

Perfect Match: Irresistible Desire For You – Chapter 171

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Zachary bombarded Joseph with questions, but it seemed that Joseph did not want to answer any of them. Because of this, Ashley decided to ignore Zachary too.

Seeing that Ashley heeded Joseph's threat, Zachary was unhappy and disappointed. "Ashley, Joseph has led you astray! You were so kind before. You've changed! You've become cruel like him."

Although Zachary was talking to Ashley, she knew that he was, in fact, scolding Joseph.

"Zachary, stop acting like a clown," Joseph said to make Zachary shut up.

He gritted his teeth when he spoke. His warning and exasperation could be seen in his eyes.

"Fine. I won't say anything more. Let's just order the food." Now that there was a beautiful woman by Joseph's side, he looked surprisingly gentle and affectionate. Seeing him like that, Zachary decided to stop talking. He picked up the menu and looked at it carefully instead.

At that moment, an awkward atmosphere filled the air, so Yasmin, who was sitting next to Ashley, broke the ice. "Ashley, we'll head back to Olkfield tomorrow."

"So soon? When are you going to get married anyway?" Ashley asked, a little surprised that Yasmin and her partner would go back soon.

"It's not settled yet. Our parents are the ones who'll decide the wedding date. I'll let you know as soon as I can."

"Thanks. I'll be sure to attend the most important day of your life," Ashley said with a smile.

"By the way, Ashley, don't forget to ask your man to give us a fat red packet," Zachary chimed in. Of course, ludicrous as he was, he grabbed the opportunity and exploited it for money.

As long as Ashley agreed, Joseph would not object. After all, he loved her so much. The red packet he would give must be bountiful. Now was the perfect time for Zachary to rip Joseph off.

Zachary figured that Ashley's thoughtfulness would lead her to agree to his coaxing. However, her straightforward reply surprised him. "No problem. The packet will definitely be big just as you want.

But when Joseph and I get married, you also have to give us a big packet, too."

'Ashley, why are you demanding reciprocity from my courtesy? Well, it's just right, though.'

When Ashley talked about her marriage without hesitation, Joseph felt joyous.

As a result, he became more arrogant than he already was. He put his arm around Ashley's shoulder and put down the menu she was currently reading. In a surprisingly gently tone, he whispered, "Honey, let's read it together."

The other three were speechless, including Ashley herself. She did not expect that Joseph would call her "honey" in public. Zachary did not expect it either. He wondered how Joseph could change his mood so quickly. Yasmin finally saw Joseph's gentle side in person. It turned out that he was actually an affectionate person.

Ashley felt touched by Joseph's attitude towards her. Once she regained her composure, she and Joseph talked to each other sweetly.

Zachary, who had an apparent disappointment in his eyes, echoed Joseph's words mockingly. "Honey, let's read it together."

The sight of the two couples made the young waitress beside them look at them with envy. It was as though she was fascinated by them. She only snapped back to reality after being called several times.

Joseph, Ashley, Zachary, and Yasmin finally ordered their food. Once the waitress left, Yasmin heaved a heavy sigh and said, "Handsome men are always a trouble. Just now, the waitress stared at Joseph and Zachary, and it seemed that she did not want to take her eyes off them."

“You’re right. It’s a bummer that handsome men always attract women,” Ashley retorted sadly.

Her and Yasmin’s complaints about handsome men made Joseph and Zachary look at them in awe. The jealousy in their words was really eye-opening for their partners.

When Ashley sighed heavily, Joseph moved towards her and sincerely said, “Honey, take me as a stock. Only you have the right to take me under control. You don’t have to worry about me being taken away by others. I won’t ever allow that to happen.”

Joseph’s reassurance, together with the serious look on his face, put a smile on Ashley’s face.

Zachary, who was watching the couple from the opposite side, found that Joseph was amazing, even at coaxing women. “Joseph, you’re really awesome! Ashley, if you decide to sell him out one day, you’ll make a fortune.”

After saying that, Zachary received an intense glare from Joseph.

To Joseph’s surprise, Ashley looked as though she was pondering Zachary’s words. This made his face turn even glummer. ‘Is she really going to sell me out?’ he wondered.

“It should be worth a lot to sell you out too,” Yasmin said to Zachary. The look on her face seemed as though that suggestion was worthy of consideration.

“Please don’t do that! I promise I’ll only make money for you. Besides, our child can’t live without me,” Zachary cajoled, not wanting to be sold out by his future wife.

Seeing that Zachary dug his own grave, Joseph chuckled in satisfaction.

Just as Zachary was about to protest, the waitress, who had come to get their orders, finally returned with their food. The two men deliberately kept a cold demeanor.

Of course, Yasmin and Ashley were pleased to see the unfriendly look on their faces. It seemed that their partners would rather shoo other women than lose their beloved.

“Nice! You really know what I want,” Yasmin remarked, patting on Zachary’s shoulder.

Ashley picked up a slice of meat and put it on Joseph’s plate with a smile. “Here’s a reward for your loyalty.

Keep going like that!” Joseph and Zachary fell speechless. Why did they feel like as though they were pets?

They talked and laughed while they ate dinner.

Joseph took off his cold facade and took good care of Ashley.

Of course, Zachary did the same thing.

While the two women were satisfied, what happened next made the two men uneasy.

Halfway through the meal, two tall and handsome men appeared.

“Zaiden?”

“Jeffery?”

Ashley and Yasmin called out in unison as they lifted their gazes and saw the men.

Yes, the ones who came were Zaiden and Jeffery.

When Jeffery studied in America for law, Zaiden was a senior student there. Since they had a common goal, Jeffery returned to work in Zaiden’s law firm.

The truth was, this was only pure coincidence. They just happened to look for a nearby restaurant for lunch.

Joseph, Ashley, Zachary, and Yasmin’s table was in the corner. As soon as Zaiden entered the restaurant, he saw Ashley, and then his gaze fixated on her. Even from afar, she was so beautiful like a flower.

At the sight of her, Zaiden could not help but walk towards her. Perplexed, Jeffery followed him. The coincidence became an inevitable one.

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“What a coincidence! I didn’t expect I’d meet you here, Ashley.” At that moment, only Ashley could Zaiden see in his tender eyes. “Do you mind if we share a table?” he slowly asked.

The thing was, two more people could join their table. It was at Ashley’s discretion whether or not she would agree. At first, Ashley was stunned upon hearing Zaiden’s modest request. Once she got ahold of herself, she smiled at him and replied, “I don’t mind.”

Zaiden and Jeffery sat down on the other side of the table once they got Ashley’s permission. Zaiden looked up to the waiter near them and said, “Waiter, two sets of tableware, please.”

As the saying goes, when two rivals meet, their eyes flash fire. That was what was happening at that moment. Joseph and Zaiden were aware that the newcomers were their rivals in love. Even though they had not said anything, the tension between them was getting intense by the minute. If only looks could kill, both of them would have already been six feet under. Meanwhile, Zachary looked at Jeffery with vigilant eyes. However, Jeffery only frowned in confusion and did not pay much attention to Zachary.

Zaiden was composed, while Joseph was frigid. Although their handsome faces were calm, there was a silent yet fierce competition going on between them. The environment, albeit noisy, had become their background, while the atmosphere was intensified by their glares.

Like in the animal kingdom, this was probably the most primitive competition that could be observed in males.

The sudden drop of the temperature due to their cold glares sent a chill down Ashley’s spine. Joseph and Zaiden were both excellent men. However, watching them being like this was really a headache for her.

At that moment, she happened to glance at the opposite seat. She found that Yasmin also seemed helpless as she gazed at Zachary, who seemed unusually hostile.

The originally harmonious dining atmosphere was ruined just like that. Before any of them realized, a deafening silence befell among them.

Fortunately, the waiter appeared right in time. He looked at the two men, who had just arrived, and politely said, "Sir, here are the tableware. Would you like to order a dish or refreshments?"

Zaiden asked Jeffery to order food. Then, for a moment, he hid the hostility in his eyes and started to break the ice.

"I am Zaiden, Ashley's good friend," Zaiden calmly introduced himself.

"I am Joseph, Ashley's boyfriend." Only a word was different, but it was enough to declare Joseph's victory.

