

Perfect Match: Irresistible Desire For You – Chapter 81 - Tips

'Is Joseph a proud man?' Ashley quickly dismissed the thought. A man that was as cold and sophisticated as he was wouldn't care to keep up appearances. She blamed his outburst on his state of moodiness at the time.

The only thing she was blissfully unaware of, was that when a person began to care about another, their opinions and comments suddenly meant the world. Even Joseph was no exception to this phenomenon.

After she finished packing up her belongings, Ashley strode over to Joseph's room next door.

"I'm ready. We should leave soon." Ashley flashed Joseph a bright smile when he opened the door. His previous outburst was already forgotten to her.

When Joseph saw the excited look on Ashley's face, he suddenly couldn't help but forget about how upset she had made him just now. The feeling of losing control of his emotions suddenly overwhelmed him. He was used to being in charge and regarded himself for his ability to control his emotions.

'Am I deeply in love with her? When did this happen? In the short time we've spent together, I've never felt happier and more at ease. All of a sudden, the burdens of the business world, and the fatigue I've felt from flattery and deception suddenly feel far away. This pure woman, Ashley, has bewitched me.

If it weren't for this beautifully effervescent woman in front of me, would I ever get to experience sunshine in my world? Perhaps I should stop feeling sad for my parent's love story, and find my own love.'

As she observed the shift in Joseph's eyes and the way his features suddenly tightened, Ashley immediately knew that he had some pressing matters troubling him. She told him, "Mr. Marshall, if I said something to offend you just now, I'd like to apologize. We should do our best to enjoy this trip. Come on, smile at me."

Ashley beamed at him as she spoke. Her beautiful face looked rosy and full of life. Joseph couldn't help but burst out laughing at how adorable she looked.

Shocked by his reaction, Joseph immediately stopped laughing and replied in a serious tone, "Bring your suitcase with you. We won't be staying here tonight."

Ashley was momentarily stunned at how dazzling Joseph looked when he smiled genuinely. It was a beautiful and rare sight! She also didn't see herself as the type of person who placed great importance on appearances. Besides, she had seen a lot of handsome men in her life. However, she couldn't help but be attracted to Joseph.

It took her a moment before she could come back to her senses. With an unsatisfied smile, she obediently returned to her room and dragged her suitcase out.

Joseph stared at her retreating figure with a content smile on his face. 'It would be worth it to smile more often if she would always react this way. Getting along with her like this feels good!' Joseph suddenly felt a strong desire for long-lasting love.

When Ashley got back to her room, she recalled the smile on Joseph's face and felt butterflies in her stomach all over again. She was confused by her strong reaction to him whenever he was near her these past couple of days. In the past, she had always been calm and collected around men. Now, she found herself succumbing to her emotional impulses more often. 'Am I falling for this cold and elegant man?' After pondering over her thoughts for a few moments, Ashley was able to draw up some conclusions.

'First, we're only traveling together. Joseph isn't the kind of man I normally gravitate towards. He's too cold for my liking. If it weren't for my efforts to engage with him, this trip would be dull.

Second, I'm acting differently because I've been in a good mood more often lately.

Third, Joseph's presence does things to me. It's hard to stay composed when he's near me.

Fourth, Joseph's smile is so intoxicating that any woman would have trouble resisting him. It was normal for me to react that way when he smiled at me.'

After getting her thoughts in order, Ashley felt more at ease.

“If we’re not staying here tonight, where are we going to stay? Should we go camping?” Ashley asked Joseph as she sat on the passenger seat.

This car was spacious and comfortable, and specifically made for off-road traveling. Joseph especially requested this car to travel in. Ashley’s chest tightened with anxiety when she suddenly recalled how rich and powerful Joseph was. She didn’t complain though, since having their own car was more convenient than commuting.

Now, Ashley was curious about where they would stay tonight. The possibility of them camping was enough to get her excited. It was also a part of her initial travel itinerary.

Traveling with a person like Joseph, the risk of camping with him was not even worth mentioning. Joseph finally answered her question and replied, “Okay.”

