

Perfect Match: Irresistible Desire For You – Chapter 201

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“Dad, I am genuinely worried about you. Don’t be so hasty to judge me.” Mike noticed his father was on the verge of anger. To rectify the situation, he instantly defended himself.

Jack let out a contemptuous snort.

Ashley saw the atmosphere had gotten grave. In order to lighten things up, she turned to Mike and said, “Mike, you are dressed in some nice formal clothes. Are you by chance going on a date with my sister-in-law?”

Her query brought everyone’s attention to Mike. However, he managed to remain calm. He raised his hand in an attempt to straighten his clothes and said, “Well, not everyone can be lucky like my sister. No one wants to go out with me. I’m going to attend the year-end party of the company. Would you both like to go out and have fun?”

He gave them a wicked smile and watched her leisurely. Then his gaze shifted and went to Joseph.

Seeing Mike’s behavior, Simone was disappointed. “Mike, watch your language,” she said admonishingly.

Mike was disheartened at being scolded by his mother. He quickly changed his tone and said, “Mom, I think you didn’t get me. I was only inviting my sister and future brother-in-law to our company.”

After hearing his explanation, Simone thought she had misinterpreted his words. She looked at the couple. “I have no objection against this. Let’s see if Ashley and Joseph want to go,” she said, smiling at them.

“Mom, I am your son yet you are treating me harshly. Mr. Marshall, on the other hand, hasn’t even married your daughter. Yet you treat him with so much kindness,” Mike grumbled and looked at Joseph resentfully.

Listening to his sudden outburst, a silence ensued. Nobody knew what to say.

Ashley and Jack found his behavior embarrassing. Joseph, on the other hand, didn’t know what to make of Mike’s childish complaint.

It was Simone who finally spoke. "My dear son, have something happened to you recently? You are behaving quite strange," she said gently to him.

She didn't think there was anything wrong with being nice to Joseph whom she had liked since he was born. It went beyond her why this had bothered her son.

Simone was a patient woman who spoke gently. However, her voice was beginning to turn cold and her eyes had gotten fierce. Mike was rendered speechless because of his mother's 'fair treatment'.

He couldn't watch his mother speak to Joseph with such kindness. After all, he hadn't even married Ashley yet! He was hell-bent on hurting Joseph but his mother wasn't cooperating. And now when he had voiced his opinion, she was beginning to think he was being unreasonable. He sat with a mournful expression.

"Mom, please forgive Mike. It's just that he has been through a lot lately," Ashley interjected, a smirk flickering at the corner of her mouth. "Mom, we would love to go to the company party with brother," she added.

In the presence of her family, Ashley was beginning to feel cheerful. Her smile was as warm as sunshine.

"Go ahead. In the future, the Guzman Group will have to rely on the three of you. It would be nice if you could go and have some pleasant time with the employees." Simone turned to her husband and said, "Honey, what do you think of this?"

Jack, who rarely disagreed with his wife, thought about it. In the end, he nodded and said, "Sure, I see no harm. You all should go now. But please don't be too late. Mike, you have to bring your sister home early."

"Yes!" Mike agreed immediately. Joseph and Ashley, on the other hand, remained silent.

After a while, Ashley's parents, who were sitting in the living room leisurely, watched the three of them leave.

Once they were out of sight, Simone turned to her husband and asked, "Honey, what do you think of Joseph?"

"Do you want to hear the truth or lie?" Jack said, flashing his beloved a bright smile.

"Tell me the truth first, and then you can entertain me with the lie," Simone answered, returning his smile. This was about her daughter's future. She wanted to analyze her husband's views.

"The truth would be Joseph isn't a nice guy. And the lie is, he is a nice guy." Jack casually picked up an orange from the fruit plate and began to peel it.

Listening to his opinion of Joseph, Simone smiled even more. She wasn't buying it. "I need an explanation as well," she added.

Jack gave it a thought and said, "Joseph is rich and powerful. And we can't deny that he is extremely handsome."

"And then what's the issue? What has led you to believe he isn't a good guy?" Simone probed.

"Let me finish, my dear. I am not done yet. There is a reason why I don't think he is good enough for our daughter."

"And what is that reason?" Simone's curiosity was piqued.

Joseph was a good-looking guy with a great personality. And Simone could tell he genuinely loved their daughter. What could Jack possibly have against Joseph?

Jack noticed the confusion on Simone's face and went on to explain, "The truth is, I myself don't know what's wrong with him. I can only say he doesn't satisfy me completely."

Simone had thought her husband was a reasonable man. However, she found his explanation to be ridiculous. It rendered her speechless.

Jack had always held a prejudice against Joseph. Perhaps he wasn't willing to change his opinion and wished to continue disliking him.

"I know what's the problem. You are worried Joseph is trying to steal our daughter. You can't accept the fact she is no longer our little girl," Simone said

and grabbed a few pieces of orange from Jack's hand. After taking a bite, she looked at him meaningfully and said, "It's quite sour."

Jack understood the underlying meaning of his wife's words. He enjoyed the oranges but admitted to himself that he had indeed felt a little sour.

"Our daughter will get married sooner or later. We just have to make sure she marries into a good family. I am fine with teaching that unfaithful man a lesson, but don't take it too far. If we aren't careful, they might elope." These thoughts were worrying Simone and today she decided to share them with Jack.

As he listened to her, he envisioned the two of them eloping. Embarrassment flashed across his face. He turned to his wife and said, "Would he dare to do such a thing?"

"It's not really about his guts. It's about how badly he wants it. Don't forget that he is a rich and powerful man. And you have already seen how Ashley is loyal to him. If you push them too hard, they could disappear without leaving a trace behind. I can see Joseph respects Ashley and wishes to get our acceptance. He came to us for our approval. Let's not be too hard on him." Simone actually liked Joseph and wished to make things easy for her future son-in-law.

In Simone's opinion, he was a perfect man for Ashley. He was not only rich and handsome, but also seemed to be very fond of her daughter. It wasn't easy to find such men these days.

After carefully considering his wife's words, Jack began to see she was right. After all, Joseph was willing to let go of his identity for their daughter! When he came, he had behaved kindly and modestly. He genuinely respected them and one could tell he would take good care of Ashley.

"Yes, I know what's the right thing to do. I won't make a mistake. Don't worry about it," he said softly to Simone. Simone's attention was now elsewhere. She was in high spirits, unpacking the gift that Joseph had given them.

"Yes. I believe you," she said distractedly. After a few seconds, she said, "This thing is so beautifully wrapped! Look here! He has given us two cards."

"What card?" Jack was curious to know what Joseph had picked for them.

“He gave us each a Global Travel Gold Card.” Simone handed the beautiful and elaborate card to her husband. Slowly, she began to read the instructions that were written on the back of the glittering three-dimensional card. “It’s newly launched and can be used internationally. How wonderful! And the best part is, we can enjoy unlimited services in any scenic spots, catering, and entertainment places around the world without paying a penny!” she declared happily.

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Simone gently caressed and then felt the weight of the well-made gold card in her hand. She let out a satisfied sigh and said, “With these two cards, we are free to travel all around the world. Life with an extremely rich son-in-law who is also generous seems like fun already.”

Hearing his wife praise Joseph, Jack couldn’t help but break into a smile. However, he pretended like he couldn’t care less about the card. He placed it back in its original place. He turned to his wife and said, “Well, he just brought you off with one expensive gift! I had no idea you would change your mind so easily.”

Truth be told, Jack was equally impressed with this luxurious and considerate gift. It had not only won his wife’s favor but also his. Joseph had been smart to present them something that would cater to preferences of both of them.

Simone knew her husband very well. She knew he was impressed but she wouldn’t call him out for it. Instead, she decided to play a trick on him. “Yes, my mind can be changed very easily. If you aren’t pleased with this card, I will keep it. I have a friend with whom I can use it one day,” she said, feigning indifference.

She then raised her hand to grab the box from the table. Before she could do it, Jack held her wrist. A little awkwardly, he stammered, “No... I mean, If you want to go, I’ll join you. For your sake, I can reluctantly accept the card.”

There was a trace of grievance in Jack’s tone. Simone shook her head and laughed at his duplicity.

Joseph, Mike, and Ashley were standing side by side in the parking lot. None of them had spoken a word until now.

“My car broke down yesterday. Mr. Marshall, do you mind if I accompany you in your car?” Mike asked, breaking the silence. Also, his words were untrue. He was only trying to go with them.

“Yes, I do mind,” Joseph said, his icy gaze fixed upon Mike.