"Hello, everyone. I'm Jeffery," Jeffery said with a smile. He noticed the anger in Zaiden's eyes, so he figured that it would be probably better if he smoothed things over.

"I am Zachary, Yasmin's fiancé." Of course, Zachary also introduced himself and announced his relationship with Yasmin while he was at it.

"I'm Yasmin. Everyone knows me, so I don't have to introduce myself in detail. It's fate that we know each other. Anyway, I hope we can have a good chat and a great time," Yasmin said in a relaxed tone. The truth was, she was quite familiar with the current chaotic situation, so she tried to ease the oppressive atmosphere as much as she could.

"I'm Ashley. The food here is great, by the way. Let's eat!" Ashley had no idea how to alleviate such a tense atmosphere, so she tried to shift the topic. She must admit, she was clueless when it came to this.

Finally, the silent battle between the two men came to an end. Although the atmosphere was still kind of awkward, they ate in peace. It was better, even though none of them said anything to break the long and oppressive silence.

"Mr. Estrada, when do you have time to talk about the Synder Group's case entrusted by your company?" Zaiden sternly asked Zachary when they were about to leave.

"I'm pretty busy recently. Mr. Marshall is the client. As the president of the Empire Group, it's best if you schedule the appointment with him," Zachary replied curtly.

The Synder Group's case involved the real reason for the untimely demise of Joseph's parents. After years of investigations and various strategies, Joseph decided to bring down the Synder Group ultimately and sue its former president, James.

Considering the reputation and efficiency of all the law firms in Ariosa, Zachary, the acting president of Empire Group, chose Zaiden's law firm as the trustee of the case.

Unexpectedly, the presidents of the two companies turned out to be rivals in love. Unless the trustee was replaced, Joseph and Zaiden would have to negotiate the secret case.

Although Joseph was taken aback by the coincidence of being Zaiden's client, it gave him a chance to have positive communication with Zaiden. Because of this, he figured that he could deal with the business and personal affairs at the same time.

"Mr. Bennett, it's up to you when you'd like to meet. I'm available anytime. Let's just finish the case as soon as possible," Joseph said while looking at Zaiden coldly. Truth be told, the case that he was pertaining to was not only Synder Group's lawsuit but also their love entanglements with Ashley.

"Agreed. Mr. Marshall, I'm looking forward to working with you," Zaiden replied with a defiant smile. He had gone so much that he was not at all intimidated by Joseph.

Even though they did not say any offensive words, the hostility between them made the atmosphere increasingly tense by the minute.

"Let's go, Ashley," Joseph said after staring at Zaiden menacingly. He then wrapped his arms around Ashley and beckoned her that it was time to leave.

"Bye, Ashley," Zaiden weakly said while watching her walk away with Joseph.

Ashley was stunned at Zaiden's heavy goodbye. Feeling guilty, she turned around and bade goodbye as well. "Goodbye, Zaiden. Goodbye, everyone!"

With that, Zachary and his fiancée finally left.

It was only after a long while that Zaiden was able to withdraw his gaze and conceal the sadness in his heart.

The day Ashley rejected his confession and told him that there was an irreplaceable person in her heart, Zaiden went to his good friend Mike to learn about her history. It was only then that he knew who the man in Ashley's heart was. It was Joseph.

When he met Joseph today, Zaiden had to admit that Joseph seemed excellent in all aspects. He was rich, powerful, handsome, and, most importantly, gentle to Ashley.

For some reason, Zaiden thought that he stood no chance against Joseph. The latter was still the victor regardless of those things. After all, he was the one who captivated Ashley's heart. At the thought of this, Zaiden felt even more heartbroken than ever.

It really irked him that Joseph could do little things to Ashley while Zaiden had no right to do the same thing. For instance, Joseph could refill Ashley's bowl while Zaiden could not. He suddenly realized that his love for Ashley was doomed from the beginning.

"Let's go," he said to Jeffery as soon as he came to his senses.

The lunch they just had seemed like the longest one they had had. Jeffery finally understood the entanglements they had in love.

Apparently, Ashley was the beautiful woman Zaiden had long waited. Sadly, she already had someone in her heart, and that man could not be taken lightly.

The most innocent person during the depressing lunch was Jeffery. Although he was merely impressed by Yasmin, he received hostility from Zachary.

"Joseph, are you okay?" Ashley cautiously asked as soon as she got in the car.

"How can I not be okay?" Joseph retorted.

"It's okay to admit that you're not," Ashley replied with care.

As one of the main reasons for the intense atmosphere a while ago, she thought that Joseph must have taken Zaiden seriously. In order to be considerate of Joseph's feelings, she decided not to talk to Zaiden over lunch.

"What are you saying? I'm really fine," Joseph reassured as he noticed that a slight frown tugged at the corners of Ashley's mouth.

Although Zaiden was a worthy rival, Joseph was confident in himself and his relationship with Ashley.

To be frank, what troubled him more was the solution on how to put Ashley out of Zaiden's mind forever.

If you find an

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"By the way, why did you send me these flowers? Also, where is the message card?" Ashley shifted her eyes from the red roses she was carrying and raised her head. A look of doubt crossed her face.

"I sent these flowers as a way of pursuing you. As for the message, I don't intend to give them before I receive a kiss," Joseph announced confidently.

Initially, Ashley had used gentle words to put him at ease. She was worried he was bothered by his love rival. However, the fact he was behaving so shamelessly caught her off-guard.

'How can he pursue me and speak so blatantly? And why was I dumb to assume he was disheartened?' Her mind was in a whirl and she admonished herself for her naivety. She thought back to the words he had spoken now and the ones he had uttered before! The contrast made her quite furious.

"Well, if you won't give it to me now then I don't want to see it!" she declared. After saying that, she turned around and looked out of the car's window. She wanted to show him she was no fool.

The playful look on her face didn't go unnoticed by Joseph. He couldn't help but feel delighted. As time went by, he was deriving lots of pleasure in pulling her leg.

“Is that so? Alright then,” he said. There was a hint of a smile in his voice.

Listening to his words, Ashley began to panic. She had assumed he would give her the message instantly! Her curiosity got the best of her and there was a sudden shift in her attitude. “No! I want to see it. But you have to give it in an unconditional way. You shouldn’t ask for anything in return! Otherwise…”

She didn’t finish her sentence. Joseph gazed at her and asked, “Otherwise what?”

“I am pretty sure you know what I mean!” Ashley said. A look of confusion flashed his eyes. She put on a serious face, let out a heavy sigh, and said slowly, “Otherwise I might cry or ignore you.”

When she had used that threat before, she noticed Joseph was instantly defeated. That was when it struck her it was a useful trick. She was determined to use it as long as it worked.

Ashley didn’t like to cry. But she had shed tears for Joseph several times. Knowing her tears would do the trick, she was willing to act like a spoiled child.

Joseph, as expected, found himself in a helpless position. He gave it some thought. If he wasn’t driving, he would have pressed her against him, not giving her any time to play tricks on him.

There was a moment’s silence. Ashley’s gaze went to his face. She was shocked to notice that an evil smile was still playing on his lips. She knew him well enough to know that something wicked was brewing in his mind.

“Hey, so are you going to give it to me or not?” she asked, but her voice was soft when she spoke. Anxiety was building inside her.

“I expect you to refer to me sweetly. Is that too much to ask?” He wasn’t satisfied with her question. He knew he deserved more than a silly hey!

When they first met abroad, Ashley did refer to him casually like that. She would often even shyly dodge meeting his eyes. However, things had changed a lot lately. It looked like she enjoyed calling him that way and would never honor him with sweet and sugary names anymore!

“Oh, what do you want me to say? Joseph?” Ashley asked, beginning to feel rather confused.

“Nope, try again,” Joseph said, a look of dissatisfaction entering upon his face.

“Joe? Will that work?” she asked quickly.

“Try again,” he repeated indifferently.

“Joey?” By now, this guessing game was getting tiresome.

Joseph was speechless. The corners of his eyes twitched slightly.

“Darling?” Ashley said gently, hoping this was what he expected.

“Give it another try,” Joseph said, but this time his face had brightened up. She was getting close.

Ashley pondered for a moment, but couldn't think of an answer. She raised her eyes and looked at him pleadingly. “I am sorry for being so stupid. Can you please give me some hints?” she requested.

