley, who was sitting quietly and cutting an apple. He looked at Leonard and said, "I am glad you are fine. I forgot to bring my phone. When I heard about your condition, I left everything and rushed here."

Then he shifted his gaze to Ashley and questioned, "Sister-in-law, why are you here?" His surprise was undisguised.

Listening to herself being referred to as sister-in-law, Ashley was a little stunned. She thought back to their previous encounter at the ball. Zachary had warmly taken to calling her his sister-in-law. She made several attempts to correct him, but in vain. He was adamant and in the end, she gave up.

Now she understood the meaning behind it. However, it was of no use. She was no longer Joseph's beloved. This title wasn't hers.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Estrada." She stood up and greeted him warmly. "I came here to visit Leonard," she said curtly.

She made no attempts to correct him. She knew Zachary wouldn't stop addressing her that way even if she asked him to. After all, it was nothing but a form of address.

"Sister-in-law, Joseph hasn't returned yet. Why are you back?" Zachary asked, regarding her with confusion.

Leonard coughed and interrupted them. "Zachary, help me register for a full examination. I don't wish to stay in this wretched place that long," he said.

"Okay," Zachary replied, diverting his attention once again back to Leonard.

He could tell something was amiss. All the three of them were acting quite odd. Suspicion began to grow in his heart. But he didn't say anything and simply set out to do what he was told.

"Mr. Marshall, I will take a look and see everything is fine," John said to Leonard.

After Leonard nodded his consent, John also left the ward. Now it was just Ashley and Leonard.

“Don’t worry. I’m fine,” she said as she handed him the apples she had cut.

Smart as she was, she could feel the awkwardness in the room. She knew Leonard had stopped Zachary from asking about Joseph, worried she would be sad.

“That’s okay. Let’s forget these unhappy thoughts. Tomorrow is a day off and I am sure I can leave the hospital today. Would you mind visiting me and keeping me company tomorrow?”

he asked. Deep down, Leonard had expected Ashley to react. He wished she would show some hostility at the mention of Joseph. That would prove she still cared about him. Ashley, however, had no reaction. He didn’t want to press her so he changed the topic.

Hearing this request, Ashley thought for a moment and nodded her head. “Okay, I happen to be free tomorrow. In fact, while we are at it, I would like to cook something nice for you. What do you say?”

“Yes, please! I miss your cooking very much.” Leonard beamed when he received a positive response from Ashley.

After this, the atmosphere became light. The two of them continued to talk and laugh about the food they would eat tomorrow. Zachary and John soon returned to the ward.

Then, they accompanied Leonard for a full examination. While he was being examined, Zachary, who had heard the truth from John, didn’t bother Ashley anymore. He only exchanged a few cordial words with her.

They had been busy the whole afternoon. Once the check-up result came, everyone was happy to learn Leonard was perfectly fine. Leonard insisted on leaving the hospital as soon as possible. Ashley said goodbye to the three of them and left for home.

“Joseph, guess who I saw in the hospital today?” Zachary rang Joseph as soon as he dropped Leonard at the mansion. It was already nightfall. He couldn’t resist calling his friend as soon as he got back to the car.

It was Joseph who gave Zachary the news about Leonard’s illness. The second he learned about it, he had dropped everything and went to see him.

“Who? And how is Leonard?” Joseph asked nervously.

“The doctor told us he fainted because of hypoglycemia which came as a result of emotional instability. He is fine now and you have nothing to worry about,” Zachary assured him. “I saw the woman who I thought would be my sister-in-law,” he added, reproach evident in his voice.

There was a brief pause.

Joseph didn’t know how to respond to this. Zachary, who still didn’t know what to make of this news, asked, “Joseph, I don’t get you. You have had a huge crush on her. And now when she has started to reciprocate your love, you choose to abandon her! How can you let go of such a beautiful and kind woman?”

Zachary didn’t know Ashley well enough but he was a good judge of character. From their brief meeting, he had gathered she was a wonderful woman. And when she had entered Joseph’s life, he seemed happy too. He knew it was true love. They were a perfect match! Not only did she belong to a rich family, but she also possessed beautiful looks and good character.

Zachary had been certain they would remain together forever. He couldn’t believe Joseph had a new girlfriend. Just the mere thought of it bothered him.

“You have hurt her very much. In spite of this, she took good care of Leonard. She is selfless and caring. These are rare traits. Where can you find such a woman?” he demanded, sounding distressed.

“You won’t understand,” Joseph said, his voice emotionless. After a short pause, he added, “Please take good care of Leonard. I’ll be back as soon as I wrap up my job here.”

After this, they hung up. ‘I know what you all think. Nobody can understand what I am going through. My wish is to keep her safe and I will do it without hesitation,’ Joseph whispered to himself, feeling an ache in his heart.

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To reduce the stress and pain that Leonard was suffering, Ashley would do her best to spend her free time at Marshall’s mansion. She was cooking, walking, and talking with Leonard for three consecutive days.

Except for the older man's family background, Ashley told her parents about her latest activities. She believed that telling that part to her family would only cause her trouble. On the other side, to help her cope with her despair, her parents had concluded that she should go out for fun whenever she had available time.

Leonard was undoubtedly in a pleasant mood when he was with Ashley. The servants liked this gorgeous and sophisticated lady, and the big mansion became livelier.

Her visit after her off-duty time was something Leonard joyfully looked forward to every day. And now, he appeared to recognize her as a family member after a few days of getting accompanied by her.

In addition to Ashley's visit, Zachary finally came with his attractive girlfriend, making the Marshall family active this bright afternoon.

The moment Zachary and Yasmin entered the house, they were welcomed by a crowd of servants who congratulated them. The couple were both tall, good-looking, and charming.

With Yasmin by his side, Zachary entered the living room. "Leonard, this is the love of my life, my girlfriend, Yasmin," he said, raising his voice in greeting.

"Good day, Mr. Marshall! It's nice meeting you," Yasmin greeted the happy Leonard with a pleasant smile.

"This is a simple gesture of my appreciation for you. Greatest of luck, Mr. Marshall." Yasmin offered the thoughtful gift to the servant standing beside her.

This perfect vintage mansion was much too overpowering, and the visit to the older man was only momentary. Yasmin was a bit anxious at the moment. She didn't settle much attention to Ashley, who sat next to Leonard, after graciously greeting the admirable older man in the hosting seat.

"You've got a wonderful girl here, Zachary! What a lucky man you are!" Leonard smiled as he patted Zachary's shoulder.

Leonard felt so happy that the woman in front of him seemed so stunning, polite, and genuine in her demeanor. Such a woman deserved to be close friends because she had a good heart.

“What would you expect? Do I have a lousy sense of taste? Is that what you think?”

“It is my greatest pleasure, Mr. Marshall.”

In the living room, two distinct voices could be heard at the same time, as well as a peal of beautiful laughter which distracted Yasmin.

“Ashley? What are you doing here?” bewildered, Yasmin wondered. She approached the source of the noise and found her friend, who was still beaming while looking at her.

“Am I not allowed to be here, Yasmin?” Ashley asked with a smile on her face.

The old personality of Yasmin was still clear on Ashley’s mind. So when Ashley realized Yasmin’s change from cheerful to ladylike, she couldn’t help but smile.

Yasmin was puzzled, so she turned to Zachary, who was beside her.