Now that the two of them were equal partners, Joseph wouldn't tolerate his nonsense.

“I am sorry to say this, but your objection is invalid.” Mike stared back at Joseph arrogantly. “You can't expect me to walk to the company, can you? Don't you care about me, Ashley?”

“Get in the car,” Joseph spat angrily. Mike was trying to gain his sister's sympathy.

After saying that, Joseph took out the car key from his pocket and threw it at Mike. “You drive the car!” he ordered.

Without giving Mike an opportunity to protest, Joseph took Ashley's hand and went straight to the back seat.

While Mike was driving the luxurious car, nobody spoke and it was invaded by silence. The couple sitting behind clasped their hands romantically. Mike caught sight of this from his rear-view mirror and got ready to protest.

“Hey, would the two of you stop flirting? I can't stand it!” He shook his head at the sight he had seen.

“Mike, don't be so sore. Why don't you go to see my sister-in-law? I promise I won't tell Mom and Dad about it,” Ashley suggested, rolling her eyes at his brother's absurd objection.

“You are saying this only because you two want to get rid of me! Well, if anyone should be complaining to Mom and Dad then it has to be me,” he retorted, seeing right through Ashley's plans.

“Mike, you are smarter than I thought! However, this plan works for both of us. Why not agree with it?” Ashley was trying to persuade her brother because she craved some alone time with her boyfriend.

“I’ve always been smart!” he responded back with a tinge of narcissism. After a short pause, he said, “I am sorry, but I can’t agree to this.”

“Why?” Ashley demanded. She couldn’t see why her brother had an issue.

“I’m strictly following Dad’s instructions,” he said, trying to look self-righteous.

“Ashley, I think the truth is Mr. Guzman’s girlfriend doesn’t have time for him,” Joseph suggested coldly.

“Oh, I see. No one wants to be with him. To run away from his loneliness, he is coming with us,” Ashley said in a brisk voice, echoing her boyfriend’s opinion.

“Yes, his condition is quite pitiful. Let’s be merciful and spend some time with him,” Joseph said, feigning sympathy.

After saying that, Joseph clasped his fingers with his girlfriend’s and leaned forward, placing a kiss on the back of her soft and white palm. He smirked at Mike through the rear-view mirror.

Mike’s face darkened after realizing he was being teased. The couple sitting behind were evidently trying to bully him.

“Ashley, I’m your brother! How can you collude with an outsider to bully me?” Mike asked with a sullen expression. On not receiving a reply, he went on and said, “Let’s make this clear, Mr. Marshall is an outsider and will remain one until he marries you.”

In one single day, Mike had pointed out several times that Joseph wasn’t a part of their family. This repetition had become quite annoying.

Ashley pretended to be worried and said, “Calm down! Something is indeed wrong with you. I am starting to get concerned. Mike, what is the matter?”

“Mr. Guzman, your eyes are dull and your face looks livid with rage as well. Something is surely wrong,” Joseph said, jumping at this opportunity to attack Mike. He continued, “Mr. Guzman, why don’t you turn around and go to the hospital? We’ll accompany you to see a doctor.”

Mike could no longer take their taunting words. He had had enough.

With some bitterness, he realized Joseph was an eloquent speaker. Although he looked indifferent and remained silent for the most part, he was capable of speaking venomous words.

Mike couldn't stand his jeer so he chose to remain silent.

The car was silent except for the vibration of Joseph's and Ashley's phone. It caught Mike's attention. Through the rear-view mirror, he tried to see what they were up to. He saw them staring at their mobile phones, a smile plastered across their faces.

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked, unable to hide his curiosity.

"I won't tell you!" Ashley and Joseph replied in unison.

The couple sitting behind looked at each other endearingly and smiled. Mike, on the other hand, felt cast aside. In the end, he decided to ignore them and drive the car as a dutiful driver. He kept his attention on the road ahead.

The incident that had unraveled behind was both funny and romantic. After Joseph satirized Mike, the phone in his pocket vibrated. He took it out and saw a message from the contact named as "Honey". It said, "I just noticed the wound on your lip is gone. How did it heal so fast?"

Joseph's face broke into a naughty smile. He wrote, "I used a secret medicine from the Dragon Gang. Once you put it on your wound, the wound will heal in a matter of hours. Now that this medicine is available, you're welcome to bite me whenever you want."

When Ashley saw the message, she blushed scarlet. Without wasting any time, she wrote, "What makes you think I want to bite you?"

"If you don't, then I will do the honor. I want to bite you." Once Ashley read this response, heat rushed to her face.

Mike felt the intimacy that was passing through the air. This was when Mike's curious voice interrupted them. The content of their messages was quite personal and embarrassing.

Therefore, the two of them refused to answer his question.

"Here we are!" Mike announced, relief washing through him.

He was glad this had been a short drive. He couldn't have made a long journey with this couple.

They hadn't just turned a blind eye to him, but also snuggled up and went on romancing. Everything about their demeanor brought irritation to him. However, he found himself in a situation where he couldn't complain.

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As soon as Ashley and Joseph got off the car, Mike quickly stood between them. He wrapped his arm around his sister's shoulder. Flashing her a smile, he said, "Let's go."

Joseph, who had been left alone, glared at Mike. His eyes fell on the hand that was wrapped around Ashley's shoulder. He was evidently unhappy.

"Mr. Marshall, our deal only prohibits me from third wheeling. It doesn't say anything about me bonding with my sister, does it?" Mike noticed Joseph's cold and fierce eyes. He was, however, unperturbed by it. Calmly, he said, "I would be extremely thankful if you could stop looking at me with that frightening gaze of yours, Mr. Marshall."

Mike, who looked gentle and elegant on the outside, was fighting against an arrogant man, Joseph. Before it could become worse, the two of them decided to stop.

Ashley, who was the object of their battle, chose to remain silent. The last thing she wanted was for things to become worse. She wished to avoid a fight at any cost.

Once they entered the party, they noticed that the gathering of the Guzman Group was very lively. The sudden appearance of two handsome men and an elegant woman caught everyone's attention.

As Mike was the CEO of the Guzman Group, people clamored around him when he entered. The host invited him to the stage. "Mr. Guzman, we're very happy to see you here. Now we invite you to say a few words that would sum up the company's performance of this year and encourage us all."

Once the host uttered these words, the audience broke into a thunderous applause. All the employees looked at Mike, expectation evident in their eyes.

Mike was now pushed to the front of the crowd. Seeing the love that was being showered upon him, he behaved elegantly. He went up to the stage and said, "In the twinkling of an eye, another year has passed. With the joint efforts of everyone, the business revenue of the Guzman Group has increased significantly. I hope you all will continue to put similar efforts in the coming years. If this happens, I am certain we will get to see even more brilliant result!"

His words inspired more enthusiasm amongst his employees.

Everyone's eyes were glued onto Mike who stood under the spotlight. Standing below, Ashley noticed how admired he was by his employees. She muttered under her breath, "Nowadays, handsome men are very popular."

There were many young female employees in the Guzman Group. Ashley noticed they were ogling at Mike, the handsome and noble CEO. She knew it wasn't the speech that had gotten their attention. Instead, her brother's outstanding physical appearance was the cause of their admiration.

Ashley's gaze shifted to Joseph. In spite of being extremely handsome, the cold aura that emanated from him kept people from approaching him. Ashley was glad her man was unapproachable. As she thought about this, she gently held Joseph's arm, declaring her ownership silently.

Then she stood on tiptoe and whispered seductively in his ear, "Let's sneak out of here."

"Okay," Joseph said, as his eyes scanned her beautiful face. There was mischief in her otherwise innocent face. He was more than happy to oblige to her request.

The two of them preferred privacy over this hustle bustle. Mike was their only barrier. But now that he was occupied with the speech, they thought it would be a good opportunity to slip away.

However, after the two of them took two steps towards the door, Mike's voice boomed from the microphone. "Now, my dear sister, Ashley, the wonderful daughter of the Guzman family, would like to honor us with a few words."

Mike had caught them leaving. The crowd was now looking at her expectantly. Ashley had no choice but to remain here. She glanced around helplessly.

Mike, who was standing on the stage, wasn't done. He went on, "I think everyone must be curious about the man beside Miss Guzman. To satiate your curiosity, I would like Mr. Marshall to join me on the stage. Would you all like that?"

"Yeah! Welcome, the son-in-law of the Guzman family!" the crowd screamed happily. Joseph received enthusiastic response from the audience. It looked like his efforts weren't in vain. He had come to the Guzman Group several times and most of them were familiar with him.