“You are indeed stupid. Okay, now think back to what I called you in the restaurant before.” Noticing the perplexed look on Ashley's face, Joseph took pity on her and gave her a hint.

“Honey?” she said excitedly, hope welling up inside her.

“No!” said Joseph as he shook his head. At this point he was starting to suspect there was something seriously wrong with Ashley's brain.

She noticed the disappointed look on Joseph's face. Like a child, she protested, “I am pretty sure that's what you said!”

He shook his head and said, “My dear wife, are you out of your mind?” He made no effort to hide his disappointment.

“How can you say that? I am not out of my mind!” she retorted. After uttering those words, it struck her. ‘My dear wife! He wants me to call him my dear husband!’ she realized.

She looked at him and said, “My dear husband, can I see the message?”

"It's in my coat pocket. Since I am driving, I suggest you take it." Joseph had finally conceded. After all, she bestowed him the title he was longing for.

Hearing this, Ashley narrowed her eyes at him. It turned out the thing she had eagerly fought for had been in her reach all this while!

"Which pocket?" she asked cautiously. Joseph was driving so she had to be careful.

"I don't know," Joseph responded honestly. When he left the company, he had remembered to take the card. He glanced at it for a few seconds before he put it in his pocket. However, he couldn't recall which pocket!

"Well, it's not a problem. I will search. Just focus on you driving,"

Ashley said with a sigh and got ready to inspect his pockets for her card.

She was done surveying his right pocket and it contained nothing but his phone. Ashley had to lean over to be able to reach his left pocket.

Just then, the brakes screeched as the car stopped. Ashley steadied herself and looked at Joseph in confusion. "What happened?" she questioned.

"Red light," he said calmly and pointed his finger at the red light.

Ashley's gaze followed his finger and she learned there was indeed a red light in front of them. However, she still couldn't figure out a connection between the red light and the sudden brake. She knew Joseph possessed excellent driving skills. He wouldn't have slammed the brake on when he met with a red light. She also observed that there weren't many cars in front of them.

However, before she could mull over it and come up with a plausible reason for his action, Joseph interrupted her in a hoarse voice. "Ashley, your hand."

On listening to his words, she looked down at her hand. It was pressing against his crotch. Her face was flushed with embarrassment.

"I didn't mean to do that." There was a shy smile on her face. She immediately withdrew her hand. At the same time, she hadn't forgotten her original purpose. She managed to pull the message card from his left pocket.

Joseph gazed in awe as he watched Ashley's flush deepen. He would have liked to make out with her then and there! He felt quite tempted and vulnerable as he watched her.

The second she had leaned forward, the delicate fragrance from her shampoo had driven him crazy. And the movement she had made with her hands excited him further. The truth was, her proximity had distracted him. He hadn't noticed the traffic light in front of him. Hence he had to slam the brake on.

Thankfully, there was no accident. However, when he felt her soft hand on his crotch, it had made him quite restless. His self-control had almost disappeared into thin air.

After what passed between them, Ashley couldn't muster up the courage to look straight into his handsome face. She lowered her head and read the message she had managed to get with great difficulty. "Day one of pursuing my girl- Ashley, I'm sorry! Forgive me for my cowardliness. But I assure you that nothing of this sort will happen in the future. I will never give up on you."

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Joseph normally expressed his feelings concisely.

Ashley's eyes were glued to the strong and powerful words written on the card. It came bearing a solemn promise. Ashley's earlier embarrassment was gone. She was deeply touched at the moment.

"I have kept it simple. However, everything I have written came from the bottom of my heart." Joseph, who had calmed down from his initial excitement, gazed at Ashley's beautiful side face. When he spoke, his voice was soft.

Ashley raised her eyes to look at Joseph, and then lowered it again. Her hands gently brushed the words on the card. A faint smile crept on her face. She said, "This card says this is your day one of pursuing your girl. Does that mean there is more in the coming days? Don't bother with flowers and other expensive items. It's simply a waste of money. Your cards are enough for me."

Joseph was a big spender. He had given her expensive flowers today. Who knew what he would give in the future? She couldn't bear the thought of him spending money on something extremely valuable. Ashley was a thrifty and virtuous girl. According to her, a simple card with earnest words on it was enough to delight her.

She would relish these cards and keep them with her safely. And in the future, she could read them and recall their old days.

'No! Giving her just cards won't be good enough,' Joseph thought to himself and mentally dismissed her suggestion. Cards were just for her to relish. It was a little extra something she could retain. However, there was no way he would chase the love of his life with merely a piece of paper! If word got around that he was giving her cards, people would look down on him. He was especially concerned about the family members of the Guzman family. Joseph yearned for their approval. If he followed Ashley's request, they would frown upon him and look at him with disapproval. After all, they had already gotten a bad impression of him.

Joseph decided to dodge her question. His face grew solemn and he said, "Ashley, I have a question for you."

"What question?" Ashley's eyes left the card and she looked at him.

"Does your father know what happened between you and me?"

"Well, yes. Is that a problem?"

"No, I was curious to know if he has formed a bad impression of me."

Ashley's voice faltered as she tried to speak. She let out a deep sigh and asked, "Do you really want to know what he thinks of you?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Well, he refers to you as a bastard," she said in a low voice.

Jack hadn't permitted Joseph to enter the Guzman Group today. This gave Joseph an idea of what his future father-in-law thought of him. However, he hadn't guessed the extent of his hatred. Ashley's words confirmed his biggest fear.

“May I know why?” he asked, his face falling. Joseph couldn’t drop this subject nor could he stay calm.

“I had told my father a man dumped me. I was careful to not mention any name. However, recently my brother told him that man was you.” Ashley spoke carefully. Her voice was gentle. She noticed the sudden shift in Joseph’s mood and couldn’t risk hurting him further.

Joseph felt completely helpless as he listened to her. He knew he was doomed to chase her for a very long time before he got her family’s approval. His bad deeds from the past were haunting his present and future!

“Joseph, are you okay? My father isn’t a harsh man. In fact, he is very easy-going. Everything will be fine.” Ashley, unable to bear to see him distressed, tried to comfort him.

“I’m fine,” Joseph said reassuringly, noticing the lines of worry etched on her face.

Moreover, he had hope in his heart. He was confident that he could face all the challenges bravely. He was not afraid of the hardships that awaited him.

The rest of their journey took place in silence. Soon, they arrived at the Guzman Group. Joseph said, “Here we are. Go to work! We’ll talk later.”

“Okay. Bye!” She got off the car and waved goodbye.

Joseph remained there for a while. Once Ashley’s slender figure was out of his sight, he started his car and drove away.

Days went by and Ashley continued to receive various kinds of beautiful flowers from Joseph. His dedication and love caused a sensation in the company.

To the people who worked in the company, she was no longer just the daughter of the Guzman family. She was also the future wife of the CEO of the Empire Group. This new identity inspired mixed emotions in the couple. Joseph was forbidden from entering the company, but that didn’t stop him from letting people know she belonged to him. Jack did his best to spoil the couple’s time together. He made Mike follow Ashley after work, giving him strict orders to ruin their dates.

Ashley could hardly spend time alone with Joseph. Mike would intervene and make it his duty to give Joseph a hard time. He would keep an eye on them at all times. They only got solace after she reached her bedroom. The two of them would talk on the phone for hours.

She soon learned her father's hand was behind everything! He couldn't approve of Joseph since he had dumped her once.

No matter how hard Ashley tried to change his mind, Jack wouldn't budge. He maintained an indifferent face, indicating his opinion would never change. Ashley couldn't help but think he wasn't as easy-going as she had assumed him to be!

There was another incident that occurred in the midst of everything. After the acquisition of the Synder Group, the former CEO of the Synder Group, James, was suspected of capital withdrawal and put behind the bars.

Ashley thought back to the discussion that took place at lunch regarding the lawsuit of the Synder Group. She detected something unusual about it. The night before yesterday, she tried to broach the topic with Joseph. To her surprise, his response was somewhat evasive.

One day, after work, Ashley ventured into Mike's office and declared, "Mike, I'm going to the Empire Group now. Do you wish to come with me?"

Mike detected a trace of discontentment in her voice. He laughed a little and said, "Do you want me to go with you?"

"Does what I want matter? It's not like you have cared much about my privacy. Your past actions prove it!" Ashley responded, her face eerily calm.