“What a fortunate coincidence! You’re both acquainted with each other. Yasmin, this is...” Zachary was totally baffled. He further said, “You’re both acquaintances with one another. I don’t think I need to introduce you to each other.” When it came to introducing Ashley to Yasmin, he just had no idea of what to say.

Zachary no longer addressed Ashley as “sister-in-law” after learning the two of them had broken up due to Joseph’s unfaithfulness a few days earlier. Instead, he just greeted her as Ashley.

He couldn’t find the right words to describe Ashley’s place in the Marshall family, although he sought to clarify to Yasmin why Ashley was here at first.

“Is it necessary for you to introduce me? We’re like family to each other, Yasmin.” Ashley turned and winked at Yasmin as she spoke, seeing that the latter was still bewildered.

At that moment, Ashley made it clear that she didn't want to answer any more questions because it was meaningless for her to come here. She had no idea what her place in the Marshall family was in reality.

As for Yasmin's unexpected visit to meet the older man at the mansion, she had absolutely no idea what was happening until they were in the main hall.

With a slight smile, Yasmin looked at Leonard and said, "Mr. Marshall, I'm Ashley's close friend. I wasn't expecting to run into her here. It's a matter of fate." She had already discerned that her friend didn't want to proceed with this discussion after years of getting along with her.

Instead of trying to pry, the wise Leonard said plainly, "Yes, you two honor me by being here today. I'm thrilled.

Don't make a stranger of yourself by standing there. Yasmin, please come here and take a seat." Leonard gestured to the vacant chair with a warm smile.

Yasmin gracefully sat down beside Ashley and nodded in gratitude. She began to engage in conversation with the master of the mansion with excitement as she was no longer nervous with her friend's presence.

The scene gladdened soon enough. Leonard was enchanted as Yasmin exposed her outgoing nature and the similarly talkative Zachary played along.

They shared laughter as they exchanged words and gleefully ate together. One by one, they all left in the middle of the night.

The three young people were guided to the parking lot by Leonard. 'If Joseph is with us, they will be two lovely couples.' He couldn't help but sigh in his heart as he looked at the friendly backs of the two women holding hands and the man following them. 'Regrettably, he misses the splendid lady.'

"I'd like to spend the night with you, Ashley," Yasmin said gently while embracing her friend's arm.

Ashley had met Yasmin many times since her return. Yasmin was so enraged that she told Ashley not to communicate with anyone or anything associated with Joseph when she heard that he split up with her loving friend.

Yasmin couldn't help but be confused when she heard that this was Joseph's home today. She insisted to be left alone with Ashley because she was intrigued about why her friend had come here.

"Fine, whatever you want. However, I'll only bring you home with me right away if your boyfriend approves," Ashley answered in a calm voice.

"Great! I'll ask him now. Please wait a minute here."

Feeling eager, she turned around and headed towards Zachary after them.

"You can go home first, Zachary. I want to spend the night with Ashley," Yasmin directly told Zachary.

Zachary gazed at her girlfriend's beautiful face and hesitated for a moment before approving. "Sure. Would you like me to drive you home?"

Zachary could only approve, despite his desire to stay with her tonight. He understood what she just said was a statement, not a suggestion. As Leonard wished, Ashley might change her mind after being convinced by her friend.

"There's no need for you to do that. Thank you, anyway." As she gave a kiss on his boyfriend's cheek, Yasmin showed gladness on her face.

Zachary seized Yasmin's soft arms, bent down, and kissed her on the forehead as she turned around. He whispered, "Be careful. Make sure that you'll long for me."

"I know. There's no doubt that I will miss you." As Yasmin always did, she smiled warmly to Zachary's kindness.

Ashley started to drive away with Yasmin under Zachary's supervision.

"I inevitably feel bad about splitting up a couple when I think of Zachary's bittersweet look in his eyes. You two are really gorgeous together." Ashley teased her friend as she watched Yasmin wave goodbye to Zachary through the window.

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“Anyway, do you want to come to my parents’ house to pay them a visit?” Ashley paused before approaching Yasmin, who was sitting up straight.

“You still make fun of me! I hate you, I really do. Being a lady is not pleasant for me. Do you think I’m easy to do that, huh?”

Up until now she could still remember Ashley’s enthusiastic laugh when she approached the elder man demurely and sweetly tonight. As a result, she expressed her annoyance to Ashley.

Zachary told her to visit the elder man today before they went to bed last night. However, Yasmin was satisfied with her performance today although she was a little nervous.

“Let’s go to your place. The next time you visit your parents, I’ll join you.” Yasmin thought Ashley wouldn’t be as free to answer her questions if she went to Guzman’s house. It was her only chance to know what happened between the couple.

“All right. I’ll call home and inform them.”

Ashley took her phone from her bag and dialed her family’s number after hearing that. “Mom. Yasmin will go to my apartment with me. I won’t be returning home tonight.”

“Please be careful tonight, the both of you.” On the other line, Simone nodded firmly in approval.

When Ashley made a call, Simone gladly allowed it. She had never been troubled about her daughter’s actions before.

“Ashley said she wouldn’t go home tonight,” Simone said after hanging up the phone as she received two inquisitive stares from her husband and son.

“Who is with her?”

“Where is she going?”

When the father and son discovered this, they both grew worried.

“Her close friend, Yasmin, will stay with her at the apartment,” Simone responded to them, gazing at the father and son with different faces of utter confusion.

“Having more socialization with a friend is an excellent thing for her. It would be great!” Jack seemed relieved.

“Dad is totally right.” Mike agreed with a nod.

Earlier, he was worried that Ashley might have bumped into someone she shouldn't have. Joseph should be on his way back. He was also conscious that his sister had recently visited the Marshall family's home and was frightened of the two flames interacting. After all, it had been a long time since they had seen each other.

Jack was afraid that his daughter would indulge in her hormonal impulses in the same way that other young people did, such as getting wasted in a bar and singing songs all night. According to him, Ashley seemed to be in a bad mood lately.

They were undoubtedly aware of Yasmin's personality, and their encounter alleviated the father and son's concerns. The Guzman family recognized her as Ashley's good friend, even though they had never met the honest Yasmin.

“Did you finish your conversation with your family? What did they say? Is it okay for me to stay with you tonight?” Yasmin spoke up after seeing her friend put her phone away.

“Honestly, I might have been in your home with you if you didn't live with Zachary. Do you enjoy living together with him?” Ashley questioned bluntly, staring at the sparkling Yasmin.

Ashley remembered when Yasmin called her to complain that Zachary had moved in with her immediately their relationship was official. As such, Yasmin would spend the night at Ashley's apartment tonight.

“Well, there are both advantages and disadvantages. However, it's fun.” Yasmin revealed a firm expression.

“You can't keep that grin hidden. With the expression on your face, it showed that the advantages surpass the downsides.”

“It feels like there's a fit of hidden jealousy from you. Are you jealous of me?”

The smile on Ashely's face paused for a second when she realized her friend's words. Truth be told, her envy was constantly agitated, even though she didn't want to admit it. She used to have a sweetness that others coveted, but it all sadly faded in a moment.

"That's all that counts. So long as you're happy, I sincerely wish you good fortunes." Ashley glanced down the crowded sidewalk and said genuinely, rather than overtly reacting to Yasmin's question.