Listening to this, the smile on Mike's face froze. He couldn't believe his employees had already considered Joseph as a part of their family. He felt bitter emotions. 'You are such an arrogant man! You are trying to overtake my turf even though you don't belong here. What would happen if you marry Ashley,' he wondered angrily.

Joseph, who had become the center of attention, glanced at Mike. He walked onto the stage, holding Ashley's hands. Once he was up there, he held the microphone. In his usual cold and magnetic voice, he said, "I am going to marry this beautiful woman right beside me, the daughter of the Guzman family. I'll be sure to invite everyone to my wedding. None of you have to give us a red envelope."

The audience listened to his words carefully and gave a cheerful uproar.

They admired the beautiful couple who now stood on the stage. They were excited to see them get married. Some of them gave their blessings hastily. Someone said, "Get married as soon as possible. And give birth to beautiful children!"

As this spectacle happened, the two siblings of the Guzman family were experiencing very contradictory emotions. Listening to everybody's cheerful uproar, Ashley tightened her grip on Joseph's warm hand. Undisguised happiness began to flow through her heart. But Mike, on the other hand, was beginning to regret his decision. He had called them onto stage, in order to stop them from fleeing. Mike hadn't thought Joseph was such a crafty man. He had taken advantage of this opportunity, announcing to the crowd he would be the future son-in-law of the Guzman family.

Then, Ashley raised her hand slightly to silence the audience. Her sweet voice began to address the crowd. She said, "The Guzman Group wouldn't have reached this glory without all of your hard-work. On behalf of the Guzman Group, I express my sincere gratitude to you all. Have a blast today!"

Ashley's uplifting words made everybody in the crowd even more cheerful than they already were. The couple walked down the stage slowly. Right behind them, Mike followed, looking sullen.

"Mike, why do you insist on following us everywhere?" Ashley demanded, looking at him with disgust. The three of them were in a relatively quiet corner, away from all the hustle bustle of the party.

"Can you blame me? I'm afraid the two of you will run away. And don't forget you have promised to keep me company. You can't go back on your word." After saying that, Mike picked up a glass of wine and began to drink alone.

The couple was evidently disturbed by his presence. However, they decided to not make a fuss about it again.

Mike noticed they had decided to ignore him. He couldn't stand being ignored. He stepped between the two and said, "Come on, Mr. Marshall, would you like to have a drink with me?"

Before Joseph could say something, Ashley said, "You shouldn't drink too much. Don't forget Dad asked you to drive me home safely."

"Mr. Guzman, Ashley is right. The driver shouldn't drink too much," Joseph said with mock seriousness. His face was bereft of any expression. However, one could easily tell he was teasing Mike. After all, this future brother-in-law of his had been giving him a hard time.

Their annoyance with each other was palpable. Standing in the midst of these angry men, Ashley sighed and said, "Have a nice chat. I'm going to the bathroom."

Joseph's eyes watched Ashley's receding figure. There was gentleness in his eyes. Mike noticed this and asked, "Mr. Marshall, you really like my sister, right?"

Hearing Mike's unusual question, Joseph looked at him, puzzled. There wasn't a trace of humor in Mike's expression. Joseph couldn't help but think it was indeed a serious question. "Yes," he answered with utmost sincerity.

"Are you confident that you can marry into my family?" Mike asked as soon as he received a response for his first question.

Joseph knew Mike didn't want him to become a part of his family. His actions had made it evident. He began to wonder what Mike had to say.

However, Joseph, who had decided to patiently see where this was going, suppressed his curiosity. "Of course. I am pretty confident Ashley will become mine one day."

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There was a cold expression on Joseph's face. Seeing this, Mike said slowly, "If you are certain to become a part of our family, why don't you refer to me as brother? It's something you will have to do in the future. How about you get used to it now?"

Mike put forth this suggestion and watched Joseph with a smug smile on his face. Joseph picked up the goblet in front of him and sipped it leisurely. He chose to stop answering Mike's questions.

"I mean it's not a big deal. After all, you will have to call me brother, sooner or later. Now I'm offering you free practice. Mr. Marshall, don't be so ungrateful," Mike said, a little annoyed at Joseph's indifference. He didn't like being ignored. But he was undeterred, eager to persuade. He spoke as if nothing had happened. The row they had almost been forgotten.

Mike knew once Joseph became a part of their family, he would be referred to as brother. This was inevitable. The truth was, deep down he craved to hear that pleasant word from Joseph. In spite of himself, he had to admit it was an honor he would deeply relish.

Joseph noticed desperation in Mike's voice. Being a wonderful businessman, he often searched for profit even in the simplest of things. This situation was no exception for Joseph. He looked up at Mike with indifference and said, "If

you can help me marry Ashley within half a month, then I will oblige to your plea and call you brother.”

Even though Joseph was a bit annoyed with Mike because of how difficult he had made their relationship, he knew at one point he would be compelled to call him brother. If Mike would be willing to help him marry Ashley as soon as possible, Joseph would think he had made a profit. If Mike refused to this condition, then he was making a loss. Joseph wouldn't refer to Mike as brother merely for the sake of practice! That sounded absurd. While sipping the wine quietly, Joseph waited for Mike's answer.

As an outstanding profiteer too, Mike knew what was on Joseph's mind. He wouldn't give Joseph what he wanted. He said, “Like I said, it's only a matter of time before you have to call me brother. I am doing this for your benefit. If you refuse, it will be your loss.” Mike looked at Joseph haughtily.

Listening to the arrogance in Mike's voice, Joseph remained silent. He couldn't care less about this practice!

Mike felt defeated. He knew it wasn't possible to convince his future brother-in-law. In the end, he dropped the subject and urged him to have a drink.

On entering the washroom, Ashley overheard the conversation between two female employees. They were standing near the wash basin, bursting with enthusiasm.

The first girl was swooning. “Mr. Guzman and Mr. Marshall are so handsome! I can't bring myself to stop thinking about them!” she exclaimed.

The other girl nodded her head and said, “Yes, they are indeed very handsome, but they are way out of our league. We can only admire them from a distance.”

“That's right! The CEO of the Empire Group is soon going to marry Ashley of the Guzman Group. I am guessing our pay will rise soon. That should be our priority, not their faces. We have to get a hold of ourselves and remain realistic.” The first girl tried to sound reasonable. She got excited at the prospect of an increased pay.

“You are right! Moreover, Ashely of the Guzman Group and CEO Marshall make a lovely match! When they get married, I am pretty sure there will be a lot of amazing food and drinks for us. It’s going to be one grand occasion!” The second employee was already beginning to envision a fun future.

The first girl’s eyes brightened. “That’s right! Perhaps it won’t be long before their first child is born. And that would mean another free meal for us! Earlier, when they were giving the speech, I was the one who asked them to get married and have children.”

Their voices gradually faded away. Ashley, who had heard their chat, was extremely happy. She let out a sigh of relief! It turned out Joseph had managed to gain all of their support.

Ashley left the bathroom and returned to her brother and boyfriend. She was shocked to notice that the two men were indulged in drinking. There were three empty bottles on the table. When she approached them, she noticed their eyes were brimming with hostility. Thinking she had to make it through another brawl of theirs, her head began to ache.

“What are you doing?” Ashley asked, her eyes looking at the empty bottles.

“Drinking!” they replied together. When they opened their mouths, a faint smell of alcohol wafted in the air.

“Don’t talk rubbish! I want to know why you are drinking so excessively!” She looked back and forth between the two men, her eyes wide with indignation.

“I don’t like him!”

Once again, the two men had spoken the same words at the same time. This annoyed Ashley even further.

They continued to drink, not paying any heed to her words. Ashley knew her brother could take a large amount of drink. Joseph was her biggest concern. She turned to him gently and said, “Joseph, are you okay?”

Before Joseph could answer, it was Mike who spoke. He glared at his sister and said, “Ashley, I’m your brother. And yet you seem more concerned about this outsider. How do you think that makes me feel?”

Listening to him complain, Ashley didn't know what to say. Joseph, who was sitting on the rotating stool, pretended to be weak and put his head on Ashley's shoulder. Then he smiled at Mike, evidently trying to provoke him.

"Brother, you are misunderstanding me. I am aware you are good at drinking and can manage well. That's the reason why I am more concerned about Joseph. He apparently isn't. Why did you allow him to drink so much?" Ashley could feel Joseph's weight on her shoulder. However, she tried to explain to her brother she wasn't being partial to anyone. But at the same time, she blamed him for Joseph's condition.