Every time Joseph sent Ashley flowers and fixed a dinner date, Mike would make it a point to follow them.

They made quite a weird trio. For the most part, the three of them sat in depressing silence.

And if Mike behaved rudely, Joseph didn't dare to retaliate. Ashley found herself in a helpless position. She couldn't believe her brother would blindly follow her father's orders!

Mike had been a third wheel for a while and the worst part was they couldn't do anything about it. Ashley had resigned to her fate and decided to inform him about her whereabouts.

"Haha, judging from your tone it is obvious you dislike me and consider me a nuisance. Alas, sure enough, a grown woman will always favor her lover! Family means nothing!" Mike said in a plaintive voice, making no attempts to hide his grievances.

"Mike, don't evade my question," Ashley said. She ignored his lamentation and asked seriously, "Are you coming or not? Just tell me!"

However, Mike still wouldn't answer the question. Instead, he said, "Please don't dislike me. I have valid reasons for everything I am doing."

"Mike, could you just answer my question? Cut the crap!" Ashley said disdainfully and her face hardened.

Of late, she had had a hard time conversing with Mike. He wouldn't take anything seriously. It irked her to watch him speak so rudely with Joseph. Joseph, on the other hand, behaved maturely and never raised his voice in front of Mike.

After all, Mike was Ashley's brother. He craved for their family's approval and wouldn't dare to treat him badly. Joseph wasn't a passive man by nature. However, in the past few days, he had played a very passive role.

"My dear sister, be calm! What has happened to your patience?" Noticing Ashley had turned around impatiently, Mike asked her to stop.

She paid no heed to his words and continued to walk. "Listen, I'll stay out of your relationship. I won't interfere anymore!" he uttered.

As soon as Mike finished speaking, Ashley turned around and asked, "Why?" His words had shocked her.

"Because my despicable brother-in-law has given me fifty percent of the Synder Group's shares." In plainer words, Joseph had decided to bribe Mike and his plans had worked!

He shook his head in exasperation. Ashley asked curiously, “Mike, I don’t understand you! If he has given you so many shares, why are you calling him despicable? Don’t you think you are being too hard on him?”

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“Never mind—it’s a long story. Anyway, your boyfriend is definitely not a kind person.” Sighing deeply, Mike felt that he had been tricked.

“I think you’re overthinking this, Mike. I’m sure he’s a nice person,” Ashley said, responding based on her experience.

Now, however, she was intrigued. “Why do you say that, though? Has he done something awful to you?”

Mike was looking after Ashley solely because of his father’s orders. This was unknown to Ashley. This, however, gave him the chance to undermine Joseph, to some extent. However, he changed his mind after he came back yesterday.

He just finished showering when he heard his phone ring. Immediately he picked it up, and was surprised when he saw that it was Joseph. “Oh, hello, Joseph. Looks like you called the wrong number?”

“No, I didn’t,” Joseph declared calmly.

“Well, that’s weird. Why are you calling me?” Mike asked, not wanting to beat around the bush.

“I have something to discuss with you,” Joseph answered bluntly.

“Okay, then. Shoot,” Mike said lightly. ‘What the hell does this man want?’ he thought.

“I will give you fifty percent of the shares of the Synder Group or give you the power over the whole company—in one condition: leave Ashley alone. Stop keeping an eye on her and let us be.” Joseph laid out this proposal nonchalantly.

Mike was caught off-guard. However, his answer was immediate. “No. Father gave me the responsibility to look after my sister. I don’t think I’ll ever abandon that, no matter what you offer me.”

In the past few days, Mike had become more aware of the mission he was entrusted with. Being a third wheel was never a nice experience for anyone, but he felt that doing so would grant Zaiden the justice he deserved. Also, considering that he was getting on his father’s good side by while seeing Joseph be visibly uncomfortable, he couldn’t help but feel great.

He took a great amount of pleasure from making things incredibly difficult for Joseph. Something about a CEO of a well-known multinational corporation being powerless when he was around made him feel invincible.

Joseph quickly caught on to what Mike was doing. He hated it, but he wasn’t surprised by it.

He also knew that he wouldn’t give his sister up that easily, and so he decided to make the stakes high for her, and more tempting. “I’ll also give you access to the army’s provincial base,” he added, sounding unfazed. “I know you like that. I’ll give you a minute to reconsider your answer.”

Mike was speechless. It was only then did he realize how powerful, how omnipotent Joseph was. He clearly knew what he needed, and he wasn’t afraid to use it against him.

When he came back late that night, he finally found the person he had been looking for for so long now. Unfortunately, the woman didn’t remember him at all. What was more annoying was that, apparently, they had a misunderstanding when they met last time. As a result, he was blacklisted by the army base where the woman was working, so Mike couldn’t really make a move.

While Joseph’s offer was indeed irresistible, Mike couldn’t just let Joseph get what he wanted that easily.

“How did you know I can’t get in?”

“Simple. Only the commander of the army has access to it. My offer to you is the only way you’d be able to get it—to get in. So your choice. If you have any other way of getting what you want, then by all means decline.”

It was the first time Mike saw Joseph talk so much. Unfortunately, nothing coming out of his mouth was friendly.

Of course he knew the commander of the military base was the father of that woman! And he could not even get a chance to talk to her, not to mention to get a pass from her.

Mike carefully weighed the pros and cons of Joseph’s offer. After what seemed like an eternity of silence, he finally spoke up. “Fine! Deal!”

Joseph chuckled. It was all too easy for him! “So, do you want half of the shares of the Synder Group or all of them?” he asked.

“Half.” Mike sounded firm and sure.

If he chose the latter, he would be forced to manage the company all by himself. It would be better if he let Joseph do it and he just shared out dividends.

“Well, brother-in-law, I wish we have a long and pleasant cooperation!” exclaimed Joseph excitedly. He hung up the phone ecstatic.

In just three minutes, he was able to change his position in the game he was in. Mike, one of the people keeping Ashely from him, was out of the game.

However, as far as Mike was concerned, what Joseph did was shameful.

But he couldn’t tell his sister the truth. As the deal between him and Joseph hadn’t started yet, he could not risk being found out.

“But what would that man even do to me? He wouldn’t dare touch me. But go on and cozy up to him now, I can’t afford him being pissed off at me!” he said arrogantly as he waved his hand.

It was rare for Ashley to see Mike behave like this, but she didn’t have the energy to question it. “Then I’ll go,” she responded dismissively.

Mike couldn't deny that his sister had already fallen for Joseph. 'Maybe it's time I accept that he's going to be my brother-in-law...' he thought, sighing deeply.

In all honesty, he liked Joseph. He had only been very gentle, loving, and considerate towards Ashley. More amazing was it extended to everyone around Ashley—whenever they were together, he would be polite and pleasant, even if he wasn't being treated the best. But Mike couldn't get over the fact that Joseph had ties to shady entities.

But so far, he had been an incredible man: nice, reliable, and agreeable. As a result, Mike had recognized the man as his future brother-in-law.

'And love is love. It is selfish. I don't think I can do anything else to help Zaiden,' he said to himself.

As soon as Ashley told the receptionist her name, she was led to the CEO's office directly.

There, she met a woman who had left a deep impression on her—it probably was the 'more beloved woman' Joseph had talked about before.

The photos didn't do her justice: she was slender, but had curves in all the right places; she had blonde, curly hair that softly rested on her shoulders; and delicate, charming features. She was a beauty unlike anyone in their region.

Although all the misunderstandings had been solved, Ashley couldn't help but feel bad when she saw the woman who had been haunting her in her nightmares in the place where Joseph worked.

The two beautiful women looked at each other.

After a while, the woman smiled and said enthusiastically, "Hello! I am Jenny."

Ashley was about to return the niceties when a man walked out and addressed her. "Hello, Miss Guzman."

"Lightning? Why are you here?"

The tall, handsome man was Lydia's "boyfriend", a nurse she knew when she was hospitalized in the United States.

Lightning flashed Ashley a megawatt smile. “Miss Guzman, this is my girlfriend, Jenny.”

Upon hearing this, Ashley looked back and forth between the two gorgeous people in front of her. “Girlfriend? Your new girlfriend?” she whispered, trying to be discreet.

Still, Jenny heard her clearly. Her face immediately soured as she turned to Lightning and asked pointedly, “New girlfriend? When did you have an ex?”