"Hey! Why are you like that? Our Ashley is incredible. You will undoubtedly be happier!" Yasmin comforted her friend as she saw the sadness in her eyes.

Yasmin didn't expect to receive the news of their breakup only a few days later after she learned that they were dating each other. Sadly, she had even believed that her friend's romantic happiness would bring her a prosperous life.

At that moment, she understood not to mention Joseph as it would only make Ashley sad.

A few days ago, Yasmin had meant to visit Ashley, but she didn't have much free time. She aspired to talk to her because they happened to be in the same situation today.

"Thank you," Ashley responded smoothly, realizing that Yasmin had tried to motivate her.

"We're finally here." Ashley parked her car in the parking lot of her home after informing Yasmin.

'The love began when I left here and stopped when I came back.' Ashley was devastated to move to her apartment, which she hadn't visited in a long time. She noticed that everything had changed.

The two of them sat on the comfortable bed after a shower. Then, they began talking about their lives and the future.

"How come you and Leonard have such a wonderful relationship?" Yasmin finally asked Ashley after a long time of holding herself.

Ashley informed her friend about her entire history of encounters with Leonard and the subsequent communications. Of course, some names were mentioned, including Joseph, which was a painful name to remember.

Yasmin sat quietly for most of the conversation, trying to piece together what Ashley said. In the end, she understood why they got along so well, as she witnessed today that Leonard, a friendly old guy, fall in adoration with her good friend.

They could be honest to each other even though they weren't affiliated. That had little to do with Ashley's previous relationship with Joseph.

"I'd like to speak about something serious with you, Ashley. I want to resign from the Synder Group." Yasmin tried to change the subject as she anticipated the mention of Joseph would make Ashley sad.

"And what might be your reason? I thought you returned to your previous position after Lina resigned, didn't you?" Ashley wondered aloud as she caressed her teddy bear on her bed.

"Yes, you're right. However, the Synder Group has recently become strict with its workers. Wherever there is tension, there is a struggle, as the saying goes. Many workers spend time thinking about changing jobs. Besides, Zachary questioned if I wanted to join the Empire Group or go directly to the Estrada Group to be the hostess. I believe the compensation will substantially increase." Yasmin voiced her opinion as she set her phone down and turned to face Ashley.

"Well, you want to be together with Zachary, correct?" Ashley spoke slowly and accurately.

"No. I'm saying it as it is. For a month, the Synder Group was stable, but the Empire Group gradually weakened it. The fact that the Synder Group's senior executives aren't actively coping with it leaves me speechless. Rather, their anxiety about the workers' attendance scheme is irrational. Once they ask for leave, the company won't pay half a month's salary. When they resign, they will receive no annual salary and bonus," Yasmin replied with a straightforward response.

'The Empire Group began putting its proposal to buy the Synder Group into action? Was it Zachary, the agent's, or Joseph, the supervisor's decision?'

Ashley immersed herself in her thoughts when she learned this. Suddenly, the thought of Joseph's return came to her mind.

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“Hey, Ashley! Get back to the world. What’s wrong with you? You seem absent-minded.” As soon as Yasmin completed her sentence, she realized that Ashley was preoccupied.

“It’s all right. I’m paying close attention. Go ahead and continue with what you were saying,” Ashley, who had regained her composure, said lightly.

“Do you agree it would be a good idea for me to switch careers? I’d like to get some advice from you.”

“Why are you even asking me? If you hear my opinion, would it change your mind?” Ashley furrowed her eyebrows.

“I guess you approve of my decision then. To be honest, I absolutely cannot stand Lina trying to pass herself off as our boss’s wife while walking around the office with her swollen belly. Isn’t she aware that the Synder Group is on the verge of exploding?” Yasmin voiced her frustration and sighed deeply.

They almost didn’t realize that Lina had been pregnant for almost five months.

“Don’t make her furious. After all, it isn’t your problem.”

“It’s Lina’s fault. She has a bad habit of making fun of me.”

“It appears that the two of you have a horribly ill-fated relationship.”

“No way! I don’t want to be involved with her,” Yasmin exclaimed violently, imagining the pregnant woman who was steering her. She even acted like she was about to vomit.

“But something’s also amiss. Lina has recently started coming and going on her own. Charlie hasn’t been seen with her in a while. What do you think happened?” She glared at her friend and asked.

“Don’t conclude something bad. Probably, Charlie is too distracted with his work to speak with Lina. By the way, what is Lina’s position now?” Ashley wondered after some thought.

“I’m sure she’s unemployed. She seems to visit the Synder Group as Charlie’s wife.”

“Is that so? Are they going to get married yet? When?”

“To be honest, I haven’t paid much attention to that couple. I heard that they will announce within two days that their wedding will be held next weekend.”

“I see. There should be tens days left before the wedding ceremony,” Ashley stated in a hushed tone.

“Ashley! Oh, my goodness! Do you want to go to their wedding? Are you planning to wreck it?”

Yasmin seemed so puzzled after hearing Ashley’s queries. Since Ashley didn’t like Charlie, she should have no idea about the precise date of his wedding.

“How come?” Ashley couldn’t say anything as she was dumbstruck. “I’m just thinking that planning a wedding ceremony when pregnant is impossible for Lina. She is very self-conscious about her appearance. I guess announcing their wedding is only Synder Group’s attempt to increase its positive effect.”

“I suppose she just has a strong desire to marry into the Synder family right away. On the other hand, your judgment is more compelling. In either case, this marriage is beneficial to a deceptive woman like Lina.” Lina’s attitude seemed so apparent for Yasmin, who hated the former.

“Thankfully, that is what you want to say. I presumed you cared about Charlie, so I wanted to offer you some suggestions on how to compromise their wedding,” Yasmin muttered under her breath.

Ashley couldn’t resist but was lost for words after hearing what Yasmin had pictured on her own. She had previously had no compassion for Charlie. Moreover, she had never given single attention to him for a long time now.

“It’s getting late. Just ignore it. Let’s take a rest now. We still have to go to work tomorrow.”

Ashley rested down on the bed and said something to Yasmin, who was interacting with Zachary while still on the internet.

“You’re right. I’ll bid Zachary goodnight and sweet dreams. You can go first,” Yasmin answered as she pressed the phone.

At her friend’s response, Ashley’s lips curled into a smile. She couldn’t say anything. All she knew was that her friend was madly in love with her boyfriend.

Love, it had to be said, had tremendous power. Yasmin who was recognized for her mannish behaviour, was transformed by love and turned into a gentle and loving woman.

Ashley dozed off under the light of Yasmin’s screen. She would finally get a good night’s sleep with Yasmin by her side.

‘Ashley, I could see the exhaustion buried underneath your peaceful surface,’ Yasmin whispered in her heart, staring at her friend’s beautiful sleeping face through the dim light. ‘After the rain, I believe the day will be bright. You must be brave. Right now, I’m very pleased, and I trust you will be as well.’

While Ashley was busy with her work, she suddenly heard a knock from the door.

“You may come in,” Ashley said in a sweet voice. The door opened and someone walked in.

“Manager, you have someone looking for you. This man is so gorgeous!” said Ashley’s young female employee.

