

Perfect Match: Irresistible Desire For You – Chapter 46 - Tips

Joseph didn't take Zachary's teasing seriously. Instead, his response reminded Zachary of his own problems again. Despite this, Zachary just couldn't believe that a cold-hearted man such as Joseph had really fallen for someone, so he went on and said, "Since even your frozen heart has started to melt, I have faith that my spring will come as well."

Joseph and Zachary had been friends for so many years, so he knew just how persistent Zachary could be. Most importantly, he believed that Zachary was more than capable of dealing with his problems on his own, so he decided not to poke his nose into it.

After that, everyone went back to having a good time at the party. As Joseph and Zachary walked around the dance floor, there were a lot of turning heads. A few seasoned politicians and business tycoons took the opportunity to strike up a conversation with them. As a result, they ended up spending the rest of the evening rubbing elbows with the other guests. As for Ashley and Mike, they talked mostly with the other high-ranking officials, and their time also flew by so quickly.

When the grand business party came to a close, Ashley's weekend ended as well, and she had to go back to work on Monday. However, she was completely clueless of the fact that the Synder Group was currently facing a financial crisis. Rumor had it that because the negotiations with the Empire Group ended up falling through, they couldn't get enough raw materials to produce the goods. It was for this very reason that they failed to accomplish a large international order before the deadline. As a result, the company had to pay a huge amount of liquidated damages.

Word was going around about this among the employees of the company, and they were starting to have some doubts. Considering how much the stock price of the Synder Group had plummeted in the past two days, the senior executives had to do something to address the employees' doubts and concerns. James, who was Charlie's father as well as the CEO of the Synder Group, had to step forward to deal with the troublesome situation. Since the Synder Group was in hot water, the company's higher-ups had to come to the table at once. They held a staff meeting to address the issue regarding the huge amount of compensation they had to pay the other party because of the breach of contract. Taking this into consideration, the senior executives

analyzed the state of the company's current finances from all aspects in order to assure the staff that, in spite of the huge amount that had to be settled, the situation was still under control, and they had nothing to worry about.

Having said that, only the senior managers and the CEO were privy to the information that the Synder Group had been caught in a tight spot because of the state of its finances. In the past couple of years, the Synder Group had managed to maintain a steady profit margin. However, saying that the company was raking in a lot of profits would be a bit of a stretch. When he was the acting head of the company, Charlie had heard that a well-known foreign company had made such a large order. So, in hopes of potentially increasing the company's profit and making a name for himself, he struck a deal with the other party and established a long-term partnership. What was more, he even guaranteed that the goods would be delivered on time. In order to make this partnership official, the two parties agreed to sign a contract. It stated that if Party A (the Synder Group) failed to deliver the goods on time, not only would it have to compensate a huge amount of liquidated damages, but it would also have to take full responsibility for the losses caused to Party B (the ordering party), including the subsequent production losses.

In other words, since the Synder Group failed to provide the goods in time, it ended up causing them a great financial loss to compensate Party B. As if that wasn't bad enough, the company's reputation had also been tarnished because of this. Be that as it might, it didn't really have any significant devastating effect on the company.

After a lengthy discussion, the senior executives concluded that it wouldn't have come to this if it weren't for the Empire Group's refusal to cooperate. As for the reason why, it was anybody's guess. Although Joseph, the current CEO of the Empire Group, could be so unforgiving when it came to business, he was a shrewd businessman. There was no question that he could make a huge profit from this partnership, but, for some reason, he decided to turn down this opportunity. No matter how anyone looked at it, it just didn't make sense—unless his goal was to retaliate the Synder Group.

As the CEO of the company, James also took part in the discussion. He couldn't wrap his mind around why the Empire Group would do such a thing. Could it be possible that Joseph wanted to get even after he found out about what had happened in the past? Although this idea crossed his mind, he brushed it off almost instantly, thinking that it was out of the question. After all,

what happened in the past had been kept under wraps. Moreover, Joseph was just a child at that time.

Charlie attended the meeting as well, but he didn't dare to say a word throughout the discussion. At the end of the day, he was still somewhat responsible for the breach of contract. From time to time, he would glance at James to see his reaction. When he noticed that James seemed to have his head in the clouds, he couldn't help worrying that his father doubted his decision-making skills. Because of this, he thought it would be better for him to just put a sock in it.