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Lightning’s face froze when he was being questioned by his angry girlfriend. “I think this is a misunderstanding. I’ll explain it to you later,” he said with a smile.

“No! I want to hear the explanation now,” Jenny insisted.

“Fine. Miss Guzman, if it’s okay with you, I’ll just deal with my personal affairs first. I’ll be right back.”

Lightning’s girlfriend was adamant to hear his explanation at once, so there was nothing he could do but tell her. With a sigh, he turned to Ashley to apologize and then pulled Jenny aside. Once the couple were out of earshot, they began to argue in whispers.

At that moment, Jenny’s expression changed from anger to understanding. While listening to her boyfriend’s explanation, she could not help but glance at Ashley apologetically. Her glare was too intense, which perplexed Ashley now.

A moment later, Jenny had totally calmed down. Lightning walked towards Ashley, but before he could do so, she asked, “Why are you here?”

Smart as she was, she had already figured out Lightning’s sudden appearance in the CEO’s office of the Empire Group. This was unlikely a coincidence. His coming must have something to do with Joseph.

“Miss Guzman, can we talk?” Instead of giving a direct answer, Lightning made a sincere invitation.

“Sure,” Ashley replied. She also wanted to know the relationship of those two, so she agreed without hesitation.

They walked into the CEO’s office and found that it was empty. Joseph was not there.

“Miss Guzman, can I ask you something? Do you know about Joseph’s real identity?” Lightning asked at once.

“I do, but not everything,” Ashley truthfully answered.

She was aware that Joseph’s identity was ulterior. She knew that he had quite a reputation and position in the gangland, but she did not know what exactly it was.

“He is the leader of the Dragon Gang, the biggest gang in the world. Here is the relevant information about who he really is. You may want to take a look at this,” Lightning seriously said as he handed Ashley the iPad.

She took it nervously and began to browse the web.

The title of the webpage was “Jason, the King of the Underworld”. On the page was his story from his debut to his fame.

At the age of 16, Jason joined the underworld and became famous; when he was nearly 20 years old, he became the leader of the Dragon Gang and opened up a new order in the underworld. It was mentioned there how Jason grew over the years by being under a heavy burden at such a young age.

To Ashley, every word on the page regarding his development was exciting, and at the same time, pitiful. Her slim fingers slid across the smooth screen, and every paragraph seemed to convey a shocking and inexplicable feeling.

‘As the saying goes, the highest branch is not the safest roost. How much blood and sweat will have to be shed to make such achievements, all while one is in danger?’ she thought to herself.

Finally, Ashley reached the bottom part of the webpage. While she was reading it, Lightning explained, “I’m one of the most capable subordinates of Jason. When you were hospitalized before, I didn’t tell you my real identity for

special reasons. Lydia is also a member of the Dragon Gang. For convenience, I pretended to be her boyfriend to get close to you.”

Now that he mentioned it, Ashley recalled her memory of that time. Looking back, Lightning and Lydia had an unusual temperament, and it seemed that they did not have chemistry between them. However, she did not think much about that because she was waiting for Joseph to show up.

“Are the doctor and Lydia’s so-called friends and relatives also from Dragon Gang?” During that time, several people came in and out of her ward. Ashley figured that those people must also belong to the same organization.

“Yes, they are. As a matter of fact, the hospital itself belongs to the Dragon Gang. Joseph specifically instructed Lydia and Thunder to take care of you.”

“I see.” Ashley mused. All of a sudden, she remembered something, so she looked up at Lightning and asked, “Do you know why Joseph didn’t come to see me?”

She remembered how she wished Joseph would come and see her, even just once. She was very worried about him because he never contacted her while she was there. Also, she was heartbroken because she had no idea where he was. The pain she had endured at that time came flooding back to her. She could not even hide the sadness in her tone.

“Joseph did it out of remorse. He thought that it was he who disturbed your peaceful life and the reason why you were in danger. He was afraid that who he really was would cause greater damage to you, so he decided to let you go,” Lightning explained. Then, with a sigh, he continued, “Miss Guzman, Joseph’s intentions were good. It’s just that he wasn’t thinking clearly at that time. We tried to persuade him, of course. But no matter what we did, there was nothing we could do to change his decision. As a result, a big mistake was made.”

Seeing that Ashley was silent and lost in thought, Lightning added, “It’s the first time Joseph has fallen in love with a woman. He loved you so much and still does. When you were kidnapped by that bastard Zack, Joseph stayed up all night. We really didn’t know if he actually slept. He deployed the search and rescue plan bravely, despite his anxiety and worries. We all saw it.

When you were finally saved, Joseph took care of you from afar. Even if you didn’t see him, he was very happy. When you finally woke up, he chose not to

see you, even though it was killing him. Then the day came that you had to leave. At that time, he never left his office and just dealt with his business. It was as though he had returned to his cold and ruthless demeanor.” Once Lightning was done talking, he heaved a heavy sigh again.

“Miss Guzman, Joseph really loves you. He didn’t have any emotions before, but since he had you, joy, anger, and sadness would inadvertently show in his eyebrows.”

After expressing his true feelings, Lightning sent out a sincere request to Ashley. “There is an old saying that goes, ‘Smart as a rule, but this time a fool.’ I think that saying perfectly describes Joseph. He was afraid of losing you, so he chose the option which he thought was best but was actually very stupid. Please don’t mind Joseph’s foolishness and give him another chance.”

“He really is stupid...” After listening to the explanation of Lightning as an onlooker, Ashley could not help but sigh.

‘How did you not understand that I wanted to stay with you as we overcome the difficulties together? Letting me go without me knowing was dreadful and harmful to our relationship. You’re so stupid, Joseph! How could you make such a decision?’ Ashley looked down at Jason’s photo on the iPad. Seeing it, she sighed with both anger and frustration.

Lightning thought that he had done something wrong, despite his good intentions, so he quickly changed the subject and remarked, “How can Joseph be stupid? He’s just very shrewd! Otherwise, how can he manage Dragon Gang efficiently? As for the matter between you two, he probably just hit his head by accident.”

Ashley chuckled upon hearing Lightning’s slightly nervous rebuke. ‘Joseph was really out of his mind! If not, how could he want to break up with me when he, in fact, loved me so much?’ she mused.

“There’s one last thing that I want to know. Why does he have intimate photos with another woman, that is, with your girlfriend?”

She wanted to figure out everything at once. Although she could not forgive Joseph right away, she wanted things to be clearer.

“Miss Guzman, please forget those photos. I’ll explain to you how that happened.” Lightning stood up from the seat slowly. Even though he wanted

to be considerate because of the circumstances, he could not hide the excitement in his tone. “Joseph asked me to composite these two photos. The man is actually me, but I edited it and put Joseph’s photo.”

Seeing that Ashley was still puzzled despite his explanation, he continued, “Please give me the iPad in your hand. I’m going to demonstrate a similar photo synthesis.”

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After saying that, Lightning fetched the iPad and gestured to Ashley to follow him to the spacious desk.

“Look, as you can see, this is a photo of me and Jenny. At present, I don’t have a photo of Joseph. So I shall use Thunder’s photo for this demo.” Lightning opened the map storage and took out two photos. He went on with the process and showed Ashley how everything was done.

The first photo was of Lightning and that woman, sharing the same quilt. It was quite an intimate pose. The second photo was completely different. It was of the doctor, Thunder, in a white gown. It was from the time when she was in the hospital. He was standing in front of the operating table.

Lightning turned on software and began to work on those two photos. Firstly, he adjusted the head of the second photo and meticulously cut off the doctor’s face. Then, he cut off his own face from the first photo in a similar manner. Once these two tasks were done, he stuck Thunder’s face in place of his face. Soon, the falsified photo of Thunder with Lightning’s girlfriend appeared on the screen!

On close inspection, Ashley could notice a slight variation between the color of his face and neck. Apart from that, one could say it was a perfect photo. To the naked eye, there was hardly any flaw. Lightning showed this rough work to Ashley, then he did fine-tuning and integration of Thunder’s expression, angle, and skin color. The result was astounding. In less than two or three minutes, a high-tech photo was freshly made.