Mike felt rage build inside him. He gritted his teeth and stared at Joseph. His sister's words had aggrieved him. She had implied it was all his fault!

In truth, after they fought over the appellation, a tacit understanding tinged with stubbornness had come over them. Since they had nothing much to talk about, they remained silent and began to drink. They had indeed had drunk a lot. However, none of them were by any chance drunk.

When Joseph caught sight of his girlfriend, he pretended to be drunk. His mortifying behavior to gain Ashley's sympathy both annoyed and shocked Mike.

"My dear sister, you can't possibly think that Heilan, a well-known figure in the business world, is actually drunk! These few bottles of wine are nothing to him! Come on, I have heard love is blind, but it shouldn't make you believe all the crap he says and does. Don't you believe your brother?" Mike complained. There was anguish in his voice.

As soon as he said this, it was Ashley's turn to feel affronted. She had only asked him why they had drunk too much. It was beyond her why he felt wronged.

Before she could say something, Joseph, who was leaning on her shoulder, whispered in her ear. There was a look of gloom in his eyes. "Ashley, I feel a little dizzy. Let's get out of here," he said.

Her brother's words made her a little suspicious. Hot breath from Joseph's mouth was making her feel a little tingly. But she wouldn't admit that she was blind in love. Instead she asked, "Brother, look at this. Do you really think he is pretending?"

“Of course! It’s easier than you think! Wait a minute. I’ll take Mr. Marshall to the hospital to sober him up.” Mike went ahead to get a hold of Joseph. A smile was present on his face. He was going to uncover his lie.

Mike was in high spirits. He quickly said, “Ashley, get out of the way first. Mr. Marshall is quite strong. There is no way you can handle him. Let me get a hold of him, just so he won’t fall.”

In a matter of minutes, Ashley was pushed aside. Now Joseph had put his slender arm into Mike’s broad shoulder. Mike was in charge of him.

If anyone carefully noticed Mike’s face, they could easily understand he was in pain. His face was white as a sheet. It took him lot of effort to even move.

There was no doubt that mischief was brewing in Joseph’s mind. He was exerting force on Mike’s shoulder, just to burden him. In truth, he was quite sober and comfortable. Mike knew this well and his rage intensified.

The three of them passed through the burning curiosity of the crowd. Their arrival had created a buzz. And now, their departure had caught everyone’s attention.

As soon as they walked out of the gate of the Marshall Group, Mike quickly loosened Joseph’s grip from his shoulder. He turned to Ashley and said, “Now look at him! I’m going to drive the car.”

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Mike hastily let go of Joseph. Instead of falling, Joseph stood straight, strode over to Ashley and wrapped his strong arms around her waist. He was completely sober. Anyone could tell he wasn’t drunk. His twinkling eyes stared at Mike. “Thank you, Mr. Guzman,” he said.

Mike understood Joseph had indeed framed him. He flashed him a hateful look and walked towards the parking lot sullenly.

Seeing that Mike was a few steps away, Joseph made use of the opportunity and turned to his girlfriend. “Ashley, let’s flee!” he said, bursting with energy.

Before Ashley could make sense of his words, he had already grabbed her right hand. He ran and she ran along with him.

Therefore, in the square of the Guzman Group, a handsome man and a beautiful woman were running. They were being followed by a luxurious car.

This would have been a funny spectacle. However, Joseph's and Ashley's faces were beaming with happiness. It was a very pleasing sight.

"Stop it! Aren't you tired? Don't you plan on getting in? I'll take you to see a doctor," Mike yelled as he rolled down the window. His face was stern. He was glaring at the couple who were acting like school children.

'There is no way the two of you can run away! Not a chance!' Mike thought.

"Mike, we have been trying hard to get away from you! Can't you take a hint! Please leave us alone." Ashley gasped for air and pleaded.

The whole day, she had dreamed of going on a date with Joseph. At first, her father had been a barrier. And now, her brother was following her, not allowing them any privacy. She felt deep resentment for these people who had stood as a barrier between her and Joseph. In spite of this, she tried to reason gently. She didn't want to fight.

"It doesn't matter. Wherever you want to go, take me along," Mike answered indifferently, showing no shame whatsoever.

Joseph had deliberately exerted a little pressure on him and Mike could still feel the pain. There was no way he would let this man go away scot-free and be happily together with his sister.

"Mike, why can't you leave us alone for a while?" Ashley begged pitifully while watching him through the window. She was almost running out of patience.

"How many times should I remind you! You promised you would spend time with me. Don't you think it's wrong to not keep a promise, Mr. Marshall? Please knock some sense into my sister." Afraid that he could not resist his sister's begging eyes any minute, he looked at Joseph for some assistance.

"Ashley, let's get back in. We should get used to this," said Joseph. With his arms wrapped around his girlfriend's waist, he glared at Mike accusingly. "Mr. Guzman is shameless. I don't think I have ever seen such an outrageous person. We need to learn a thing or two from him so that we can make him taste his own medicine."

Mike was about to argue, but Joseph didn't give him a chance. He opened the door of the backseat and guided Ashley inside.

"Mr. Marshall, it's rare to hear you support me. However, I am a little disappointed you had to say those unpleasant stuff about me," Mike said as he tapped his fingers on the steering wheel.

However, Joseph didn't think he deserved an answer.

The couple sitting behind chose to ignore him once again.

"Hey, where are you going?" Mike asked after a short pause, hoping this question would grab their attention.

"My home." Joseph's answer came in an instant. It was now Mike's turn to be silent. Noticing this, Joseph asked, "Is that a problem, Mr. Guzman? Are you afraid?"

Hearing this provoking question, Mike was determined to show he wasn't scared of anything. Moreover, he could use this as an opportunity to inquire about Joseph's family. Without an ounce of hesitancy, he started the engine and said, "Of course not! Sounds great to me!"

Ashley, who had remained a spectator for a while, looked at Joseph doubtfully. "Why are we going to your house?" she asked.

"Grandpa told me he misses you. Also, I would like to introduce him to my brother-in-law who is a paragon." Joseph's voice was low and gentle. However, there was ridicule in his tone.

Truth was, Joseph had mentally gone through several dating places. In the end, he had discarded all of them. Now that Mike would be tagging along with them, it wasn't possible to have a romantic date. Under the circumstance, home sounded like the best place. He could show this annoying man to his grandfather.

"Paragon?" Ashley didn't understand what Joseph was trying to say.

“Yes. Mr. Guzman is a paragon of shamelessness. There is a lot we need to learn from him.” Joseph was as cold as ice when he spoke. Later, he raised his hand and stroked Ashley’s soft hair.

“Oh...” Ashley drawled. It dawned on her that Joseph was taunting Mike.

Mike watched the couple make fun of him. To avoid further taunts, he chose silence and didn’t utter a word.

Today had been a dreadful day for him. He had been badly humiliated. He understood that Joseph was a scheming man. One could easily mistake Joseph for a silent man. However, when he decided to argue with someone, he was capable of shutting them up in an instant.

Joseph provided the address and like a dutiful driver, Mike drove in silence. Soon, they arrived at their destination. Mike was stunned by the beautiful architecture of the house.

Before getting out of the car, Ashley said anxiously, “Joseph, I just remembered I didn’t bring any gift.”

“It doesn’t matter. You are the best gift anyone could ask for,” said Joseph dotingly.

Then, he put on a stern voice and looked at Mike. “Mr. Guzman has also come without a gift. But it’s fine. We will all make an exception for him since he is a paragon.”

Joseph wouldn’t miss an opportunity to make fun of Mike. Mike flashed him a displeased look and said calmly, “You’ll marry my sister in the future. That’s the best gift I can give you.”

Mike was extremely thick skinned. In spite of the taunts that had been thrown, he remained calm. He was capable of putting up a good front, acting like he was in good terms with Joseph.

As soon as the three of them got off the car, an elderly voice called from behind. “Ashley! Here you are!” Leonard said enthusiastically.

“Grandpa!” Ashley rushed to him, with a bright smile irradiating all her features.

“Hey, Ashley, I am so delighted to see you. You have no idea how much I missed you.” Leonard looked at Ashley from head to toe. He gave a satisfied smile.

“Hello, Grandpa! I’m Mike Guzman, Ashley’s brother.” The old man’s bright eyes swept over him so Mike went forward and introduced himself.

“Amazing! You and your sister both look outstanding.” Leonard was satisfied with both the siblings.