When the meeting was wrapped up, James asked Charlie to stay in the conference room and asked him about the company's state of operations as well as some of the decisions he had made recently. Sitting on pins and needles, Charlie told him about everything that had transpired after his father let him temporarily take over the company.

While Charlie was giving James a detailed report, Lina suddenly opened the door and walked in. After greeting the two of them, she didn't beat around the bush and said right away, "Sir, I think things only turned out like this because the Empire Group didn't want to cooperate with us."

Truth be told, James didn't like being interrupted in the middle of a conversation. Moreover, he had never really been that fond of his future daughter-in-law. Although she had good looks and was a capable woman, she had no background and wasn't open-minded enough. Someone like her wouldn't be able to help in the company's development. However, now that Lina was carrying his son's child in her womb, which was what he had been looking forward to the most, he had to pretend to be nicer to his daughter-in-law. Since both of them agreed with what Lina said, James gestured for her to continue.

Taking the hint from his eyes to keep talking, Lina explained to them the reason why she came up with this idea. Lina was the one who took over the third round of negotiation between the Synder Group and the Empire Group after she asked Ashley to step down. Unfortunately for her, when they arrived at the designated meeting place, the representative of Empire Group just kept messing around with them and didn't take them seriously. Even when they offered to raise the negotiated price by a certain percentage, they still didn't give them a concrete response. In the end, they simply said that they had to report it to their superior before making a decision. It wasn't until the next round of negotiation, which happened more than a week later, that the other

party informed them that they weren't willing to cooperate with them anymore. This left Lina at such a loss for words.

Remembering everything she went through, it took all Lina had to hold back her anger. She had thought that as the future Mrs. Synder of the Synder Group, she would receive the same, if not better, treatment as Ashley. But, as it turned out, it was nothing but wishful thinking. When the Empire Group received her and her team for the last time, they remained so casual throughout the negotiation. As much as she hated to admit it, she felt so helpless at that time. Not only were they in the other party's territory, but her own company was also much inferior to theirs, so she didn't have enough confidence.

At the thought of this, Lina mentioned one more thing, "Sir, from what I can tell, there are people in our company who have a deep connection with the CEO of the Empire Group. There's a good chance that they were in cahoots with each other in planning the crisis."

The moment they heard this, the look on both James' and Charlie's faces shifted. Could it really be possible that there was a mole who disclosed confidential information about the company to the Empire Group? Was that person the reason why they had to face the current crisis they were in? The main reason why the two of them believed Lina's speculation was because they knew that the company's problems could have easily been dealt with before the public could even find out about it. Despite that, the news about what happened spread like wildfire, causing the company's reputation to be damaged and the stock price to plummet. Taking everything that happened into account, it was highly likely that there was a mole inside the company who had leaked the information.

When she saw how the expressions on the two men's faces had shifted, a smug expression flashed through Lina's eyes. With that, she went ahead and explained in detail, "The first and second rounds of negotiation between our company and the Empire Group had been led by the manager of the marketing department, Ashley. And on the second round of negotiations, the CEO of the Empire Group came to meet her in person. Everyone in the department knows about it."

Upon saying this, Lina took out a dozen photos along with a newspaper from her bag and placed them down on the table in front of James and Charlie. She presented to them a few photos of Joseph and Ashley. The newspaper article read, "The CEO of the Empire Group, Joseph Marshall, was seen dancing

with a woman at a party. It is rumored that something is going on between the two.” Below this was a picture of Joseph inviting Ashley to dance with him.

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Two days ago, the news about Joseph’s attendance at the party was on the headlines of both the financial and the entertainment news section. On the other hand, the newspaper Lina had just placed in front of them was newly printed today. It called into question the notion that Joseph was not interested in women. In the photo, Joseph was courteously inviting a woman to dance with him, and only the side profile of the mysterious woman’s face could be seen.

Charlie picked up the newspaper on the table and read the article. The moment he saw the picture, he was able to tell right away who the so-called “mysterious woman” was. Seeing her graceful figure and familiar side profile, he believed that it was none other than Ashley.

On the night of the party, Charlie saw Joseph and Ashley dancing on the dance floor from a distance. Because of how they moved so gracefully and the way they carried themselves, the other guests couldn’t help looking at them in awe. Even though Charlie didn’t want to admit that the two of them looked so good together, he couldn’t shake off the disappointment and jealousy he felt deep in his heart when he saw how well they were getting along with each other. ‘Ashley and I were still dating just a while ago, but then she suddenly appears in front of me with another man. As much as I hate to admit it, I can’t hold a candle to him.’