Within just almost a month, Ashley and the employees were already comfortable with each other. Almost all the employees of the Guzman Group had acknowledged that the daughter of their boss was beautiful and brilliant. The employees working with her in the same department were even more impressed with her. They all knew that the woman was just cold on the outside but warm on her inside. That was why they could talk to her casually.

Ashley sighed and said, “Okay. Thank you for informing me. You can go.”

“Hi, Ashley! I just came here to see you. Do you still have work to do?” When the female employee left the office, an attractive male voice echoed.

“Zaiden, what are you doing here?”

Ashley turned her attention and saw Zaiden. She quickly stood up and waved at him.

Inside the spacious office, there was a gorgeous man and a beautiful woman in their black suit that were looking at each other. The curious female employee saw that scene and closed the door after. She thought that those two would be a perfect match.

“I came here to see you. Would you like to eat lunch with me later?” he directly asked Ashley.

She nodded and said, “Sure. Please take a seat, Zaiden. I’ll just finish this paperwork first.” Ashley looked at her wristwatch and saw that it was almost lunchtime. “I’ll just make a call to my brother and ask him if he already finished his work.”

“Oh?” Actually, Zaiden only wanted to invite her. But the cheerful woman didn’t know anything about his plan so she still called her brother.

“Hello, Mike. Zaiden is here and he invited us to lunch. Are you done with your work?” Ashley told his brother as she scanned the documents on her table.

After Mike heard what his sister said, he thought for a moment and immediately grasped why Zaiden invited Ashley to have lunch with him. So he decisively replied, “Sorry sister, but I have an emergency meeting to attend. You two go ahead and eat your lunch.”

In Mike’s perception, he and Zaiden had already made a deal. He could see that Zaiden loved Ashley very much, and it made him happy to know that Zaiden had a pure intention for his sister. Zaiden already said that he would court Ashley and had asked Mike to help him.

“Is that so? Okay. If you want, I’ll just pack some food for you,” Ashley replied calmly.

“Thank you, but no need. I’ll just ask my secretary to bring me some food,” Mike instantly replied.

“Then just finish your work and don’t skip your lunch, okay?” Ashley said it softly without doubting her brother’s words.

“Okay, don’t worry.” Then, Mike ended the call.

‘My dear sister, I know that Zaiden will make you happy. You just have to open your heart to him.’ He stared out the window and heaved a sigh as he thought about his sister.

After Jack had talked to Ashley, Mike also personally talked to his sister and gave some advice to her. Until now, Mike knew that although her sister was awfully calm she was still in pain as the wound in her heart was still fresh. But he was sincerely hoping that his sister would stop dwelling on her past and let go of her obsession. In his heart, he wished that one day, her sister would find a reliable person who would care for her for the rest of her life.

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“My brother still has something to do so he can’t go with us.” When Ashley finally sorted out the documents, she cleaned her desk and said, “I’m finished, Zaiden. Let’s go?”

Zaiden stood up and opened the door for her. “Okay,” the man said promptly.

They headed to a high-end restaurant nearby for dinner. Zaiden was always smiling as he noticed Ashley’s casual yet elegant presence. He couldn’t express how happy he was knowing that he was having dinner with the person he liked.

“Why are you not eating much, Zaiden?” Ashley noticed that Zaiden seldom ate his food so she asked him with a confused expression, “Don’t you like these foods? It doesn’t suit your taste?”

When he and Ashley were alone with each other this time, he had already put on the full play to his gentility. He’d always been following the principle of the ‘lady first’. He had invited her to sit down. When it comes to ordering the food and having meals, Zaiden even urged that Ashley would be the one who would choose their food.

“No, all of the food you ordered is delicious.”

“That’s great. When I saw that you’re not eating much, I thought you didn’t like the food.”

“Haha, you don’t have to worry about me. Make sure that you are eating well, so you will have energy when you work later.”

Ashley smiled at him and said, “Okay.”

After they talked for a while, the two of them proceeded to eat their food without speaking.

They just finished eating their dinner and it was time for the dessert. Zaiden decided to open a conversation so he asked her, “Ashley, how are your parents doing?”

Ashley just shrugged her shoulders. “Not bad. I already mentioned you to our parents. If you have some time, you can visit them,” Ashley said as she enjoyed eating her dessert.

“Sure, in a couple of days I’m going to visit your parents.”

Looking back when Zaiden was still young, he always came to the Guzman family’s house. So he was very familiar with Ashley’s parents. Now that he had been back home for quite some time, he just thought that it was the best time to visit them.

Ashley raised her head when she heard Zaiden’s reply. Then she said, “I know that my parents are expecting you to visit them one of these days.”

Zaiden saw how Ashley’s eyes twinkled. For a moment, his thoughts flew away and got lost. He could say that Ashley was effortlessly beautiful that even in her unintended expression she still looked so lovely.

Now, his affection for her during the youth days only deepened as time passed by. Luckily, the man and the woman were both still not married. ‘Will the woman choose to marry me?’ Zaiden took the cup and sipped his coffee. He was looking at Ashley with his eyes that were full of admiration.

Even though Zaiden wanted to tell Ashley about his feelings as soon as possible, he was afraid that it would turn so unexpected. He was anxious that his sudden confession might frighten Ashley who was clueless about his feelings.

What was more made him unsure, was Zaiden could still remember Mike's careful reminder. "Now that Ashley's heart had been closed, it would be difficult for anyone to enter her heart." Zaiden was aware of Ashley's love story. He also knew that there was someone who had entered her life but only inflicted pain on her heart after. Thankfully, it was already over.

'I know that it's difficult to enter Ashley's heart. But still, there's a chance. So to get inside her heart, I'll do anything just to make that possible.' Zaiden motivated himself.

"Ashley, I already decorated my new home in Ariosa. I'm just going to buy some furniture. Can I ask your help in picking out the furniture when you have time? I want to know your opinion and might get some advice from you." Ashley just finished her meal and wiped her mouth when Zaiden suddenly asked her.

Zaiden realized that what they needed the most right now was more contact and quality time with each other. Perhaps, this was more helpful to their future relationship.

Ashley looked at him and asked, "When?"

"How about after two days? But any day will be okay as long as you are free."

"I am free this Saturday. You can just notify me then."

Ashley thought that she still had to go to the Marshall family after work for the next few days. She didn't have much time to go out. But she thought that weekends would be fine.

It should be precise if they picked out furniture. Ashley thought that maybe Zaiden was not good at it that was why she agreed.

"Okay, then it settled. I'll pick you up on Saturday and I'm going to visit your parents too," Zaiden said happily. The joy could be seen on Zaiden's face.

"Okay," Ashley said.

“Zaiden, why don’t you come with me to the company so you could see my brother?” Ashley asked him when she noticed that Zaiden had been following her on their way back to the company.

“Sure, I also want to talk to him.”

Zaiden wanted to grab this chance to walk with Ashley, but the distance was too short. If he would offer to drive her back to the company, it was a bit absurd. That was why he quickly replied to Ashley’s question like that.

After he sent Ashley to the office building, Zaiden took the elevator and pushed the down button. Then he fished out his phone and called his friend. “Hello, Mike. Did you already eat?”

“I’m currently eating. My single life is so pitiable.” Mike answered the phone call he received from his friend and spoke cheerfully. “So, why did you call me after your dinner?”