“Grandpa, you flatter me,” Mike said, smiling at the compliment. After a short pause, he went on, “I have always wanted to thank you for taking care of Ashley. And now I finally have an opportunity.”

“We’ll be relatives soon. There is no need to thank me. Besides, Ashley has always taken good care of me. I should be the one thanking her,” Leonard said. He was quite impressed with Mike’s immaculate behavior.

“Grandpa, let’s go inside and continue the conversation,” Joseph said, cutting in. He was a little annoyed seeing his grandpa bond with Mike.

He knew his grandfather very well. It was obvious he had liked Mike and thought him to be an excellent man. This made him despise Mike even more.

Ashley and Leonard began chatting. They were telling each other stories and laughing.

A few steps behind them, Mike and Joseph began a conversation.

“Mr. Guzman, I’ve learned a lot from your shamelessness.”

“There is more you can learn from me. However, you seem very fixated with shamelessness. But don’t worry, I am sure to show you more in the future.”

“Perhaps you aren’t aware but shamelessness is also a kind of disease. Mr. Guzman, you’re seriously ill.”

“Thank you for your concern, Mr. Marshall. This disease has never bothered me before so I think I am fine.”

“Well, I am glad to hear that. However, I should congratulate you. In terms of shamelessness, no one can surpass you. This is your absolute advantage.”

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As Ashley was conversing with Leonard, she felt the tension behind her. Turning around, she demanded, “What are you two talking about?”

“Nothing!” they answered in unison. But one could tell something was indeed wrong. They both looked very unhappy.

Leonard looked at the two of them and smiled. He said, “They probably have a good relationship. They should be bonding after all.” His reasoning was astonishing. Perhaps old age had made his eyesight weak. Or else the two men’s expression had given the wrong impression. Either way, Leonard couldn’t be more wrong.

Leonard had thought these two had become good friends. He also assumed Mike would help Joseph in pursuing Ashley. What he didn’t know was that behind Mike’s gentle and elegant exterior, he was an interfering man. He was one of the major barriers that stood between his grandson and Ashley.

All the two gaped at Leonard. His words had rendered them speechless.

They let go of this subject and discussed something else. Leonard enjoyed talking to the brother and sister of the Guzman family. He deeply admired them. When they chit-chatted happily, Joseph remained silent throughout the conversation. He sat next to his lover and drank tea.

He got up and left for a while. “Grandpa, I can’t seem to find the second set of my car keys. Would you please help me look for it?” Joseph pleaded. Once he returned, he interrupted their conversation.

Leonard, who seemed to be in good humor today, glanced at his grandson standing at the hallway. He got up, ready to help.

As soon as Leonard approached him, Joseph began to act. He looked around, pretending like he was actually looking for something. In a low voice, he whispered, “Grandpa, my brother-in-law is a third wheel. Can you help me get rid of him?”

Hearing this, Leonard looked at his grandson, his sharp eyes becoming fierce. His outrage and indignation were evident. “You s.uck! You allowed a third wheel to follow you all the way to your house!” he spat, ashamed.

“No, I brought him here on purpose. I thought my dear grandfather would be able to help,” Joseph explained defensively.

Having spent a lot of time with Mike, Joseph, a cold man, had learned a thing or two about flattery.

“Flattery doesn’t suit you. It is making me feel uncomfortable,” Leonard said sternly, shrugging off his grandson’s praise. He then asked, “How can I hold off your brother-in-law?”

He hit the nail on the head. He would help his grandson with this issue. After all, he wanted Joseph to be able to spend some quality time with Ashley, his granddaughter-in-law.

Joseph cleared his throat and said in a low voice, “I was thinking you could immerse him in some interesting conversation. That will keep him distracted,” he suggested.

“Is there any other better suggestion?” Leonard asked impatiently.

The truth was, Joseph had planned everything. He smiled and said, “Grandpa, you can talk to him about the pass that you got for him.”

Before Leonard could ask for more details, Joseph had already walked in the opposite direction. If they remained in the same spot for too long, he thought Mike would become suspicious. “Grandpa, I’ll go over there to look for it,” he said loudly.

Leonard frowned at his grandson’s poor acting skills. It was terrible. He felt a little embarrassed watching it.

“Ashley, if you are bored of sitting here, I suggest you go and help Joseph find his keys.” Leonard returned back to his seat and looked at Ashley kindly. Ashley’s gaze was fixated where Joseph was standing.

When she heard this suggestion, she became excited. “Okay, Grandpa. I’ll go and help him,” she responded cheerfully. Without glancing at her brother, she hurried out of there.

Leonard's sharp eyes scrutinized Mike. Ashley's brother was staring after Ashley. Seeing her departure, he seemed to be on pins and needles. Leonard cleared his throat, ready to distract him. "Mike, do you have a pass for the provincial army base?"

"Yes, I do. How do you know about it, Grandpa?" There was surprise in Mike's voice. Listening to this question, his attention immediately shifted to Leonard.

"I had gotten that pass from one of my old friends' son. Recently, Joseph asked for it. And I learned from him that it is in your hand now." He wasn't going to conceal anything. He went straight to the point. After a short pause, he demanded, "Mike, what are you doing with it?"

A few days ago, Leonard had spoken to Joseph, wanting to know if he had made any progress with his relationship. At that moment, Joseph asked his grandfather, who had been a senior officer in the military region, whether he had a pass that would allow someone to enter and leave the provincial army base at his will. To convince his grandpa, he added it would help him in his mission to woo the Guzman family. Leonard immediately made a phone call and handed the pass to Joseph the next day.

Now, he learned it was Mike who needed the pass. His curiosity got the best of him. He wanted to know what a young man like Mike wanted to do with it.

"I need it so that I can see someone in the army base," he replied with casual indifference that he did not feel.

Watching this indifference, Leonard's curiosity was further aroused. He couldn't help but ask more questions. Mike didn't dodge and was willing to answer them.

Therefore, the two of them immersed in a long conversation. Under the spell of Leonard's words, Mike barely had time to spy on his sister.

Ashley hurried to the corner of the hallway. Joseph was standing straight, evidently waiting for her.

"Joseph, you are definitely not looking for the keys," she remarked as soon as she was near him. She scrunched up her eyes and looked at him.

"You're smart!" he said and held her soft hand.

Ashley had seen through Joseph's poor acting. Moreover, if his key was actually lost, he would have asked the servants to look for it. It was a big mansion and their assistance would make the job quite easy. From the very beginning, it sounded fishy to her. Later, she glimpsed him whispering something to Leonard. She was sure her suspicion had been right.

However, Ashley wouldn't pour cold water on Joseph's idea. She knew he was doing this in order to create an opportunity to be alone with her. In spite of his bad acting, the plan had been effective! She was delighted.

"Joseph, where are we going?" Ashley turned her head and looked back vigilantly.

"Don't look! You have nothing to worry. That brother of yours won't disturb us for a while," Joseph said, smiling at her gleefully. He knew his grandfather well enough to know he had a penchant for pestering people.

Joseph spoke very confidently and Ashley instantly understood what was going on. She shook Joseph's arm and opened her big watery eyes. They couldn't afford to waste time. "Shall we go out on a date?" she asked.

"If we go out, your brother is bound to know that we left. Why don't we go somewhere nearby and make use of this precious time," Joseph suggested, rubbing her head gently.

Ashley began to dwell on her boyfriend's far-sighted decision. In the end, she concluded he was absolutely right.

Holding his arm intimately, she strolled through the green path of the villa, laughing and joking. The artificial lake with rockery and the back garden with plants were quite a sight to behold.

"Eh? What's this? I see a swing here! I have been here too many times before. How come I never noticed this swing?" Ashley's attention was fixed on the old swing in the corner.

When Leonard was sick, she had been here almost every single day. In fact, they always strolled and had a chit-chat in this path. She was familiar with this luxurious and elegant villa, but this old swing among the trees had escaped her notice.

“When I was a child, my parents often took me here when they had time to spare.” Joseph had a far-away look in his eyes.

Gazing at this shabby swing, memories from the past rushed to him. He could see himself laughing happily with his parents. He often sat here, urging his parents to push him high in the air. In those days, the sky used to be particularly blue and the sun comfortingly warm.

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Joseph’s face didn’t show any emotions. Yet Ashley, who was standing beside him, could still feel the deep yearning he had for his parents. Instinctively, she held his hand and caressed his palm. In her soft voice, she whispered, “Your parents accompanied you when you were a child. And now, I will accompany you till your last breath.”