Now, Charlie was looking at the photos Lina had presented to them. In these photos, Joseph and Ashley looked like they were in a world of their own. Their eyes were glued to each other as they danced. Among the photos, there were a few where Ashley and Joseph could be seen standing next to another tall man and talking to each other.

Looking at these photos, Charlie wasn’t sure how he was supposed to feel. Just what was going on? At first, Charlie thought that Lina only said those words because she was jealous of Ashley. But, now there was irrefutable evidence to support her claim. And based on what he saw with his very own eyes that night, Ashley really seemed to be close to Joseph. Did she really

sell out the company? However, the Ashley he knew shouldn't be the type who would do such a thing.

Looking at Charlie, Lina noticed how the expression on his face had changed. She could tell that he still harbored feelings for Ashley. For this reason, she wanted to take advantage of this incident so that Ashley would be given the boot out of the Synder Group. This way, she would be able to keep Ashley away from Charlie for good. It was like killing two birds with one stone.

"Sir, the woman in those photos and on the newspaper is the current marketing manager, Ashley. It is without question that she has a close relationship with the CEO of the Empire Group, Joseph Marshall. Charlie should be aware of that as well." Upon saying this, she glanced at Charlie and asked, "Charlie, what do you think?"

Seeing that his father was also looking at him and waiting for his response, Charlie hesitated for a moment. Then, he replied, "Lina is right." After a short pause, he went on and added, "On the night of the party, I did feel that Ashley and Joseph had quite an unusual relationship."

Lina was certain that Charlie wouldn't mind selling his old lover out if his future at the company was hanging in the balance. At the moment, Ashley was being suspected of divulging confidential information about the company. If Charlie spoke up for her in front of James, it would give away the fact that he still had lingering feelings for Ashley. If that were to happen, the image he had tried so hard to maintain in front of his father would be ruined. Charlie, a man who had always valued the inheritance of the company more than anything, would not take the risk.

Lina asked Charlie about it for a particular reason. Now that Charlie had verified the evidence she had presented, her words seemed more credible.

After hearing Lina and Charlie's statements, James thought for a moment and said in a rather forbidding tone, "We have to look into this matter seriously. If what you're saying is true, she'll have to pay for what she has done."

It was possible that this was just be a minor issue, but it could also be a serious one. It would be much easier to deal with if it were just a conflict of interest caused by the marketing manager's leaking of sensitive information. However, James couldn't shake off the feeling that this was an act of revenge

made by Joseph. Although he might not have been aware of it at that time, since he was the son of that person, he must also be someone formidable, so they couldn't afford to let their guard down.

"There's something else I have to deal with. Charlie, I'll leave this to you," James ordered. He wanted to first find out the reason why Joseph refused to cooperate with them and cross out all the possibilities.

After Charlie gave him his word, James left the conference room.

"So, what are you going to do about it?" Lina asked Charlie, who had suddenly turned silent.

"What do you want me to do?" Charlie hurled back at her in a rather unpleasant tone.

"It's up to you. But, let me just remind you to be careful, and remember to keep your personal interests separate from the company's," Lina replied in a cold tone.

Then, she cast Charlie a quick glance and walked out of the conference room. 'Well, even if you want to play favorites, that's going to depend on whether I will allow it or not. I know what you care about the most. If you don't cooperate obediently, I will definitely make you regret it,' Lina thought to herself before walking away, her eyes full of resentment.

Even though Lina and Charlie were about to tie the knot, there was a good chance that they were only going to make use of each other until they got sick of each other. Charlie used the baby in her belly to secure his position in the family, but he disliked Lina being insatiable.

After being together with him for a period of time, Lina found out that Charlie only cared about his position in the Synder Group and that he didn't like her at all. What she found ever more embarrassing was how her baby's future father still hadn't forgotten about Ashley and kept giving her the cold shoulder. Lina used to hold Charlie in high regard, but after seeing those men who were much more handsome and excellent than him appear around Ashley, her feelings of admiration for him began to fade away. Right now, she only had her eyes on getting as much properties as she could from the Synder Group.

Little by little, seeds of distrust and disgust started to take root in their hearts. Whenever they were left alone in a room, the two of them would simply ignore each other.