“Just so you know, I don’t have any intentions. I just want to know if you’re starving to death.” Zaiden turned a bit speechless and then spoke after a while. “By the way, I want to know more about your parents and what they like. I’m going to visit them on Saturday.”

“You said earlier that you don’t have any intentions? You’re a liar.”

“Mr. Guzman, can I at least hear something nice from you?”

“Oh, sorry. But I don’t have any nice words to say. What I want right now is something really nice to eat. I feel so hungry.”

Zaiden didn’t say anything.

They had been talking that way with each other ever since when they were still in their youth. Always casual and straightforward.

“Well, I’m just kidding!” Mike spoke again after a few moments of thought. “Actually, I don’t know what my parents like. You know, they don’t lack at anything.”

However, there was no reply from the other side. ‘Why does this guy keep on saying nonsense things?’ Zaiden thought to himself and still didn’t reply.

“I guess it’s enough for them if you will just go there and show up yourself. After all, you are such a young talented and promising choice of son-in-law.”

“Mike, can you please tell me something useful? If you decided to visit some elders one day, how can you show up yourself empty-handed?” Zaiden responded.

“Man, don’t be mad.” Mike thought for a while again before he spoke seriously. “Just bring an antique stamp album. My mother likes collecting stamps.”

“How about your father? What should I bring for him?”

“Well, there’s nothing to worry about my father. He really loves to spoil his wife. As long as my mother is happy, my father will be delighted as well.” Mike sighed as he replied to Zaiden honestly.

Mike paused for a moment then continued after, “And for me? I want free service from your law office this whole year. That’s all. You’re welcome.”

After Zaiden heard what Mike said, he didn’t say anything but compromised. “Okay. This year will be finished anyway.”

“No, you can’t still do that. I’ll be needing the contract for next year. You don’t have to thank me.”

His condition that he gave to Zaiden was a big jackpot for him. Using the free service of a well-known law firm not only could he save such a large amount of money but he would also get some guarantees. This opportunity was a big advantage for him. Mike turned a genius as he made this decision in his head.

“Okay. I got it. As a token of our friendship. No more nonsense things with you. I still have work to do and I need to start preparing presents for your parents.”

Mike looked at his phone screen when Zaiden suddenly ended the call.

‘Am I nonsense? I think my words are not that useless?’ After he ate dinner, Mike kept on thinking about this while cleaning up the table.

“Ashley, can I ask you something? Do you know what does our mother like?”

To help his friend successfully win the favor of his parents, Mike decided to ask his sister so he could confirm what were his mother's hobbies and likes.

"Why did you ask that question all of a sudden? Wait, I'll think about it." Ashley spoke in a questioning voice sitting in the office chair. She just came back there a while ago.

She thought for a while before she said, "You want to know? Mom's favorite thing is that you'll bring home a woman whom you'll marry and make her your wife."

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Apparently, Ashley hadn't given him the answer to his question; so Mike turned to her. "Come on, Ashley! I'm asking what things Mom likes. I need a direct answer."

Ashley believed she guessed right. After all, their mother had been pressuring him to get married as soon as possible. If he introduced a girl to them at home, their mother would definitely be happy.

"Mike, why don't you ask Mom instead? How about Dad? He probably know better."

"I can't do that. I want to give them a surprise. Come on, think harder. What does Mom like?"

"You said you wanted to surprise them both, but why are you only asking about Mom's preferences?"

For a moment, Mike was rendered speechless.

This question came unexpectedly, so he didn't know how to answer his sister. Sure enough, a person who always played tricks on others would get tricked in the end.

"Anyway, I don't know everything that Mom likes. I suggest you ask Dad." Noticing that Mike was lost in a thought, Ashley spoke again. "But I think she will like whatever you give her."

"Okay, I'll think about it." In the end, Mike gave up and hung up the phone.

It seemed like there was nothing he could do now to help Zaiden flatter his future mother-in-law.

The past few days had been busy but full of life for Ashley. She worked hard in the morning, and then went to the Marshall's residence to visit Leonard in the afternoon before she went back home in the evening.

The only strange thing she had noticed was that her brother seemed to be too busy recently. Therefore, every time Zaiden came to invite them to have lunch together, Mike turned it down right away. This only left Ashley too embarrassed to say no, so she went out with him for a meal even if it was just two of them.

What she didn't know was, Mike was not really busy. He also went off work right after Ashley went to the Marshall's residence.

Zaiden was tall, handsome, and a gentleman, so he was always the topic in Ashley's office. They had regarded him as her boyfriend.

On one beautiful morning, when the sun was shining brightly, beating the winter chill, Zaiden decided to visit the Guzman family.

"Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Guzman. How are you?" As a gentleman, Zaiden knew it wasn't polite to come empty handed. So he brought gifts for every member of the Guzman family.

"Oh, Zaiden, it's you! It's been a long time since I last saw you. You've grown more handsome." There was a warm smile plastered on Simone's face when she greeted him.

"Don't stand there. Let's go in the living room." When Jack saw him, he also greeted Zaiden.

"Thank you!" A smile appeared on Zaiden's face as he looked at the old couple standing in front of him. "It's been a long time, but you two still looked young. Moreover, I can see in your eyes that you are still head over heels with each other."

“Zaiden, you flatter us so much. We’re elders. Of course, we’re getting old.” No matter how many times people complimented them, Simone knew they had aged as time went by.

“No, you look as beautiful as before. Nothing has changed except that you’re more beautiful now, Mrs. Guzman.”

Sensing the sincerity in his tone, Simone could only smile. “Zaiden, how was your life in the United States? How long are you going to stay here?”

“My stay abroad was fine. I can go back to the United States anytime, but I don’t have plans to do so for now.” His honesty made Jack nod in agreement.

“It’s good that you came home. Talents like you should go back home.” As he spoke, Jack poured Zaiden some tea.

Since Zaiden was a good friend of Mike, the Guzman family had heard about his return and his recent fame.

“I’m flattered.” With both hands, Zaiden accepted the cup of tea.

“Zaiden, please make yourself at home. I’ll just go to Mike’s room to wake him up. Wait here,” said Simone.

Upon hearing this, Zaiden quickly told her the other reason why he came today. “Mrs. Guzman, I actually came here for Ashley. I need her help with buying some stuff.”

These words made Simone stop in her tracks for a second, then she smiled and stood up gracefully. “Then I’ll call them both. It’s time to get up anyway.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Guzman,” Zaiden said in a gentle voice.

Only when Simone had gone upstairs did Zaiden begin to feel restless. How could he not be nervous if Jack’s scrutinizing eyes were on him?

The moment Jack heard that Zaiden came for his daughter, he couldn’t stop himself from carefully surveying him.

At that moment, he was sure that Zaiden wanted to date his daughter. But of course, it was not going to be that easy. While Simone was upstairs, Jack waited with Zaiden in the living room, talking to him as if he didn’t notice anything.

“Zaiden, what do you think of the country’s current affairs?” All of a sudden, Jack decided to ask him.

After gathering his thoughts, Zaiden answered confidently, “I think our country is in the stage of vigorous development in terms of military forces, economy, and national governance.”

As Zaiden briefly expressed his opinion on this matter, Jack listened to him quietly, without saying anything.

It was as if Jack had forgotten for a moment that Zaiden was a well-known lawyer. Considering his field of work, he naturally had to pay attention to current affairs; so he didn’t have a hard time answering this question.