It took them an hour to get from Mexico City to the north of Otziwakan, where the Moon Pyramid was located. When they arrived at the picturesque spot, the first thing they noticed was the ancient Moon Pyramid. The two hundred steps of the ancient building were tilted at different angles, which gave the structure a magnificent and mysterious aura.

“The sun is bright here. Did you bring sunscreen with you?” Joseph was concerned that she would get sunburnt and thought to remind her in a soft voice. Ashley was awe-struck as she looked at the Moon Pyramid. The bright sunshine illuminated her delicate face and made her look like she was glowing.

“Thanks for reminding me! I wanted to put on some sunscreen.” Ashley took out the sunscreen from her purse and gracefully applied it to her face, neck, and arms.

However, as she squeezed the bottle to get more sunscreen, she accidentally dispensed too much onto her palm. She was stunned for a moment before she looked up at Joseph and asked, “Do you want some sunscreen too?”

“No, thank you,” he refused without hesitation. It would damage his image if someone saw him applying a product that was only meant for women.

“What’s the big deal? This will protect you from the sun. Everyone needs that.” Ashley tried her best to persuade the arrogant Joseph.

She rubbed her palms together, stood on her tiptoes, and stretched out slender arms to rub the lotion on Joseph’s face. Joseph was quick to react and leaned back before she could get any on his face.

If another person had dared to touch him this intimately, he would’ve broken their arm by now. Since it was Ashley Joseph tried not to fight back, nor step away from her since she would fall if he did that. He merely angled his face away from her.

As a result, Ashley fell onto Joseph’s chest. With a gasp, she instinctively wrapped her arms around his neck to catch her fall.

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“Ouch! My nose!” Ashley raised her head from Joseph’s chest and complained with tearful eyes.

As she stood millimeters away from Joseph’s handsome face, a thought suddenly came to Ashley. She quickly unwrapped her arms from him and smeared the sunscreen onto his face. She rubbed her delicate nose as she said with a smile, “Look, you can’t escape this.”

After spending more time with Joseph, she realized that he was a cold man with a warm heart. Gradually, getting along with him came more effortlessly to her. However, just as she thought she finally succeeded in applying the sunscreen to him, she didn’t realize that attempting to touch his face was a grave mistake.

The moment she fell into his arms, Joseph’s heart began to race. He didn’t expect the emotional impact the mere act of having her face buried in his chest could have for him. The soft scent of her hair, coupled with the warmth and feel of her slender body against his suddenly made his entire body hot.

His sudden surge of desire for her overwhelmed him. When Ashley moved away from him, relief and disappointment warred inside of him.

When he saw her tearful eyes and sheepish laughter, he didn't know how to respond. 'How dare she tease me like this. She even has the nerve to show off like this! I'll make sure not to let her go next time.'

After their close encounter, Joseph couldn't help but think back to the initial attraction and passion they felt for one another. As he looked at her smiling face, he realized it would take a long time before he could get hold of himself.

"Now that you've gotten some on my face, you have to help me spread it out," he finally said to her. The sunscreen was cool against his skin, and he immediately missed the warmth that radiated from her palms.

'He has a point. I never do things halfway. I don't think it would be a good idea to give him the cold-shoulder and make him put the sunscreen on by himself.' Ashley walked up to Joseph to continue what she was doing.

"Can you lean forward? You're too tall for me," she ordered after she felt her legs beginning to ache after standing on her toes for a few moments.

Her request was spoken in a soft murmur, but Joseph heard it clearly. He was stunned by her question and thought to himself, 'Is it wrong to be tall? I thought I had good genes...'

Joseph obliged nonetheless and leaned over slightly so she didn't have to tiptoe. He could feel the warmth from her tender palms, and her unique scent lingered on the tip of his nose. As he looked at her serious face as she focused on the task at hand, the desire stirring inside him suddenly felt uncontrollable. Not wanting to disrupt the intimate moment they were sharing, Joseph didn't say anything more to interrupt her.

Ashley raised her head and continued to apply sunscreen onto his face. She carefully regarded his handsome features as she did so. After a few moments of touching the strong features of his face, she couldn't help but marvel at his masculine beauty.