After Lina left, Charlie started to chew the cud about the best way to deal with this issue. If at all possible, he didn't want Ashley to leave the company, but Lina wanted the exact opposite. Moreover, his father was a very cautious and ruthless man, so there was no way he would keep anyone or anything that would pose a threat to him by his side. Now, Lina had already presented substantial evidence to make his father suspect Ashley. At any rate, there was no denying the fact that Ashley was close to Joseph. His father's words were loud and clear that they needed to figure out a way to reduce the damage that had been dealt to the company. Charlie went over the situation with a fine-tooth comb. In order to earn his father's trust and approval, and for his own future development as well, he had made up his mind.

Clueless of the fact that someone was secretly hatching a plot against her, Ashley went on and did her job as usual, enjoying the calm before the storm.

The following day, at the end of the team meeting, Ashley received a pink slip from her superior. In her opinion, the reason for her dismissal was completely ridiculous. It stated that she was being suspected of divulging confidential information about the company. So, in order to ensure the safety of the company, she had to be laid off. The person who issued the letter of dismissal was Charlie.

As soon as she received this letter, in order to fight for her rights and interests, Ashley brought it to the general manager's office and looked for Charlie.

After knocking on the door of Charlie's office, Ashley put the letter on his desk. Watching Charlie who was sitting on the other side, she asked, "What's going on?"

This was the first time that Ashley had ever been to his office since they called their relationship quits. Charlie looked at Ashley, who looked so beautiful and stunning, standing in front of him. Trying so hard to keep his heart from pounding loudly in his chest, he calmly replied, "It's just as the letter said. The financial crisis that we are going through was caused by the Empire Group's refusal to cooperate with us, and you seem to have a very close relationship with the CEO of the Empire Group, Joseph Marshall. Because of this, you are being suspected of divulging the confidential information about the company to the other party, which resulted in this incident."

After saying this, Charlie pushed a stack of photos to the other side of his desk, hinting for Ashley to have a look.

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Ashley picked up the photos lying on the table and looked at each of them. They were mostly photos of her and Joseph that were taken at the party. But, so what? It didn't prove anything. "Are you seriously accusing me of leaking sensitive information about the company just because of these photos?" she sneered, looking Charlie straight in the eye.

"The company's safety is our number one priority. Given the situation we're in, I have no choice but to lay you off. This is what's best for you and the company." The reason might have seemed a little far-fetched, but Charlie still managed to say this in a rather firm and indifferent tone.

"This is preposterous! Where would I even get the company's information? And what makes you think that I am in any position to influence Joseph's decisions?" Ashley retorted.

"As the head of the marketing department, you were the one who negotiated with them on behalf of the company at the beginning. There's a good chance that you found out confidential information about the company at that time. As for why you can influence Joseph's decisions, that will depend on whatever kind of agreement or relationship you have with him. You probably have your own motives." As he said these words, Charlie thought of all the times he had seen Ashley next to different excellent men. He felt a jolt of pain in his chest, which made him seem a little anxious.

When Ashley found out that Charlie was making an allegation without even an iota of evidence to support it, it really ruffled her feathers. For so many years, she had worked like a dog for the Synder Group, but how did they repay her? She was fired because someone blackened her name.

Charlie was so overcome by resentment that he didn't even notice Ashley's sudden coldness. Seeing that she remained silent for a moment, he thought that she was just at such a loss for words, so he said again, "Can't think of

anything to say, huh? The decision is final. You have been fired by the company. So, there is no point in talking more. You may leave!”

“Who would want to stay in a company that can’t even keep public interests separate from private interests? But, if you think that I’m just going to let it go, then you’re sadly mistaken. You can’t fire me without giving a reasonable explanation.” Trying her best to keep her composure, Ashley turned around and left.

On her way back from Charlie’s office to her office, she heard her co-workers whispering about her. Although she couldn’t make out what they were saying, she guessed that word about her leaking sensitive information about the company had reached the other employees. Of course, she didn’t like what was happening, but she knew that, just as Charlie said, there was no use saying anything more at this point, as it would only make the situation worse. So, she decided to just hold her tongue and let their words go in one ear and out the other as she walked to her office under the accusing eyes of her colleagues.

When she was about to walk back into her department, several colleagues approached her and asked anxiously, “Manager, what happened? Why are they accusing you of leaking sensitive information about the company? People are saying that you caused this financial crisis.”