“Your analysis makes sense.” Although Jack’s reply was plain, he couldn’t deny that he was impressed with Zaiden’s answer.

People who paid attention to the country’s situation and analyzed it thoroughly were all farsighted and resourceful. Not everyone was like this, so Jack admired his political views.

“Since you plan to start your career here, what will happen to your parents in the United States? Who will take care of them?” Soon, Jack threw another question.

The most important virtue that a person should know was filial piety. Jack believed that a person worth trusting was the one who had respect for his or her parents, so it was important for him to know how Zaiden treated them.

“My parents are still young. They plan to stay abroad for a few more years before coming back home. Until then I will visit them regularly.” Under Jack’s gaze, Zaiden remained calm.

“Dad, what are you talking about?” The two men looked up at Ashley who just came down. She noticed that they seemed to be having a serious conversation, so she couldn’t help but be curious about what they were talking about.

With Ashley’s presence, Zaiden could finally breathe a sigh of relief. He stood up and greeted her with a smile. ‘I was more nervous answering Jack’s questions than when I had an interview,’ he thought inwardly.

The truth was, Zaiden could no longer stand Jack's sharp eyes. Therefore, he was secretly grateful that Ashley interrupted them.

"Nothing. I just want to know how Zaiden is doing recently," Jack replied as he watched her walk over.

"Good morning, Mom, Dad and Ashley." Not long after, Mike came down and greeted everyone, including Zaiden.

"It's late. The guest has been waiting here downstairs while you were still asleep. Don't you think it's impolite?"

There was a hint of disappointment in Jack's voice, making Mike speechless.

'I have been busy working every day. Can't I sleep a little longer during weekends?' This was what Mike wanted to say, but he chose to remain silent.

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"Dad, I also slept late," Ashley complained while standing next to Jack.

"You all are so lazy! Anyway, go and eat breakfast now. Zaiden wants to see you," Jack said sternly.

"Got it," Ashley replied obediently.

She then turned to Zaiden and asked, "Zaiden, have you eaten breakfast already? Would you like to join us?"

"Well, I've already eaten. Thanks for the invite, though. You guys just enjoy eating. Don't mind me," he replied. All of a sudden, he remembered something, so he asked, "Ashley, don't forget that we have to choose furniture today, okay?"

"Don't worry, I didn't forget. Actually, I'll leave as soon as I finish eating. Wait for me."

"Okay."

A slight frown appeared at Jack's face as he saw the interaction between Ashley and Zaiden. It seemed as though nobody was around but them. Jack

turned to Mike, who was about to enter the dining room and said, "Mike, since you have nothing else to do today, can you go with Zaiden to the furniture shop and order a large courtyard lamp?" He paused for a moment and continued, "The lamp has been used for so many years. It's time to replace it."

Judging from Zaiden's gentle tone towards Ashley, Jack understood what was going on. A man and woman going out alone is worrisome. Jack loved his daughter very much, and he was afraid what would happen if she stayed with Zaiden alone.

Because of this, Jack asked Mike to come along with the two for a good reason.

"Okay." Confused, Mike looked at his father, who seemed to be serious about his order. It looked like he had no choice but to agree.

"Zaiden, come on. Have some fruit," Simone offered with a fruit plate in hand. Meanwhile, Ashley and Mike entered the dining room.

"Thank you, Mrs. Guzman."

"You're welcome. You should come here more often," Simone replied.

Zaiden stayed in the living room and had a pleasant conversation with Ashley's parents. At last, Jack stopped his interrogations and oppressive gaze after a while.

About twenty minutes later, Zaiden, together with Mike and Ashley, left the house.

When the three were gone, Simone and Jack were the only ones left at home. The former opened Zaiden's presents and her eyes lit up in delight. It turned out that Zaiden gifted her health care products, fruits, and something precious. She turned to her husband and exclaimed, "Look! It's an album of stamps of the Republic of Ob.raria."

As a philatelist, she could tell this stamp album had gone a long way and was very valuable. "Zaiden was so thoughtful!" she mumbled to herself.

Seeing that Jack did not respond and was somewhat absent-minded, Simone raised her voice to attract his attention. "What are you thinking about?"

Jack came to his senses at once. He looked at his wife and saw that she was looking at him with a frown. He smiled at her reassuringly and answered, "Nothing. Honey, if you like something like this, I'll help you get it."

"I don't need your help. I'll collect them myself," Simone refused. All of a sudden, something crossed her mind, so she asked, "Are you thinking about the matter between Zaiden and Ashley?"

Jack felt his wife's determined gaze, so he admitted the truth. "Yes," he said with a nod. His eyebrows were furrowed, and he seemed to be really worried about his daughter.

"There's nothing to worry about. Zaiden is an excellent man and he treats Ashley well. I think they're a good match," Simone said as she carefully put away the stamp album.

"I know. Even so, I think that we still have to investigate him further," Jack insisted.

"You don't want your daughter to get married, do you? You think that Ashley doesn't need to get married, even if she's already a grown-up." Simone exposed what his thoughts were straightforwardly.

Jack was at a loss for words. 'So what if I don't want my daughter to get married? Is there anything wrong?' He brazenly looked into his wife's eyes as though he was trying to start an argument.

"Zaiden has been in love with our Ashley for so many years. He's trustworthy and virtuous."

"How can you say that?"

"He was good friends with Mike, so he used to come to our house. I saw how nice he was to Ashley. Besides, our daughter is beautiful. It's obvious ever since she was a little girl. Many boys had a crush on her, remember?"

Jack frowned as he tried to recall the past. Seeing that he looked somehow clueless, Simone added, "You were busy in the company at that time, so you probably don't know about these things."

"It doesn't seem to be a good thing, does it?" Jack expressed his disagreement with his wife's statement.

Although he was not around much when Ashley was little, he was there when she was in high school. He could say that it was not a good thing to be attracted by the opposite sex at such a young age.

“Yes, but she’s naive. For sure, she doesn’t know what Zaiden is thinking,” Simone concluded after pondering for a moment.

“For some reason, I think it’s good if our daughter has inherited your heart of stone,” Jack said with a sigh. If only his outstanding daughter wasn’t this cold and unfriendly, she would have fallen into the trap of men before.

“Jack, say what you want to say. Just admit that my daughter has inherited my beauty.” Unable to accept what he had just said, Simone pinched Jack’s arm and retorted.

When Jack was young, he lived through her unfriendliness until he caught her heart. Now that they were old, he always made fun of it. On the contrary, Simone seemed unhappy.

“It sounds like my daughter’s beauty has nothing to do with me,” Jack retorted in a low voice.

As he realized that his wife was glaring at him, he chuckled and said fawningly, “Honey, I’m so sorry. You are the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“Humbug!” Simone snorted.

“I’m telling the truth. My wife is the most beautiful and lovely woman that has ever existed!”

“Jack, you’re so cheeky for an old man! Oh, old goat, let me go...”

It was undeniable that Jack’s solution whenever Simone sulked still worked like a charm. No matter how angry she was at him, her anger would disappear in an instant when he started kissing her. It worked every time, especially on petty quarrels like what they had now.

In the CEO’s Office of Empire Group.

Zachary’s phone suddenly rang. As soon as he answered it, Joseph’s cold voice came from the other end of the line. “Zachary, I’ll be back today.”