Joseph suddenly snapped back from his memory. He stared at Ashley’s pretty face. His face broke into a smile. He pressed her hand and said, “Okay.”

Once again, he looked at the swing. Still smiling, he thought, ‘Dad, Mom, I have found a life partner who has promised to be with me for the rest of my life. She will give me the happiness that I have cherished with you in my childhood. I will no longer be alone...’ As he thought about Ashley’s words, his sadness slowly evaporated.

“Come on, sit on it and allow me to push,” Ashley said cheerfully. She let go of Joseph’s hand, hurried to the swing and blew the dust off it.

Seeing that Ashley was in high spirits, Joseph realized there was no harm in having a little fun. He sat on it and felt his body sway.

From behind, Ashley’s laughter rang. It was melodious to his ears. On looking up, he noticed the sky was very blue. The wind was whistling in the air. He felt warmth spread through him.

With Ashley by his side, he nurtured hope in his heart. Perhaps he could be happy for the rest of his life.

“Are you tired? How about I push for a little while?” he asked, getting up from the swing. He walked behind and urged the blushing woman to take a seat.

“Okay!” Ashley, who was a little tired, agreed immediately.

Her pleasant and melodious laughter resounded through the garden as the swing took her high in the air.

At this moment, they felt like an ordinary couple. They were deriving pleasure out of simple joys.

“Joseph, higher...” Ashley encouraged, still laughing.

Then, Joseph exerted all his strength to push Ashley to a new height.

However, once it went up in the air, the shabby swing gave out. It snapped with a bang. And Ashley found herself in a defenseless position.

“Ah...” she screamed, fearing her body would fall on the ground.

In a matter of seconds, she felt Joseph’s warm embrace. He had caught her in time!

“Fortunately, you didn’t fall down! Why did you urge me to push you a little higher?” Joseph was struck by fear. He looked at Ashley who was fluttering her eyelashes and staring at him.

“You’re so handsome!” Ashley, who had escaped danger, was no longer thinking about it. Something else was occupying her thoughts. She stared at Joseph with fascination and complimented him for his looks.

In fact, when Ashley realized that the swing was broken, for a split second she was scared. However, when she remembered her strong boyfriend was right behind her, her fear disappeared into the thin year. As expected, she fell into the familiar arms. She could always rely on him!

She was overcome by a strong desire for him. It didn’t matter how dire the situation was.

Joseph, who hadn’t recovered from the shock, glared at Ashley. His heart was thudding against his chest. He scolded, “You little fool! You don’t seem to care much about your life!”

Seeing his stern expression, Ashley pouted her lips sulkily at being reproached. "First of all, the swing is a little old. It's no surprise it broke. And secondly, when you sat on it, nothing happened. Perhaps your weight had a hand in this. And when you pushed me too high in the air, it got destroyed completely."

When Joseph listened to her explanation, he snorted in exasperation.

Ashley had placed all the blame on him, even though it was all her idea. Joseph turned away his face to show his displeasure.

She understood her words had hurt him. In an instant, she held his hand and said, "Joseph, I admit this was my fault. Please don't be angry."

Joseph, who was still disappointed with her, chose to ignore her.

"Hey, don't be so mean!" She wrapped her arms around his neck and moved closer to him. In a fierce tone, she said, "If you don't answer me, I'll bite you."

Listening to her words, Joseph couldn't help but laugh. His rage had disappeared. He turned his handsome face to Ashley, so that his adorable girlfriend could bite him.

However, their romantic moment was interrupted. As Ashley aggressively moved her red lips towards his lips, a loud and clear voice coughed from behind.

"Grandpa and I are here to remind you that it's time for lunch." Mike's spiteful voice stopped them before they could begin.

Mike and Leonard stood in front of the couple. They had seen how Joseph had used this amazing speed to stop Ashley from falling. They had also listened to the flirty conversation that took place between the couple.

Mike had never seen this side of his sister. Her undignified words filled him with shame. In the end, when they were going to get intimate with each other, he decided to call them out.

Leonard had an awkward smile on his face. He didn't desire to interrupt them, but he had no choice.

Ashley figured that her brother and her future grandfather-in-law had overheard their conversation. She looked at Joseph, indirectly urging him to put her down. However, he ignored her silent plea. Embarrassed, she resorted to burying her little face in his arms.

Joseph felt a stirring of rage. Just when he was about to kiss his girlfriend, Mike had showed up. Not concealing his anger, he said coldly, "Mr. Guzman, peeping and overhearing are considered very ungentlemanly."

Being a thick-skinned man, Mike didn't care about Joseph's words. He flashed him a sarcastic smile and said, "Mr. Marshall, before you accuse me of peeping, you have to remember something. Grandpa and I have been standing here for a while. It isn't my fault that you were too focused on something else, is it?"

'You try to take advantage of my sister and then you have the audacity to blame me! Who is more shameless in this situation?' Mike thought and stared back at Joseph, who was standing opposite to him, holding Ashley in his arms.

Leonard stood aside like a bystander. A squabble had sparked between the two young men. They were glaring at each other angrily. He realized he had been wrong when he assumed the two of them got along well!

Mike was sharp-witted. After a while, he understood Leonard was trying to stall him to give his sister and Joseph some privacy. He saw through their ruse.

He insisted that Leonard show him around the mansion. Leonard was a host and he couldn't say no to such a request. Once they began walking, Mike started to wander around aimlessly. It wasn't long before he caught sight of Ashley and Joseph in the garden.

Joseph's grandfather yearned for a great grandson. He would have liked for Ashley to bite Joseph's lips. But with Mike standing beside him and stopping their intimate contact, he had no choice but stand aside silently.

None of the two young men spoke. Being the eldest among the group, Leonard thought it was his duty to talk. Solemnly, he said, "It's time for lunch. Let's go back inside."

Hearing this, Ashley, who had gotten rid of her initial embarrassment, quietly raised her head and said to Joseph, "It's time to eat. Put me down now."

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- Tips

Joseph stopped looking at Mike. Gently, he obliged to Ashley's plea and put her down. Holding her hand tightly, he followed Leonard to the main house.

His alone-time with Ashley had been ruined because of Mike. Joseph swore in his heart that one day he would exact revenge from his brother-in-law.

Sometime in the future, he was certain that an opportunity would come before him. And then Mike would be sorry for everything he had done.

During the lunch time, Joseph and Mike, who had always been at odds with each other, didn't even glance at each other. They maintained silence. It was Leonard and Ashley who made the atmosphere lively by chit-chatting with each other.

After lunch, they chatted for a little longer. And soon, Ashley said goodbye and got into one of the luxurious cars that had been parked in the Marshall family's garage.

Leonard watched the car drive away. As he stood watching, he contemplated over the words Mike had spoken before he left. He said his father had warned him to return Ashley home early. This could only mean one thing. 'Joseph's future brother-in-law isn't the only obstacle that stands between him and Ashley. His father-in-law also has trouble approving him,' Leonard thought.

He turned to his grandson and demanded, "Why does Ashley's family dislike you so much?"

Before Joseph could answer, a thought struck Leonard. "My memory is so terrible! Well, of course they must have known you were seeing another woman, right?"

"Grandpa, your memory is indeed bad. How can you forget it was just a misunderstanding?" Joseph shook his head in exasperation. After a short pause, he explained, "And except for Mike, nobody else in her family knows about it."

Leonard gazed at his grandson warily and asked, "If that's the case then why does your future father-in-law also have a problem with you?" Leonard was confused.

"He probably doesn't want his little girl to get married so soon. Also, he learned I had broken up with her once. That's why he still holds it against me," Joseph answered honestly.

Joseph had visited Ashley's parents today. He thought back to the way Ashley's father had behaved. He was obviously envious of the attention Ashley was giving him. Being a good judge of character, Joseph understood jealousy was crux of his father-in-law's dissatisfaction. However, he didn't know how he could make things better.

Fortunately, Joseph's mother-in-law, whom Joseph had never met before, behaved very kindly. She was the only one who had approved of him.

"How did you end up being such a loser! You have been chasing after her for ages. Why isn't your hard-work bearing fruit?" Leonard sighed with disappointment, "Well, your father was a little stupid back then, but even he was faster than you!"

"Grandpa, their situation was very different. My mother chased after him first. Moreover, he had Grandpa Clark's support," Joseph said defensively. He couldn't bear to hear his grandfather taunt him. Their love stories were entirely different, leaving no room for comparison.

'If I had my father-in-law's approval, I would have nothing to worry about,' Joseph thought to himself.