The Synder Group might not have suffered a heavy blow from the financial crisis, but this concerned the company’s reputation and best interests, as well as the welfare of the employees. As a result, when everyone heard that all of it was caused by one of the employees who leaked sensitive information about the company, they were filled with righteous indignation. Ashley was a prominent figure in the Synder Group, not just because she broke up with Charlie a few days ago, but also because of her remarkable appearance and expertise. This had become a hot potato in the company at the moment, and a lot of people were arguing because of it. Those who were familiar with her stood up and spoke for her, and her colleagues from the marketing department quickly came over to ask what was happening and expressed their concern.

Ashley knew that her colleagues were worried about her, but she just didn’t know where to start. How was she supposed to explain everything to them? Of course, she could just tell them upfront that the company’s senior managers suspected her of leaking company’s information based solely on some photos that were taken at the party, but that wouldn’t be a good idea.

After all, even if her colleagues believed her and were dissatisfied with the decision of the senior managers, none of them would be able to do anything about it. What was worse, it could even affect their career prospects, because at the end of the day, only the voices of powerful people could be heard in this society. Therefore, it would be better not to tell them anything lest they get involved in the mess she was in. Besides, whether she told them or not wouldn't make that much of a difference.

"Don't worry. I'll take care of it. You should go back to work," Ashley told her colleagues in her usual cold and indifferent tone.

"But the rumor is spreading like wildfire. Manager, you can't just let them talk behind your back and insult you like this..." her colleagues insisted, feeling so anxious.

All her colleagues in the marketing department had faith in her. Although Ashley was usually cold and strict towards her subordinates, they knew that she was actually a warm-hearted person deep inside. Aside from always giving everyone advice and support on their work, she was also very easy to get along with. Knowing this, they believed that she wasn't the type of person who would sell out the company to anyone. There was no way she would do such a thing. However, since Ashley seemed awfully calm, they couldn't help worrying about her and got so worked up.

Seeing this, Ashley waved her hand to calm them down and gave her word. "All right, I want you to know that I didn't do any of that, and I will do everything I can until I get justice for myself." With everyone's eyes on her as they eagerly listened to what she was going to say, she went on and continued, "The truth shall prevail. I appreciate your kindness, but please don't worry about me. Now go back to work!" After giving them an answer, she gave an order as a strict superior.

When they saw her filled with aplomb, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. They had complete trust in her, so they did as she said and went back to their desks one after another.

After putting her colleagues' minds at ease, she walked into her office. She saw that all her things had already been packed and placed on top of her desk. Upon a closer look, she noticed that there was a note on the box that said, "Ashley, I told you you would regret it!"

As soon as she read the note, she knew right away who wrote it. She sat down in her chair and sighed, “Lina, why do you always have to be so against me?” It seemed that the company needed an Aunt Sally right now to cover up the company’s issue to the public and the other employees. And since she happened to have a so-called ‘close relationship’ with the central figure involved in the issue, she had to be laid off. This was definitely a plot Lina had hatched to get her kicked out of the Synder Group. What was more, she even rubbed her success in her face. How despicable she was!

At that time, the despicable woman, Lina, was lazily sitting in her office and happily leafing the documents she had just brought over from Ashley’s desk. She was certain that there was nothing Ashley could do to get out of this situation anymore, which meant that she had finally succeeded in kicking her out of the Synder Group this time.

When Lina joined the marketing department, she became colleagues with Ashley. During her first few days there, the two of them were dubbed as the “marketing twins” by everyone in the company. However, as time went by, Lina’s true colors were revealed little by little, and everyone started distancing themselves from her. In the end, the more capable and graceful Ashley got promoted to the manager of the marketing department. When Lina saw that Ashley got a higher position and was well-loved by their colleagues, she grew more and more jealous of her. Later on, she went so far as to hook up with Charlie just to get a rise out of Ashley.

She had been dying to kick Ashley out of the Synder Group for so long. In her opinion, ever since she met Ashley, her sense of pride as the center of everyone’s attention had slowly been eaten up, and everything she wanted had been taken away by Ashley, which made her resent her even more. Needless to say, Lina was the one who plotted to kick Ashley out of the company by taking advantage of the state of confusion the company was in. First, she searched for the photos of Ashley and Joseph that were taken at the party. Then, she handed over these pieces of ‘evidence’ to the distrustful CEO of the Synder Group, James. Finally, she spread the rumor that Ashley leaked the company’s sensitive information to the employees, and she intended this to be the final nail in the coffin.