“Thank God! I almost thought that I’d drop dead in your office due to overworking!” It was the first time Zachary felt happy to hear Joseph’s cold voice.

On the other end, Joseph did not respond.

Zachary counted to three, yet Joseph remained silent. He had expected that Joseph would hang up the phone as soon as he finished speaking, but he did not. “Mr. CEO, after working for two whole months, it’s my turn to take a leave. Is that okay?” he quickly added.

“Sure.”

Zachary had already planned it, and he could not wait to travel with his girlfriend. Since Joseph agreed right away, he was ecstatic. “Wow! I didn’t know you’d be so human!”

“Zachary, if you don’t want to take a vacation, just say it,” Joseph replied. It turned out that his cold temperament was still there.

“I don’t. Well, you’ve already agreed about my leave, so there’s nothing else you can do about it.” Zachary felt that there was a trace of threat in Joseph’s words, so he asked in a serious tone, “Where are you now anyway? Do you want me to pick you up?”

“No. I’m already at the Ariosa airport. I’ll head straight home later.”

“I see. Don’t forget to take over my work as soon as possible.”

“Okay.”

Zachary sensed that the call was about to come to an end. Just before it did, he asked solemnly, “Did you come back with your new girlfriend? If so, how do you plan on facing Ashley this time?”

There was a deafening silence between them. After a moment, Zachary continued, “I heard Ashley is already in relationship. If you haven’t given up, you better come back quickly. If you have, don’t disturb her life anymore.”

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“I see. Bye.” Zachary did not have time to figure out what was on Joseph’s mind. The call ended just before he could fathom it.

The truth was, it was Yasmin who told him that Ashley already had a boyfriend.

This was how it happened. Two days ago, Yasmin handed her resignation letter to the general manager, Charlie, at about noon. Then, she packed up her things and left not long after. Of course, she bade farewell to her colleagues just before she left. Just as she reached the gate of the Synder Group, she took out her mobile phone. She called her dear friend, Ashley, to tell her about the resignation and also to ask if they could hang out.

However, Ashley said that she was busy at the moment, but she did not mind if Yasmin wanted to join them for a meal. Curious as she was, Yasmin learned that Ashley was outside with his brother’s friend, who was a tall and handsome lawyer. According to Ashley, she was always with that man.

She felt that there was something fishy going on, so she gladly accepted Ashley’s invitation. She drove to her apartment as soon as she could and rushed to the rendezvous Ashley had said.

When Yasmin arrived at the place, she instantly saw Ashley waving at her. Opposite Ashley was a tall man.

She slowly walked to the table and politely introduced herself, “Hello! I’m Yasmin, Ashley’s good friend.” While she spoke, she scrutinized Ashley’s handsome companion furtively.

Yasmin had to admit that she felt particularly elated when she laid her eyes on the handsome man, who was smiling brightly at her. Her excitement, which had been dormant for so long, became active once again.

Zaiden was dressed in a crisp suit. In Yasmin’s eyes, his bronze skin outlined his angular face and outstanding features, making him look more dazzling than he already was. As she looked at him, happiness appeared in her black jewel-like eyes.

He looked different from Zachary’s handsome and unruly appearance, Jeffery’s sunny and elegant temperament, and lastly, Joseph’s impeccable yet cold demeanor. Zaiden was handsome like them. The only difference was that he was cool and casual. After comparing him with the other handsome men

Yasmin knew of, she remarked in her mind, 'His handsome face is not something I can get tired of!'

"Nice meeting you. I'm Zaiden." He stood up and greeted the beautiful woman in front of him with a smile.

"Yasmin, come sit and order your food now."

Ashley noticed that Yasmin was looking at Zaiden with a scorching gaze. She was afraid that her friend would be infatuated with her companion, so she suddenly spoke to make Yasmin snap back to reality.

When Ashley and Yasmin were younger and learned Taekwondo together, the latter fancied a fellow junior apprentice because of his handsomeness. For the young guy to yield to her, she intimidated him with violence. From that moment on, she appointed him as a mobile beauty, whom she could call at any time.

However, things did not go according to her plan. Yasmin left the club, leaving the guy behind. Perhaps he was used to being abused or he was unable to find a deserving rival after hard training, so he inquired about Yasmin's address and went to her house. He claimed that he decided to pursue her.

At first, Yasmin didn't take it seriously. However, her view changed after hearing his words full of sincerity. Once she realized that violence could never solve a problem, she ran away from him. As a result, he pursued her for more than six months.

Fortunately, Ashley, Yasmin's wise military counsellor, suggested that Yasmin should pretend to be in a relationship and that she should inform the guy's parents to make him stop. The stupid pursuit finally came to an end. The foolish love the young man had for Yasmin had been nipped in the bud.

Although Yasmin behaved inappropriately in front of Zaiden, he had been respectful. She must say, his attitude was commendable.

The restaurant where they had eaten was pretty far from the Guzman Group. Because of this, Zaiden had to drive Ashley back to work once they were done eating. Before they left, Yasmin bade goodbye to Ashley and Zaiden. Once the two of them were gone, she finally went home to her apartment.

The night fell eventually. Zachary woke Yasmin up, who was sleeping comfortably. It turned out that he had already finished preparing for dinner, so she got up and ate with him.

Although they had only been together for two months, Zachary changed and had become a 'good husband' for Yasmin. He took care of her all the time and, sometimes, even cooked for her. After all, it is a pleasure to cook for someone one loves.

"When I'm on vacation, let's go back to Olkfield and get engaged. Mom and Dad have been urging us to get married for a long time," Zachary said while filling Yasmin's bowl with rice.

"Well, I'm free anytime. I've already resigned anyway," Yasmin answered while serving herself a dish.

In all honesty, she had already known that it was a foregone conclusion that she would end up with Zachary. Because of this, she cherished every second of their sweetness. Besides, their parents had been pressing them to get married already, so she agreed to Zachary's informal proposal without a second thought.

Zachary could not wipe the smile off his face when he heard that Yasmin had agreed to get engaged. He quickly served his fiancée food and said dotingly, "Today's the day you've resigned. Why don't you work in the Empire Group? Or you can go back to the Estrada Group to be the hostess if you like. Just let me take good care of you afterwards."

"Aren't you tired of being with me all day long?" Yasmin lifted her eyes from the bowl and added, "I'm planning to have a break for a while. For some reason, I suddenly want to travel abroad, like Ashley."

"If that's the case, you have to go with me." Zachary did not want her to travel alone, so he suggested, "How about we go on a trip after our engagement?"

"Sure. That's fine with me," Yasmin answered as she sensed the nervousness underneath his stern voice.

"Good girl." Since she agreed to compromise, Zachary was satisfied, and at the same time, relieved.

“When will Joseph return anyway? You’re in charge of a big company while he’s free and laid back.”

Yasmin could not help but ask. Since Joseph had not returned yet, Zachary could not apply for a leave. His plans of travelling had to be postponed yet again.

“He said he’d return soon. Don’t worry. I’ll apply for a leave as soon as possible.”

“So he will come back soon? I hope he won’t disturb Ashley’s life anymore. It seems that she has a man who protects her already.”