Ashley gazed at his work with surprise. Lightning said proudly, “This photo synthesis software is exclusively developed by me. The possibility of using falsehood to serve as genuine can be up to 99%. This is my way of telling you

that the photos you received before were made in a similar manner. So, Miss Guzman, please don't misunderstand Joseph."

This photo was indeed imitative to a high degree. If Ashley hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she would have undoubtedly thought it was real! It dawned upon her how far Joseph had gone to break up with her! Ashley couldn't help but feel a bad feeling gnaw at her. She knew Joseph had his own reasons for doing it. But at the end of the day, he should have been more considerate. The photos had given her an endless amount of nightmares.

"I have noticed that you always speak for him. Did he send you here as a lobbyist?" Lightning appeared nervous when he spoke. Ashley raised her eyebrows and regarded him carefully.

"No! We didn't even know you would come here!" Lightning refuted her accusation quickly.

"Then why did you suddenly come to Ob.raria?" Ashley wouldn't drop the subject. She decided to prob.

"Joseph asked me to run the company for him. He said it would also be a good opportunity to have a vacation with my girlfriend. Well, as per this arrangement, I had to come to Ob.raria," Lightning said honestly.

Joseph had called him two days ago and asked him to manage the company. Lightning and almost all the important members of Dragon Gang were distraught about Joseph's marriage. Now that Lightning was here, it was his duty to report back to the others about Joseph's love life.

When he came across Ashley by accident, he made it a point to make the best use of it. He decided to make a clean b.reast of things. He told her about the difficulties that had weighed Joseph down, compelling him to break up with her. He genuinely hoped Ashley would offer him a second chance.

Hearing what Lightning said, it dawned on her why Joseph had so much spare time for her. He was showering her with flowers, cards and love lately. It turned out that he had ordered people like Lightning to work for him. Hence he could spare some leisure hours!

“Where did he go?” Initially, Ashley had assumed Joseph had gone to the Synder Group. But at present, she wasn’t sure. It seemed quite unlikely.

“I don’t know. He didn’t tell me much. He only told me he had some urgent matter to deal with and would be back in a while.”

Then Lightning continued in a serious tone, “Miss Guzman, you haven’t answered my question yet. Tell me, are you willing to give Joseph another chance? His secret identity is important. It is an inescapable responsibility and there is no way he can leave it behind. But disregarding this minor issue, he truly loves you. However, if you are afraid of risking your life, then we completely understand. But never forget he loves you.”

Looking at the expectant expression on Lightning’s face, Ashley smiled slightly at him and responded, “Do you think I would come looking for him if we had actually broken up?”

As soon as these words left her mouth, Lightning’s face froze. It took a few seconds for him to finally understand the meaning behind her words. His face broke into a smile and there was excitement in his voice when he spoke. “Do you mean to say that the two of you are still together?”

Ashley nodded indifferently.

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier! I wouldn’t have put all this effort to persuade you.” Out of excitement, he spoke in an incoherent manner. He went on, “Well, Miss Guzman, oh, no! Not Miss Guzman. I am going to call you Mrs. Marshall. Mrs. Marshall, please have a seat. I’m going to report this amazing news to some fellows overseas. There is no way I can wait!”

“But....” Ashley faltered in her speech. It went beyond her how a serious man like Joseph had gotten along with such a lively and cheerful subordinate like Lightning.

“Mrs. Marshall, please don’t mind his peculiar ways. He has always been like that. In a while, you will get used to it.” As they were talking, Jenny walked up to her with two cups of coffee and said with a smile, “Mrs. Marshall, have some coffee.”

When Jenny arrived, Lightning went to her cheerfully and announced the news. She was glad to hear that Joseph had finally managed to achieve his

goal. However, the news didn't surprise her as much as it had surprised her boyfriend.

It was not until Lightning had explained the ex-girlfriend thing to her did she instantly know that this beautiful Ob.rarian woman, who had eyed her suspiciously on arriving, was the 'woman of Joseph' called by all members of the gang.

Jenny was a good judge of people. She could analyze and read expressions very well. She instantly spotted vigilance and a little bit of hatred in Ashley's eyes. She thought back to the past events. The nude photos were still in her mind. Jenny knew with certainty that Ashley and Joseph were still in love. That was the only explanation for Ashley's hostility towards Jenny. She was the girl in Joseph's photos! And now, seeing her here in Joseph's territory, Ashley wasn't too happy.

Therefore, unlike others, Jenny wasn't too surprised when she heard the news of their patch-up. She saw it coming.

After learning the truth, all the hard feelings and repulsion Ashley had felt for Jenny disappeared. Instead, she picked up a cup of coffee Jenny offered and said with a smile, "Thank you."

Both of them made it a point to refer to her as Mrs. Marshall. Ashley soon began to accept that title. Ever since she had been with Joseph, people had begun to address her in various ways. Truth be told, she had slowly gotten used to it.

"Are you also from Dragon Gang?" Ashley asked Jenny as she continued to sip her coffee.

"Yes, my position is different from that of Lightning's. I'm a senior agent of Dragon Gang," Jenny answered honestly.

"How about you fill me in with your love story?" Ashley had nothing else to do. To kill time, she decided to strike an interesting conversation with Jenny. After all, these were the people Joseph spent most of his time with while he lived his other identity. By learning about them, she would indirectly be gaining deeper knowledge about him. Joseph hasn't arrived yet. She saw no point in wasting this precious time doing nothing.

"Okay." Jenny readily agreed to tell her.

“I met Lightning on a mission many years ago. Back then, I was a nobody. I knew that he was one of the superior leaders. My impression of him wasn’t that good. I didn’t intend to have feelings for a man who laughed heartlessly all day long. However, an incident changed my mind about him. He was the one who saved me in the storm of shots and shells. He took good care of me. I couldn’t help but watch myself fall in love with him.

Once I recovered, I confronted him and asked whether he liked me. Do you know what he said? Instead of giving a proper answer, he pissed me off!” At the recollection of this old memory, Jenny’s fair and pretty face lit up. There was a spark in her eyes as she narrated their love story.

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“What did he say?” Although Jenny did not say trivial details in the story, her exciting words and expressions made Ashley more curious about the course of the story.

“That bastard asked, ‘What’s wrong with you? How could I fall in love with you?’ It was so hurtful, I admit. That’s why before I turned around to leave, I stepped hard on his foot,” Jenny said angrily. That was not yet everything, though, as she continued, “It was only when he saw me leaving did he put away his usual playful smile. He finally answered me seriously. Oh my God! Just thinking of him makes me so angry. Mrs. Marshall, do you think I’m ugly?”

“Of course not! You’re a typical Western beauty,” Ashley truthfully answered. “Then, what happened afterwards?”

“Well, he did not come to see me again. I guess he really thought that I was an idiot,” Jenny replied with a sad smile.

“And then?”

“Then, I stirred up trouble when I found out that that bastard was fvcking another girl.” All of a sudden, Jenny realized that she was way too harsh and hostile, so she smiled at Ashley apologetically. “I’m sorry. I was so furious that I blurted horrible words.”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Go on,” Ashley said as if it was nothing. The truth was, she was enjoying this, especially Jenny’s straightforwardness.

“We fought. It was pretty messy that both of us had bruises in the end. Don’t worry, though. He didn’t really hurt me so much. Every time I found out that he wanted to seduce other women, I would jump in and ruin his plan. Fortunately, I got promoted in the company, so I could keep an eye on him all the time.”

“Did you finally get him?” Ashley asked in anticipation.

“Well... no. It’s not like that. I just beat him up when I got unhappy with his behavior. He didn’t dare to hit me hard anyway. After all, he eventually gave in after I said something to him.”

“What did you say then?” Ashley asked in curiosity.

“Do you really want to know?” Jenny’s tone revealed that she was enjoying their conversation too.

“Of course,” Ashley answered with a nod.

“The truth is, I had said to him before that I could help him with his sexual needs, but he had to help me with my psychological ones,” Jenny said with cadences to build anticipation, and then she added, “Do you know what his response was? He said he didn’t understand!

Since he didn’t understand what I meant, I had to put it simply. I said to him, ‘Let’s make a deal. Let’s have sex! Do you want to or not?!’

As soon as I finished speaking, he picked me up and threw me to the bed. When we were done, he remarked that it was great, so we made the deal!”

Hearing the simple yet crude plot, Ashley said nothing and just smiled in response.