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Now that the letter of dismissal had already been issued and received, it was impossible for Ashley to defend herself. Lina thought of doing Ashley a favor by helping her pack her stuff so that she could leave without any hassle. At that moment, Lina was immensely proud of her being so 'thoughtful' toward Ashley.

Ashley sat in her office, lost in thought. Like a hurricane, Yasmin rushed in angrily, but her voice was heavy with worry when she asked, "What's wrong, Ashley? People have been saying that you've been fired. Is that true?"

As a response, Ashley only looked at her.

Seeing that she didn't reply, Yasmin guessed that her friend was feeling depressed because of the rumors spreading in the company grapevine. Clearing her throat, she indignantly exclaimed, "Those bastards outside are talking nonsense. How could they do that? Don't take it to heart, Ashley."

As soon as she heard from someone in her department the rumor about Ashley leaking the company's sensitive information and getting fired for corporate espionage, Yasmin immediately hurried to her friend's office to find out the actual situation. Yasmin would never have believed that her friend would do such a thing—after all, she had no reason and nothing to gain for doing so. She was the sort of person who could never be swayed by money and vested interests because her moral compass disdained such unscrupulous actions. Knowing what she did about Ashley, Yasmin unconditionally believed her friend.

"Calm down. What they've been saying is true." In face of Yasmin's question, Ashley didn't appear to be too downcast. Now, everything was clear to her. Lina, who was in a higher position, used this method to get rid of her, and people in the company all knew that. Now, it was useless to say anything more. She was innocent, and sooner or later, she would get justice for herself.

In the face of her friend's composure, Yasmin thought for a while and said nothing. The two women's long-standing friendship made Yasmin confident that she knew her friend's character. She had always been calm, shown grace under pressure, and had incredible foresight. Although such a disaster had occurred to her, she still managed to remain calm. Even so, she knew that Ashley had gone through a horrible ordeal so she decided not to say anything that would make her friend sad.

At this thought, Yasmin calmed down. However, as she drew closer to Ashley's desk, the first thing she noticed was the open notice on top of a box filled with Ashley's belongings. Once again, the agitated excitement that she had just tried to suppress rose to the surface. "Who wrote this? What a b!tch! Tell me who it is, and I will slap the hell out of them!"

Ashley stood up from her chair and grabbed Yasmin's arm, saying, "Calm down. It's Lina."

"I know it's that stupid woman—she's always made your life here at the office miserable. What an a.ssh0le. One of these days, I'll kick her a.ss so bad, she'll go crying for mommy." The curses fell unchecked from Yasmin's lips. She couldn't help it—the horrible woman actually dared to do such a thing!

"Hush. Calm down. A clean hand needs no washing. I will get even with her sooner or later." Ashley's eyes took on a sharp glitter.

Yasmin noticed the change of expression in her eyes. Ashley was never a pushover, and she always followed the principle of "I won't attack unless I'm attacked". Now that Lina had completely provoked her, she'd better not blame her for retaliating in kind!

"Ashley, I've made up my mind. I want to follow you. We can still live happily. To hell with the Synder Group!" Yasmin fumed in righteous indignation, empathizing with her friend's mood.

Amused by Yasmin's bold words, Ashley commented in a relaxed tone, "Focus on your work first, and then I will consider taking you with me once I get settled down." As she spoke, she sorted through her belongings and prepared to leave.

While they were talking, Lina suddenly made an appearance in the office and shot Ashley a smug smile.

Lina's figure had yet to show her pregnancy, but she had changed her previous preference for high-heeled shoes usually that were at least 10 cm high, as well as her habit of swiveling her hips and twisting her waist. Besides, her makeup wasn't as heavy as she usually wore it. It seemed like she actually cared about the baby inside her. Was she actually developing a maternal instinct, or did she have some hidden agenda? Well, who knew?

“Hey, it’s the famous flower peacock! Why aren’t you twisting your waist and showing off your figure today? Or could it be...you can’t move your waist?” Yasmin remarked sarcastically. She detested that smug look on the other woman’s face.

Without a doubt, Lina felt the barbs in Yasmin’s words. By calling her a flower peacock, the woman was implying that she’s using her unborn child to get her desired position and, even worse, she was old. She kept her anger to herself, for now. Once Ashley was out of the picture, she wouldn’t let Yasmin get away with her insults.

Glaring at Yasmin, Lina affected an air of superiority and asked in a snide voice, “Yasmin, is the planning department so idle? How dare you kill time on company hours and talk against your superior? Your pay will be docked this month!”