Yasmin’s tone when she spoke denoted that she was somehow worried about her friend. She suddenly remembered how Zaiden stared at Ashley while they were eating. It seemed that he did not want to take his eyes off her, not even for a second.

It is said that time heals wounds. Ashley’s ephemeral gaiety was about to fade away, as well as the sadness in her eyes. However, Joseph’s reappearance would undoubtedly break the peace she tried hard to maintain.

At last, Ashley had an excellent man who was treating her with sincerity. In the future, he might be the good husband she deserved. Yasmin did not want her friend to get hurt again.

“Who?” Zachary asked. His heart seemed to have skipped a beat because of what Yasmin had said. ‘Would Ashley and Joseph miss each other in the end?’

“He’s a good friend of Mike. He’s very handsome and takes good care of her,” Yasmin answered truthfully.

“Handsome? Is he as handsome as me?” Zachary asked seriously. It seemed that he had forgotten what their topic was in an instant.

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- Tips

As soon as Zachary finished speaking, Yasmin realized that he was staring at her without blinking. She was at a loss for words.

Because he was gazing at her expectantly, she reasoned out, "You are all handsome. It's just that all are of different types."

"I'll give you one last chance. Answer my question truthfully," Zachary said in a serious tone. From the tone of his voice, it seemed that he was not at all joking.

'Are you kidding me?' Yasmin thought in exasperation. She did not expect that Zachary could be so childish and immature. Since he had been nothing but loving toward her, she cleared her throat and answered sincerely, "My boyfriend is the most handsome man I've ever met."

In the blink of an eye, Zachary stood up from his chair and walked over to her. Then, he leaned over and gave her a meaningful look on his face. "Huh?" Yasmin did not know how to react.

Fortunately, she was smart enough to know what he meant. She put down her bowl and gave him a peck on his cheek.

"Well, I've already given you your reward. Focus on your meal," Yasmin said to Zachary, whose face was an inch apart from hers.

"I want you right now. What should I do?" he asked coquettishly. His charming voice rang in her ears and sent shivers down her spine.

"What? Zachary, I'm telling you, I don't have the energy to waste on you. Behave and go back to your seat," Yasmin warned in a low voice.

"How could you be so tired after eating and sleeping all day? Are you sick?" Zachary asked in confusion. He hugged Yasmin from behind and looked at the empty dishes on the table.

"I'm fine. I just have a voracious appetite these past few days," she reassured. But the truth was, she, herself, did not know why she felt sleepy all the time and ate more than usual.

"Good for you. But I'm not fine recently. I want you all the time," Zachary whispered in her ear.

Yasmin was speechless.

She glanced at Zachary, who was grinning from ear to ear, and pretended not to have heard anything. With that, she continued eating. 'He's too energetic! It's better if I don't say anything anymore. He'll leave me in peace eventually,' she thought to herself.

Seeing that Yasmin wasn't feeling herself, Zachary kissed her back before returning to his seat.

When Zachary answered Joseph's call, Joseph told him that he had returned. Zachary could finally have the vacation he wanted for the longest time. He was so ecstatic that he immediately called Yasmin to tell her about it. "Hey, my lazy girl, have you got up already?"

Before he left, Yasmin told him that she would rest after breakfast. It had been almost two hours since then.

"Yes, what's up?" she asked in a sleepy voice.

"Why do you sleep so much lately?" Zachary was confused. He could tell from her voice that she had just woken up.

"Maybe because I had nothing else to do recently. Anyway, why did you suddenly call? You're at work, right?"

Yasmin was idle these past few days, so she decided to sleep in her free time instead.

"Well, I just wanted to share good news with you. Joseph has returned. I asked if I could have a long vacation and he agreed. You can discuss our engagement with your parents later," Zachary said excitedly.

"Really? I didn't expect him to return this fast." Yasmin remarked. She paused for a few seconds and added, "I'll talk to my mother about it later and figure out when I should go back to Olkfield. You should concentrate on your work first. Let's talk about the plan in detail when you come home."

"Sure!" Zachary answered happily. With that, he ended the call and put away his phone. He concentrated on sorting out the documents, so that he could hand over the work as soon as he could.

Meanwhile, Joseph was sitting alone in the backseat of his luxury Rolls-Royce. He suddenly felt a pang in his heart when he recalled what Zachary had told him. 'It finally happened. Someone is now accompanying you and taking care of you. Sadly, it isn't me,' he thought to himself.

"Pull over!" he shouted all of a sudden. His words broke the deafening silence inside the car.

The driver immediately slowed down and parked the car near the sidewalk. He had no idea why his boss suddenly ordered him to pull over near a furniture store, but he did it anyway. Then, we waited patiently for his boss's next order.

Perhaps it was because of his love for a certain woman that was etched deeply in his heart or her figure that was conspicuous for being perfect that Joseph immediately saw her. He was just looking outside the window casually. He never expected to see her then and there.

Through the transparent glass of a large furniture store, he saw Ashley and Zaiden in the bed section, most probably to select a bed for them. The truth was, Mike had run off after choosing the lamp as required by his father, leaving Ashley and Zaiden behind. The man excused himself to play bowling with a client.

"Zaiden, what kind of bed do you want?" Ashley lifted her gaze from the flamboyant beds and looked at him.

"It's up to you. You can buy whatever you like," Zaiden answered softly.

"Sir, Ma'am, take a look at this double bed. The famous designer behind this specifically designed this for newlyweds. It's soft, wide, and of good quality," said a saleslady enthusiastically while pointing at the luxury double bed.

Before Ashley could explain her relationship with Zaiden to the saleslady, he suddenly asked, "What do you think?"

"Well, not bad. I like the style," Ashley remarked while looking at the elegant bed in front of her.

Zaiden turned to face the saleslady and said, "We want this one. Please make an order."

“Okay! Please wait a moment, sir,” the saleslady replied enthusiastically. It was rare for her to meet such a brisk customer, so she did not dare waste a second.

Zaiden could not stop smiling as he looked at the bed which Ashley chose. ‘This was a good sign, was it not?’ he thought. He was looking forward to their wedding.

Ashley walked towards the bed Zaiden had just ordered and bent over to touch it. It was soft and undeniably comfortable to sleep on. All of a sudden, a question flashed through her mind. ‘Why did he suddenly decide to buy a double bed? Did he find a girlfriend already?’

At the thought of this, she faced him and asked, “Zaiden, when will you get married? This bed will certainly be suitable for you and your future wife.”

He was taken aback by her question. His dream shattered in an instant. ‘What are you saying?’ he asked inwardly.

“Ashley, in fact, I...”

Only then did he realize that he had to make his intentions clear. Just as he was about to profess his feelings to her, the saleslady’s loud voice interrupted him. “This way, sir. Please fill in the delivery address after you pay. Thank you so much!”

“Okay.”

Zaiden had no choice but to postpone what he had to say and follow the saleslady to the cashier.

His words trailed off midsentence, but Ashley did not think too much of it. She walked towards the previous double bed and gently touched it. Then, as if in a daze, she looked out of the window.

Little did she know, Joseph was looking at her through the car window with affection and longing in his eyes.

Funny how he could see her, but he could not show himself.

They were under the same sky, only the sun was unfair. It was shining brightly in the store while the other was in the shadows.

Things were not the same as before. The beauty was still beautiful, but she now belonged to someone else. They were so close yet so far.