“Since then, we’ve been responsible for each other,” Jenny briefly concluded.

“The story between you two is really interesting,” Ashley commented as she noticed the sparkle in Jenny’s eyes and the smile on her face.

“How about you, Mrs. Marshall? Would you mind telling me the story between you and Joseph?” Jenny asked after her short and cheerful storytelling.

Because Jenny shared her story, Ashley supposed that she could share hers as well. After a few seconds of pondering, she began to tell Jenny her love story with Joseph.

In the dark basement of an abandoned building in the remote suburb, a tall and strong figure looked down at the helpless figure tied to the chair with hatred in his eyes.

“Joseph, let me go! This is kidnapping! When my father hears about this, he won’t spare you!” answered a hysterical male voice.

“Two days ago, your father ran away with a large sum of money. Do you think he’ll still save you?” Joseph asked coldly.

“That’s impossible! He won’t leave me!” Charlie shouted while shaking his head vigorously.

After a week of torture, his face was now black and blue. He no longer looked like the debonair man he was before.

“You still don’t believe me? Fine. I’ll give you newspapers for you to see it yourself.” Joseph narrowed his eyes and looked at Charlie coldly. If looks could kill, Charlie would have already been dead.

Even though in the darkness, Charlie felt that Joseph was exuding an intense cold aura. The former could not help but feel a chill on his back, and a bad feeling arose in his heart.

Joseph cast a meaningful look at the man next to him. The man threw two newspapers to the ground, and another kicked Charlie off the chair.

Embarrassed, Charlie struggled to get up but only managed to get on his knees. Then, he looked at the two newspapers on the ground with fear in his eyes.

Although he was afraid to read what it said, the striking headline was enough to let Charlie know the sudden change in the Synder Group. It turned out that the company had been acquired, and the former CEO of the company failed to escape and was now imprisoned. Seeing this, Charlie trembled in terror.

“Joseph...” It took Charlie a long time to find his words. His eyes widened in alarm, and he shouted in repugnance, “The Synder Group has nothing to do with you! Why did you have to dismantle the company? You’re wicked!”

“Ridiculous! You know what you’ve done wrong.” Joseph looked down at Charlie and snorted with disdain. “Just so you know, I’m the one who calls the shots here.”

He spoke slowly, and it made him even more frightening. The cold and arrogant look on Joseph’s face made Charlie tremble all over. He felt that only Joseph could make him so desperate.

However, Charlie feigned calmness, even though he actually felt pathetic. He raised his wounded and bleeding face and sneered. “Do you really think that you’re noble? If I know, you’re just doing this for a woman. You’re pathetic!”

In any case, she’s just a woman I dumped! You probably don’t know that I’ve slept with her. It’s unfortunate that she’s no longer a v!rgin. How ridiculous of you to take her as a treasure. Don’t you think you deserve someone better? Ha-ha!”

Charlie’s crazy laughter echoed in the quiet room. In his mind, Joseph may be formidable, but he was a fool.

“Ah! You son of a b!tch!” Charlie’s crazy laughter was suddenly replaced by a painful scream.

It turned out that Joseph kicked Charlie in the crotch, which made the latter roll on the ground in pain.

At that moment, Joseph seemed like the devil who descended to the world. His murderous eyes showed boundless anger. He swore to himself that anyone who offended him or Ashley would die miserably in his hands.

“You’ve gone too far. How dare you insult Ashley like that? You’re doomed.” Joseph was so angry that he pronounced Charlie’s demise with emphasis. Every word was like a cold arrow, stabbing into Charlie’s heart all at once.

Joseph seemed dissatisfied that he kicked Charlie a few more times. “Torture him slowly and then k!ll him,” he ordered to the men behind him afterwards.

“Yes, sir!” the two men answered respectfully, intimidated by Joseph’s vicious aura.

“Joseph, don’t go! I’m sorry! I was wrong! Don’t go!” Charlie begged while watching Joseph leave. Then, the two men closed in on him, and he almost lost consciousness in fear.

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“It’s too late!” Without looking back, Joseph left in a cold and arrogant manner.

Originally, Joseph just wanted to get back at James because of the grudges between their families in the previous generation. Since Joseph had nothing to do with Charlie, he did not pay attention to Charlie. However, the latter crossed the line again and again. It was like he was testing how far he could go. First, he attempted to r.ape Ashley, and now he dared to insult her in Joseph’s face. Charlie deserved to die for his iniquity.

‘Anyone who dares to offend my woman will die at my hands!’ Joseph narrowed his eyes, and a murderous look appeared on his face.

While Ashley was roughly telling Jenny her love story with Joseph, Lightning came out of the office cubicle. He had just finished reporting the news. Then, three men in crisp business suits came over and joined the other three.

Those men in suits were the secretaries of the Empire Group’s CEO.

“Manager, who is this beautiful lady?” one of the male secretaries asked Lightning.

The latter, who specialized in computer technology and company management, was called there by Joseph to be the general manager of the Empire Group. By doing so, Lightning would share the heavy work with Joseph.

Lightning had been busy familiarizing with the business in the CEO’s office in the past two days. As a result, he was already acquainted with the three male secretaries. After all, he was as outgoing and friendly as Zachary.

“The future wife of your CEO,” Lightning answered nonchalantly. Little did they know, he was actually suppressing the joy and excitement that was still surging in his heart.

“What? Oh, my god! Mr. Marshall has really abandoned us!” one of the secretaries shouted in disbelief.

“Derek, I’m sorry. The truth is, we all know about it.” The other two secretaries looked rather calm than Derek. They then turned to Ashley and politely greeted her. “Hello, Mrs. Marshall!”

The three secretaries saw Ashley when she came to this floor and was welcomed into the CEO’s office, even though Joseph was not around. Because of this, they tried to guess who she was to pass the time. In the end, they could not help but go to the CEO’s office to confirm their speculations.

As always, Derek asked for the truth. It was apparent that he could not restrain his excitement, unlike his coworkers. Meanwhile, the other secretaries suppressed their enthusiasm and made themselves look less surprised to avoid embarrassment.

Truth be told, Zachary had already mentioned before that CEO had a girlfriend. However, the secretaries did not see any change in Joseph’s attitude. If there was any, it seemed that he was actually colder than he already was. Well, that was because Mike tailed Joseph and Ashley whenever they went out. Going back, since the secretaries had not seen Joseph’s girlfriend, they thought that Zachary was just toying with them.

However, the CEO’s fiancée finally appeared who stood out with her stunning appearance and demeanor, so the three secretaries were deeply astonished.

The secretaries bowed to Ashley at the same time, making her feel a little flattered. With a faint smile, she stood up and said to them, “You don’t have to do that.”

For some reason, Derek seemed to have something else in mind. He did not greet Ashley and instead exclaimed, “Mrs. Marshall, I think I’ve seen you before!”

Ashley was a little confused. She had not seen that man before, so she doubted that they had met in the past.

Meanwhile, the other two secretaries looked at Derek with disdain, seemingly could not believe that their friend dared accost the CEO's fiancée. Even Lightning and Jenny looked at Derek as well.

Feeling the confused look on everyone's faces, Derek racked his brain to remember when they had met. Then, his face suddenly lit up as he did. "I remember! Mrs. Marshall came here a long time ago to discuss the cooperation with Mr. Marshall. It was me who showed her the way! Mrs. Marshall, do you remember me?" Derek asked with a beaming smile. He was a little proud of himself that he was able to remember such a trivial thing.

"Yes," Ashley replied while looking at him.

She was impressed by what Derek had told her. At that time, Joseph told her that he was her one-night stand and he even asked her shamelessly to be his woman! Ashley was displeased by his words that she hit him in his groin and quickly left.

'It's interesting to think about it now. Maybe Joseph already had a crush on me at that time,' Ashley thought. She must admit, she was very happy at the thought of this.

"I knew it! All right, stop looking at me like that. It's not my fault I have a good memory," Derek said to his untrusting colleagues proudly.

Upon saying that, he turned to face Ashley and exclaimed, "Mrs. Marshall, you're real! Mr. Marshall really has a girlfriend."

Ashley seemed infected by the lively atmosphere. Because of this, she forgot to think through her words. "Is your CEO the kind of person nobody wants to be with?" she asked jokingly.