‘Bitch!’ Yasmin cursed inwardly. ‘I have money, so I’m not afraid of getting my salary slashed. What I’m afraid of is not having enough self-control to stop myself from kicking your a.ss.’ Yasmin was about to commit insubordination against her “superior” in order to vent her anger when Ashley tugged at her hand and signaled for her to not say anything.

“Lina, what brings you here?” Ashley asked with a stone face. Lina looked like she wanted to say something, so she continued, “How can you stand there and scold other people? Look at yourself—you’re out of post without leave. Are you saying that you’re entitled to special treatment?” After a loaded pause, she wondered aloud, “It must be because of your heavy makeup—is that why you’re so thick-skinned?”

Lina tried to interrupt her multiple times, but Ashley’s cold tone brooked no argument. Finally, her expression twisted unpleasantly.

She was about to retort when Yasmin butted in, “Ah, no wonder! Upon a closer look, I’m afraid our Deputy General Manager’s wrinkles couldn’t be covered by that heavy makeup she’s wearing right now. I can’t even tell if it’s makeup or her thick skin—which is it, do you think?” Yasmin asked in an inquisitive tone, and then her expression changed like she just had an epiphany.

Lina looked incensed after being attacked by both Ashley and Yasmin. She repeatedly told herself to calm down. She came here to see a joke, not to be the one being laughed at.

After a few calming breaths, a sneer appeared on her lips. “Enough! Ashley, I’m appointed by my superior to supervise you to pack up and get out of the Synder Group.”

‘Now that we have broken up, there’s no need to be polite. Now let’s see how you can still be calm.’ Looking coldly at the well-dressed and elegant Ashley, Lina vowed to herself, ‘You’re done for, Ashley. Even if you leave the Synder Group, I won’t stop until your reputation is in ruins.’ A malicious glint flashed in her eyes.

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“No need for that. I am more than capable of walking by myself.” Ashley picked up the things on the table and walked towards the door of the office, ignoring Lina who was coming over to ‘help’.

Yasmin trailed closely behind her, but when she passed Lina she pretended not to see her foot and stepped on it hard before she went proudly on her way. If it wasn’t for the fact that Lina was pregnant, Yasmin would have slapped her across her face and slammed the door on her. The woman was really lucky that it was just her foot she stepped on.

Lina gritted her teeth in pain because she couldn’t scream out. Suddenly, the door flung open and the rest of the employees from the department streamed in, surrounding the trio. For the sake of her professional image, she held back from showing any sign of pain.

At this moment, Yasmin turned around and caught a glimpse of Lina, who was standing tall with a straight back and a pale face. A wicked smile tugged at the corner of her lips at this sight. The smile was not lost on Lina who glared fiercely back at her. Yasmin, of course, pretended to be scared which made Lina’s anger only grow.

When the other colleagues noticed Ashley’s small box and Lina’s smug face, it wasn’t hard to guess what had happened. Everyone looked at Lina with expressions that ranged from disappointment to disgust. This woman had been picking on Ashley from the beginning. She even stole Ashley’s boyfriend, but she didn’t stop there. She framed her and drove her out of the company. How vicious could this woman be!

“I’ll be taking over the marketing department after Manager Guzman leaves,” Lina announced to everyone as she tried to regain her composure. “After all, I’ve worked with you for a long time. Does any of you have a problem with this?”

All the colleagues ignored her. No one dare say no to this woman. Everyone turned their attention to Ashley. They knew that their manager was being asked to step down and were sad to see her go. They gathered around her to bid her farewell. Many of them expressed their reluctance at her sudden departure.

Watching her colleagues ignore her was painful. Worse still, their concern for Ashley only made Lina feel more resentful. Their preference of Ashley over her was a bitter pill to swallow.

Ashley was moved by their concern. They were a loyal bunch and she was grateful for such a strong team. As she looked beyond them, she couldn’t help but notice Lina’s acrimonious eyes. Lina was vexed! Ashley did not want to cause any further trouble or jeopardize the future of her colleagues, so she said, “Thank you, everyone. It has been an absolute pleasure working with you. Let’s part here. Don’t forget to keep giving the work your best. If I can be of any help to you in future, please do not hesitate to contact me.”

She turned around, picked up her things and walked towards the exit. A male colleague stepped away from the group and hurried towards her. He extended his arm and took her box from her. “Manager, may I help you with your things?” he asked.