"From our family's experience, we have gathered that the more difficult things are, the more you have to hold on. From now on, you should stay with the Guzman family all day long. You should make them accustomed to you. This is what your father did in the past," Leonard said, imparting knowledge to his grandson.

"What do you mean by 'our family's experience'? Besides, if my father actually chased mom, why did I not know about it?" Joseph was startled by this revelation.

His grandfather implied that men from the Marshall family used to pursue the girls they liked by keeping pestering them until they got what they wanted. This meant Leonard and Blake had done it before.

However, Leonard wouldn't use himself as an example to his grandson. He said, "Of course your father wouldn't tell a child such a thing."

Blake had kept it from his son. It would tarnish the image he had set for him. A child was supposed to look at his father with respect.

Joseph was quite disturbed by this. "Grandpa, why then are you putting such bad ideas into my head?" he complained.

Hearing him grumble, Leonard looked at his grandson with a scowl on his face. D disdainfully, he said, "You b.rat! What's the matter with you! It shouldn't matter if a trick is dirty or not. As long as it works, you should be happy."

Joseph didn't refute to his grandfather's criticism.

In truth, it had been a while since Joseph had used his pestering skills. After all, he had appeared in the Guzman Group, sending flowers and marking his territory. Not only did he eliminate all his rivals in love, but also successfully established the identity as the son-in-law of the Guzman family.

Now he and his grandfather had a heated discussion, trying to come up with plans that would succeed.

After the year-end party of a big company, all the employees of the company began to enjoy a happy New Year holiday. However, Ashley wasn't lucky to enjoy such pleasures. She was grounded at home by her father. It would have been a gloomy time for her if it wasn't for Joseph.

Joseph proved himself to be the best boyfriend. He appeared in the Guzman family's house almost every day, inventing various petty reasons. Even if Jack gave him a hard time, Joseph handled it smoothly. It would suffice to say he had become shameless like Mike. Nothing would mortify him. Ashley had the pleasure of seeing her boyfriend, even if her parents were always around.

Luckily, Mike, who enjoyed troubling Joseph, was almost always away.

Finally, one day, in order to breathe some fresh air, Ashley agreed to accompany her parents to go shopping for New Year. And Joseph, who arrived at the Guzman family's house, decided to tag along with them.

The incident that followed was very pitiful. Ashley's parents were strolling happily with their daughter whereas their future son-in-law was carrying their packages. Joseph played the role of their driver and also had to pay all the hefty bills. He couldn't even spend a few seconds with his girlfriend.

Joseph, the poor full-time son-in-law, had never in his life worked so much. The passers-by looked at him, admiration evident in their glances. As time went by, he was carrying more and more bags.

Since his hands were occupied, Ashley was the one responsible for paying the bills using his credit card. When her parents were looking elsewhere, she whispered in Joseph's ear, "Joseph, Dad and Mom are being too inhumane. Let's sneak away."

"Honey, I know you are concerned about me but running away won't solve the problem. If we attempt to escape, points will be deducted. It will do more harm than good." Joseph had been tortured a lot yet his ability to think logically didn't disappear.

Jack, who was petty and jealous, had established an abstract system to inspect his son-in-law. Joseph's score wouldn't solely depend on his performance. Jack's mood was a factor that would be used to determine it. Under the circumstance, Joseph couldn't risk annoying him. If Joseph's average performance score reached a certain point each day, Joseph could move on to the next stage.

In the first stage, the two young people were not allowed to be in love. However, in the next stage, he would be lax. The couple would be allowed to go on a date. In the end, they could get married and have children. It seemed like a long journey, but Joseph was determined to reach it.

Jack's terrible system was non-negotiable. In spite of his efforts, Joseph was struggling to ace this test.

Jack observed Joseph's every move. However, he kept his opinion to himself. It wouldn't be announced in the public now. Therefore, Joseph had to keep guessing. There was no way of knowing how he was doing.

Finally, Joseph and Ashley chose to remain there. They wouldn't attempt escape. Like a servant, he went to just about every shop in the mall with Ashley's parents. He did everything that was asked of him. And while doing it, he made it a point to look happy.

In the end, today wasn't what they had hoped it would be. It ended up being yet another tough day for the two of them.

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- Tips

As the saying went, "Wherever there is pressure, there is resistance." In the dead of night, Ashley, who had been oppressed all these days, decided to step out of the Guzman family's mansion. Her parents' behavior had roused a feeling of rebellion in her.

"Joseph, are you asleep?" she asked, as soon as he took her call.

"No."

"Well, I will be coming there soon!"

"Hello?"

Before he could make sense of her words, she had hung up the call. It was a brief and urgent conversation. After the shopping fiasco, Joseph had a showered and then received a call from his girlfriend. He was a little stunned at first, but soon happiness engulfed him.

It was quite late so he thought it wasn't safe to have her come here all alone. Joseph put down his phone and quickly changed his clothes, quietly driving to pick up his girlfriend who had called him at this hour.

It was quite late, but they still had two hours before it struck twelve o'clock. The temperature was pretty low these days. The nights were cold and Ashley's parents, who always went to sleep early, had gone to their room. Ashley's brother, Mike, didn't have much to say to her. Hence the siblings went back to their respective rooms. Therefore, people in the Guzman family were in their rooms, sleeping. The members of this family slept earlier than most people.

Clad in long overcoat, Ashley tiptoed past her sleeping family members' rooms. The servants she met on the way would keep her secret safe. She bribed them with her charming smile.

To avoid disturbing her family, Ashley planned on taking a taxi rather than their car.

The mansion of the Guzman family was located at the edge of the city. It would take a while before she reached the main road. Eager to meet her boyfriend, Ashley decided to take a shortcut.

Ashley turned on the flashlight of her mobile phone and quickly walked through the path. Just then, she watched several shadows appear in front of her.

Once they were close enough, she noticed there were three strong men in front of her. Soon, she gathered they were a bunch of hooligans, waiting to rob the passers-by late at night. Ashley calmly watched them approach her, and came up with a solution.

"Guys, do you want money or me?" she asked, raising her voice.

"Wow, interesting! It's the first time that I have come across a woman who is both beautiful and unafraid. Impressive combination! I want money, but I also want you..." A thin man made an obscene gesture and walked towards her.

"Cut the crap! Just catch her!" the fierce-looking man on the left grumbled angrily.

The three hooligans approached. They didn't know Ashley was a fourth-degree black belt in taekwondo. She kicked one of them and now he was lying on the ground looking helpless. With her ruthless eyes, she stared at the other two and knocked them down as well.

"Tell me! Why are you after me? Who is it that asked you to do it?" Walking back and forth, Ashley looked down sharply at them. One of them tried to escape but she caught him before he could leave.

Ashley had overheard their conversation. Now she would force the truth out of them.

Her question was followed by a long silence. She raised her foot and kicked one of the men in the nuts. He let out a cry of pain. In a cold voice, she threatened, "You don't want to tell me, do you? I'll call someone to take the three of you away. And trust me, I will make sure you will be tortured. Or do you want me to kick you in the nuts again? Huh? Answer me!" she demanded.

They noticed that the beautiful woman's face was contorted with a cruel expression. Looking at his companion who had been kicked and was groaning with pain, the thin man knew they couldn't defeat this woman. In a trembling voice, he said, "It was a woman who asked us to catch you. We have been waiting here for many days..."

"Which woman?"

"I don't know her name. She is young and usually applies heavy makeup," another man replied, his eyes wide with horror. All of them knew they were incapable of fighting against this woman.

"We really don't know the woman's name. This is all the information we have got. Can't you please let us go?" The man, who had been kicked, was almost pleading with her.

"I'll let you go. However, I am going to take a picture of you three. If you stir trouble again, I will make sure you will be put behind the bars!" Ashley took out her phone to take their photos.

The flashlight came from her phone. All the three men gazed in the direction behind her. They pointed towards the figure that was coming and explained, "The woman who gave us orders is right behind you."

When Ashley turned around, the three hooligans fled.

She didn't care about them anymore. Her eyes were looking at the woman with heavy makeup. Under the moonlight, the woman's evil smile was terrifying.

"Lina? Why are you here?" Ashley raised the flashlight of her mobile phone to illuminate the approaching woman's face. She got terribly shocked when she saw who she was.

"How are you doing, Ashley?" As Lina walked closer, she shot Ashley a look of pure hatred. Coldly, she said, "Needless to say, your life must be grand."