Upon hearing her questions, Joseph's subordinates fell speechless at once.

'No one wants to be with Mr. Marshall? How is that even possible? Mr. Marshall is such an excellent and successful man!'

Those five people did not dare to answer Ashley's retort as they suddenly felt a familiar cold aura in the room.

It turned out that Joseph appeared behind them at that very moment.

“Mr. Marshall, Mrs. Marshall, I’m going to work...” they mumbled while they scuttled from the office dejectedly.

They were so embarrassed that they even volunteered to work overtime.

Not long after, the cold CEO and his fiancée were the only ones left in the office.

“Joseph, where have you been?” Ashley asked with a smile as she walked towards him.

Joseph looked displeased, even though Ashley was in front of him. She figured that he must have heard her last question. As she walked over him, she opened her arms and then wrapped her arms around his waist once she got near him. “You haven’t been with anyone else, even though you’re a wonderful man. Perhaps you’ve been waiting for me all this time.”

Despite Joseph’s straight face, he was actually glad that she threw herself at him. Seeing her so affectionate, Joseph could not help but chuckle. He really did not know what to do with his girlfriend!

Yes, he did hear what Ashley had just said. However, the joy of seeing her in his office outweighed the displeasure in his heart. Besides, how could he be angry at his beloved? He just looked glum because he was already unhappy, even before he came to his office.

As Joseph felt his girlfriend’s warmth and fragrance, the anger in his heart dissipated at once.

“You were the one who said that. Since you’ve chosen to be with me, you have to be responsible for me. After all, I’m a good man, am I not?” Joseph said while patting Ashley’s head dotingly.

All of a sudden, Ashley got out of Joseph’s warm and comforting arms. Then, with a deadpan expression, she said coldly, “Just be my man, or I won’t discuss anything else with you.”

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Joseph frowned slightly, unable to understand what had caused a sudden change in Ashley's attitude. He couldn't help but begin to wonder whether he was being teased by her.

"Don't you detect familiarity in what I just said?" she asked at once, abandoning her cool attitude and revealing her piqued curiosity.

Joseph racked his brain, trying to remember where he had heard that sentence but it didn't ring a bell. As he vainly attempted to remember, Ashley was staring at him expectantly.

"Ah! What has happened to you? When did you become so stupid?" she grumbled with frustration. Joseph hadn't come with a reply. Instead, he was staring at her affectionately. Ashley went on, "Are you serious or just pretending? If you are serious, it goes to show you don't take our relationship all that seriously."

Ashley looked at him with a sad face after she muttered those words. However, Joseph seemed nonplussed despite her lamentations. He stood there silently and smiled at her.

Then, after a few seconds passed, Joseph said in his characteristic cold voice, "Guys, would you like to come in and hear this?"

As soon as he finished speaking, the door of his office opened. Derek stepped inside whereas the others chose to hide outside.

"Mr. Marshall, please go ahead with Mrs. Marshall. We will let you both alone." After Derek spoke those words, he looked at Joseph with a serious expression and disappeared at once.

Once Derek saw the others outside, he glared at them and began to accuse them of betrayal.

Ashley had witnessed Derek's strange behavior in the office. She was unable to suppress a giggle. "Why are your subordinates so lively and active when you are serious all the time? There is a saying which states you will slowly develop the personality of the people you work with. Now, I am beginning to question it,"

she said jokingly. Listening to her words, a forbidding look overtook Joseph's face. "I think it's time I instilled some discipline," he said.

His subordinates, who were getting ready to leave, felt a chill down their spine.

“No! In fact, I think their cheery nature is good. It will stop you from remaining lifeless all day,” Ashley said, not wanting him to be severe to them.

“Lifeless? Is that what you think of me?”

Joseph asked, his deep-set eyes glittering coldly. A strong sense of impending doom ensued. She instantly regretted her mistake. She wished she could retract her words.

Ashley hastily explained, “Oh, that’s not what I meant. You can call it a slip of the tongue! Honey, don’t be mad at me.” Ashley took a step back and flashed him an awkward smile. Joseph had his eyes slightly narrowed. He was approaching her with slow steps.

“Please... I made a mistake. I admit! Please let it go...” she implored. Ashley was pushed against his front desk. She looked at Joseph’s intimidating face and begged for mercy.

His face remained unsmiling. Ashley began to worry. It looked like he was going to possess her physically any second.

Joseph had abstained from se.x for a long time. He had followed all the principles and made it a point to not indulge in such a thing. However, he had no desire to let go of this beautiful woman standing in front of him.

He had a strong desire for Ashley. He leaned over and pressed the innocent girl against the table. He sealed his lips with hers.

There was a sudden shift in the atmosphere. It was charged with passion and love.

After a while, Ashley’s faint voice spoke. “Stop! I have to... go home...” she pleaded.

Joseph’s seductive eyes scrutinized the beauty who was under his control. These words filled him with disappointment. After all, he was starting to get excited. Her words had snapped him back to reality.

If this went on, he was certain he wouldn't be able to control himself. He would want her for a long time. His mind went to the Guzman family. He would have to offer them an explanation for their delay. Joseph was in a dilemma. His mind was fighting against his body's desires.

After struggling with his thoughts, he decided to put a stop to this. He reminded himself there would be ample time in the future. For this short-term joy, he couldn't forsake his future. Being a logical man, he decided to set his priorities straight.

However, his desire wasn't gone. His feeling of anguish was so great that it threatened to engulf him. He grasped her breasts brutally with his big palm, and let out a heavy breath. After this, he freed her.

Ashley, who hadn't recovered from the wave of lust that had struck her, felt an extraordinary sensory stimulation. She gave a little moan of pleasure. Joseph, who was doing his best to control his urge, winced at this. Her reaction was turning him on.

"You are such a coquettish young girl! Why are you so sexy and beautiful!" he asked in agony. She was tormenting him. He gazed at her and said, "Well, you should have stayed away from me..." His voice was low when he spoke. And his words contrasted with what he felt. Even now, his deep eyes looked at her with infatuation.

His words stunned her. She watched him slowly retreat from her. Her face flushed red.

Ashley was a smart girl. She didn't have to ask him to know why he had decided to stop all of a sudden. Her heart, which was thudding against her chest, began to relax.

She straightened herself up but intense pain shot through her body. She shrieked, "Oh, you have hurt my waist!"

"Why are you so hell-bent on tempting me?" Hearing her yelp, Joseph quickly approached her and gently carried her onto his plush and comfortable office chair. While he took care of her, he was careful to maintain a distance. He couldn't risk repeating his previous violent behavior.

“You are the one who pounced on me! How dare you put the blame on me! Shame on you!” Ashley, whose pain had receded a little, decided to speak up against his unjust accusations.

Joseph was the reason behind her backache. If he hadn't darted towards her, pushed her against the hard table and kissed her violently, none of this would have happened. If anyone had reason to complain, it was her. Ashley thought about this matter and shook her head. She was convinced he was the most shameless man!

She was pink with rage. Joseph continued to watch her. He leaned and fixed her clothes which had gotten messy because of his actions. With a trace of bitterness in his voice, he demanded, “Do you think this is easy for me? I can't even go on a date with you without your brother third wheeling! I constantly worry about meeting and impressing your parents. I have maintained my chastity for you. I want to possess you a little, but even that isn't possible. Do you have any idea how hard this is for me?”

Now that they were alone, Joseph showed his true feelings without any scruples.

Ashley finally understood Joseph wasn't unfazed by Mike's behavior. These interruptions had indeed disheartened him. In addition to being busy with office business, Joseph had other things to worry about. He was constantly inquiring about Ashley's parents' preferences just so he could make them like him. He ardently wished to rectify the bad image they had of him. Even though he rarely showed it, the past few days had been daunting.

Joseph, who was known as a cold man, felt aggrieved when he realized it took him such a long time to find a woman he really loved. He was in his late twenties after all. And now, the worst part was he had the opportunity to have sex with her only twice!

“Ha... You are so funny!” Instead of sorrow, his remorseful complaints made her laugh. She laughed quite boldly.

At first, she was convinced it had indeed been her fault. But after a while, a few questions popped into her mind. ‘But when did Mr. Marshall keep his chastity? And how can he say he hasn't managed to possess my body even a little?’ she wondered. Ashley, however, didn't raise any of these questions to him.

If yo