His request was so sincere that Ashley found it hard to say no. She nodded at him, and he smiled back. After taking a few steps, she paused and turned around once more. Everyone stood rooted to the ground as they watched her leave. Goodbyes are always bittersweet. Each of them contributed to her experience here at work. They made the effort worthwhile. For that she would always be grateful. “All of you have your own unique talent that has made my time here unforgettable. Keep bringing your best selves to work and you will have a bright future. Come on!” After saying that, she made a gesture of cheering to the crowd and turned away. The male colleague followed her with her things.

“Alright, enough of staring. Get back to work now.” Lina clapped her hands to get the attention of her colleagues. Watching everyone’s faces flooded with concern for Ashley only irked her further. Grinding her teeth, she tried to maintain her composure and hide her anger from her colleagues. She remembered what those people said and did today and would definitely get they paid for their complete indifference to her.

After saying goodbye to Yasmin and the man, Ashley hailed a taxi to take her back to her apartment. In the cab, her mind raced. She had to make a plan. She couldn’t tell Mike that she was fired. She did not want him to worry. He had enough on his plate. Anyway, she was used to being independent and dealing with her problems by herself. She would find a way to solve this situation on her own. First, she needed to investigate the events that led to her being fired. They made no sense to her, and she had to get to the bottom of it. She had to uncover the truth.

She had lost her job without just cause. It would be a lie to say that she didn’t feel anything. Deep down, she sensed her own anxiety, but she pushed it away. She shut her eyes and leaned back against the leather seat as she made a plan to protect her rights and interests. If Lina didn’t give her a satisfactory explanation, she would make her regret her actions. She had to let the other woman know she was never a pushover.

At her apartment, she put her things down and slid off her heels. She knew there was a lot to get done and she did not have much time. After a quick tidying up of her things, she sat down at the dining table, removed her laptop from its case and got down to business. While at college, she had a part-time job in an intelligence agency. She remembered her colleagues vividly. They were a group of highly talented individuals with diverse skills. Their perspectives on how to approach challenges fascinated her. This small, largely unknown intelligence agency once encountered a crisis and was going to shut down because of a lack of funds. Ashley found the business very promising, and she knew it would be a pity to lose such a talented team. They worked like a well-oiled machine. After pondering on the agency’s future for a while, she made the bold, and some would say impulsive, decision to buy the largely unknown intelligence agency with the life savings. This was hard-earned money that she collected from her part-time jobs over the years. The management was stunned to find out a young girl had saved them. For grown, conservative men, this was a slap in their faces. When realizing there was no other way, they finally came to terms with this reality and were determined to improve their ability of intelligence collection to pay back their benefactor.

At that time, Ashley couldn't bear to see the intelligence agency fold. It would mean letting down those who loved this job. As was always the case with her, she put their needs first and wanted to help them ride this crisis out. She repeatedly explained to the leadership that she wanted to help them. It was not about ousting the management and taking over. She was merely offering an olive branch to help them get out of this crisis. When they had sufficient funds, she would gladly hand it back, without a second thought. Her sincerity convinced the agency's founder. The business had turned around since then, but Ashley retained her ownership rights behind the scenes. Apart from checking the accounts and collecting her annual bonuses, she did not need to do anything more. Today, the intelligence agency's clientele had grown multifold and profits continued to stream in. Those men were indebted to their benefactor for not losing their jobs. In fact, they were deeply grateful to her and would like to investigate anything for her if the boss ordered it. No questions asked.

She picked up the phone and dialed the agency. After chatting with the team, Ashley felt much better. Speaking to them was refreshing. They reminded her that people were not all bad. Despite her terrible experiences, sincerity and empathy did exist. These people were genuine in their care for her, and this made her anger towards Lina melt away.

After entrusting the task to them, she knew she needed to wait. This investigation would definitely take time if it was going to expose some of the ugly sides of the Synder Group. She also wanted to find out what Joseph had against the Synder Group.

As Joseph's cold and stern face appeared in her mind, angry thoughts flooded her. She felt that since getting to know him, her life had been full of bad luck. First, she lost her virginity in a meaningless way, then she faced setbacks in her career, and now she was fired. It dawned on her that he was her nemesis.

In actuality, Charlie and Lina were the culprit of her bad luck. But it was time to pay back what they had done. She paused and took a deep breath. Shaking her head, she tried to get rid of her messy thoughts. This was not who she was. With a loud sigh, she picked up a financial magazine and flipped through its pages distractedly.