After all, you are the daughter of the Guzman family. And soon you will be the wife of the CEO of the Empire Group! You are really something!”

Ashley had not seen Lina for a few days. She was now wearing heavy make-up and she was devoured by jealousy. She indeed looked like the cruel and temperamental woman that Yasmin had talked about.

Listening to these spiteful words, Ashley glared at Lina. Coldly, she said, “Why are you ridiculing me? I didn’t blame even though you have done some terrible things. And yet you have the audacity to act like I am at fault?”

Ashley recalled the day when Lina had tricked her into drinking the aphrodisiac, almost allowing Charlie to r.ape her. She was possessed with rage as she remembered that memory.

The saying that a leopard cannot change its spots was indeed true. A vicious woman like Lina would never learn from her mistakes. She was here to harm her again. Ashley, who was never a pushover, decided to give vent to her anger.

“Ashley, there is no point in acting so noble. You need to remember you are in this position only because you have slept with Joseph. We aren’t very different. You are just lucky to have ended up with a richer and more powerful lover!” Lina spat out angrily.

Hearing this, Ashley sneered and said, “Lina, you’ve always been jealous of me! Jealous of my identity, my love life. Well, let’s suppose I am a social climber like you think I am. Even then, I am a hundred times better than you. After all, you are after guys that I don’t want. What a pity! The man you were after was neither rich nor powerful yet he doesn’t want you. Don’t you think that makes you a little pathetic?”

In the past, Ashley would always ignore Lina’s provocation. But now, she knew she had to put this vicious woman in her place. After all, she had tried to hurt her again.

Ashley’s words were spiked with malice and it stung Lina. She was starting to feel scared.

“Ashley, you’re born into a powerful family! What’s there to brag about?” she demanded, mustering up some courage. Lina was wounded, but she did a

great job at hiding her pain. She pretended like Ashley's words had no power over her.

She was blind with jealousy. According to her, Ashley was lucky only because she belonged to a superior family. She thought that was the only reason men admired her. Apart from that, she was meritless.

'Yes, I'm pathetic. I hooked up with a useless man. And in the end, I got nothing! And the person responsible for this is you,' Lina thought to herself. She believed Ashley engineered her downfall.

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"You hysterical woman! What is your point? Well, I am blessed with a good family background. I'm forever thankful for it. Why does this bother you? What do you want to do to me?" Ashley demanded roughly. Lina was constantly making a fuss about everything. She couldn't tolerate this any longer.

"You..." Lina screamed, seeing Ashley was looking at her with defiant air. However, she faltered in her speech. Words were stuck in Lina's throat.

"Me? I'm fine! Enough about me. Tell me about you. Is the baby born?" Ashley's gaze fell on her enemy's flat belly. Expressionlessly, she demanded an explanation for this.

Lina stared at her with her dull eyes. After a moment, she burst into peals of laughter. Under the light of the flashlight, her face that was caked with powder, looked eerily pale. Her hatred was stinking in the air.

Once she had exhausted her laughter, she stopped. Then she straightened herself up and looked at Ashley with eyes that were simmering with resentment. "Ha ha! You want to know about the child? Well, I've already aborted it."

On her wedding day, Charlie didn't appear as well as his family. Charlie's sudden disappearance, the acquisition of the Synder Group, and the destruction of the hotel video made it obvious it was all Joseph's doing. He had avenged his girlfriend's culprit. He made them pay for the humiliation that Ashley had gone through.

She was involved in what happened that night. Her fear slowly escalated into panic. Worried Joseph would be coming for her next, she chose to hide in the city.

She lived in a constant state of anxiety for the next few days. The baby in her belly made her situation worse. She could hardly move around. Moreover, the Synder Group had gone bankrupt, so the baby had lost its value. In order to save herself, she chose to abort the baby.

She rested for 10 days. But since her bank accounts were frozen, she ran out of money. Driven by starvation and cold, she entered a small nightclub. The salary they paid for the waitress's position was too low. With no other choice, she made use of the fact she was pretty and coquettish. In a matter of days, she became a well-known figure in that club.

However, underneath everything, Lina was leading a miserable life. Every day, she cursed Ashley for being the cause of her doom. God too had been unfair to her. Ashley was given everything in abundance. Finally, she hired a few street hooligans and paid them a small amount to humiliate her.

Lina had told the hooligans to secretly keep an eye on Ashley. It had been a while since they were hiding in a secret place near the Guzman family's house. To their utter disappointment, Ashley rarely went out of the house. And when she did, it was always in car. Facing such a dilemma, the hooligans couldn't do much. Finally, they came up with a plan and took turns to monitor Ashley's moves. And today, it was those three hooligans' turn.

When the three of them failed to catch Ashley, Lina, who happened to come to have a look, decided to show herself up.

"Why do you seem surprised? Do you think I should have given birth and taken care of a child that would be useless to me?" Lina glared at her coldly.

Ashley looked stunned but she soon regained her composure. She couldn't believe Lina was so terrible! She hadn't shown mercy to her own child. Ashley shook her head in disbelief and said, "Lina, you are a terrible human-being! That baby was almost 6 months! How can you do that?"

"So you think I should have kept the baby whose father went missing?" she retorted indignantly. "Ashley, you always enjoyed pretending to be noble! This

makes me hate you even more! If it weren't you, I wouldn't have had to take such a drastic step! It's all your fault!"

Lina's blame game was in full bloom. Her hatred towards Ashley had something to do with the fact that Charlie had loved her all this time. Her hatred intensified because Joseph loved Ashley so much that he had decided to destroy her enemy's life. Had been pushed to the wall, she had suffered too many humiliations because of Ashley.

However, what Lina didn't know was that Joseph had an influence all over the world. It was impossible for her to escape. He had thought of the innocent baby in her belly and decided to let her go. He had only blocked her economic lifelines.

But Lina, out of her selfishness, had aborted the unborn child. She didn't have an ounce of regret and went even further. This ghastly woman would never come to a good end.

Seeing the ferocious look on Lina's face, Ashley wasn't threatened. She sneered and said, "How ridiculous! I thought you had an ounce of conscience left in you. I thought you would at least try to be a good mother. But now I am positive there is no humanity left in you. "

Lina wouldn't spare her own child. The most basic maternal instinct didn't exist in her. Ashley was convinced nothing would move this horrible woman.

"Ashley, go to hell!" Lina spat out loudly, glaring at Ashley.

Her cold voice was muffled by the sound of wind. After uttering these words, Lina rushed towards her. Something white glistened from her hand! She came bearing a dagger!

The cruelty in Lina's eyes was as sharp as the dagger she was holding in her hand. She dashed frantically, a murderous look appearing in her face. Seeing this, Ashley's eyes widened. She quickly dodged and Lina ended up tripping. Ashley stepped on Lina's wrist, trying to make sure Lina wouldn't get access to that dagger.

Lina wouldn't give up, still struggling to get a hold of her dagger. Ashley understood this wretched woman wouldn't stop. Hence she resorted to kicking it away. Now it was lost among the darkness.

All the grappling had made Lina's hair more disheveled than they already were. Hatred flared up inside her. Her cold gaze was fixated upon Ashley.

The street light had become dim. Ashley could only vaguely make out the contorted features of the vicious woman lying down.

Lina lifted her leg, in an attempt to kick her. But Ashley, who was extremely nimble, grabbed her leg and twisted it slightly. Lina winced as a sharp pain shot through her.

"Ouch... Ashley, let go of me!" she said, almost pleading for her life.

"Let you go? Don't even dream of it! I am going to remind you that I am not someone to be trifled with!" Lina was struggling to free her wrist from under Ashley's foot. Noticing this, Ashley exerted more pressure.

"Ashley, I dare you to let me stand!" She gritted her teeth. The pain on her broken ankle was almost too great to endure.

"Okay, I'll let you stand up if that's what you want." A cold smile flashed across Ashley's face. She removed her leg from Lina's wrist. "I'll let you stand up just so I can relish the pleasure of knocking you down again! Get up..." she said challengingly.

With her arms crossed over her chest, Ashley looked at Lina. She kept a distance between them. Lina started to limp slowly. All of a sudden, she made an attempt to pounce on Ashley but was kicked by Ashley once again. This time, her condition was much worse. She fell down on the ground on her right side. The cheek was covered with blood on one side.

Lina once again tried to stand up. She made an attempt at pouncing on Ashley but she couldn't even get close to her. Ashley watched the spectacle silently. She wanted her to come forward, just so she could have the satisfaction of kicking her again.

The two of them were determined to give vent to their anger.