"Alright. Why is your face getting warmer?" When she finished putting the sunscreen on his face, she felt his face begin to grow warm.

Joseph immediately leaned back and replied in a husky voice, "Friction generates heat, that's all."

'Is that so?' Ashley assumed it was because he was exposed to direct sunlight and because she was touching him. She decided not to think too much of his reaction.

Striding over to the car, she took a few more bottles of water with her and placed them inside her bag. Then, she wore her hat, picked up a mirror-less camera, and began to walk towards the Pyramid. Before she could walk further, she called out to Joseph, "Let's go. We need to reach the top!"

Joseph stood in awe as he watched Ashley walk forward with her bag in hand. He couldn't help but laugh at her determination. He was almost overwhelmed by desire at the mere sight of her just now. Unconsciously, he placed a hand on his face and touched it. It was relatively hot at the time, so she was convinced by his lackluster excuse.

They slowly climbed up the Pyramid under the blistering sun. When they reached a scenic area, Ashley would stop to appreciate the colorful murals painted on the rocks piled outside. She would even take a few pictures to document the moment. Joseph didn't want to disturb her, since she seemed utterly mesmerized by her surroundings. He merely looked at her and answered whatever questions she had for him.

They walked and stopped along the way, and Joseph made sure to stay close to her as often as he could. Dressed in her light outfit, Ashley was besotted with the scenery around her as the pyramid steps grew steeper and steeper.

She was particularly interested in the Pyramid of the Moon, which had a deep cultural and historical background. In addition to taking pictures, she would occasionally take her phone out to search for any note-worthy areas, and then go from there.

After they shared a simple lunch, they continued to move forward. When they reached the top of the pyramid, they stayed there for about an hour. Ashley took pictures from all angles. On the other hand, Joseph wasn't keen on taking pictures, so she just asked him to take a few of her.

There was a large crowd of tourists at the Pyramid, and some were good-looking foreign men. A few of them were busy enjoying the scenery, while others were taking pictures of themselves, or with their friends. When Ashley moved to take a picture of the handsome men, Joseph suddenly appeared in front of her and said, "You can take a picture of me."

Joseph had been paying close attention to Ashley the entire time. He didn't feel particularly interested in the scenery around them, but it was a joy for him to see the way her face lit up when she saw them. During the trip, Ashley's full attention was on appreciating the beguiling scenery around them. Her face displayed emotions of joy and wonder, which looked effortless and natural on her.

Joseph took photos for Ashley whenever she requested them. At the same time, Joseph also took out his phone to take his own pictures. In the photos he took, there was a beautiful woman who smiled at the setting sun, cast in its warm glow.

While Joseph was taking the time to appreciate the pictures of Ashley on his mobile phone, the latter looked at the men nearby with a cunning look. He immediately knew what she was planning to do. She wanted to take photos of the "handsome men". Although Joseph wasn't fond of taking photos, it was better for him to do that rather than see her taking pictures of other men. It came as instinct for Joseph to step in and prevent Ashley from taking pictures of others.

When she heard his request, Ashley was stunned for a few moments. She had no idea why Joseph suddenly asked this of her. However, when she heard the firm tone of his voice and saw the domineering look in his eyes, she immediately picked up her camera to take photos of him.

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When she looked back at the photos she took of Joseph, she couldn't help but think that his exquisite face rivaled the fashion shots of male models she had seen in the past. Even when he didn't smile, his eyes were enough to draw you in. Dressed in a casual t-shirt and trousers that showed off his slender and muscled figure, he looked effortlessly beautiful.

Although he looked dashing in his pictures, Ashley didn't think it was appropriate to show them to her friend, who requested photos of handsome foreign men. More than that, if Yasmin got her hands on a photo of Joseph, she would surely ask questions that Ashley wasn't prepared to answer. Last time, Ashley managed to deceive her, but she didn't think she would be as lucky the second time around.

Joseph, who was standing next to Ashley, noticed that she was awe-struck as she looked over his photos. He couldn't help but smile at the adoring look on her face as she scrutinized his photos.

The truth was, Joseph was a bit full of himself, and her reaction did nothing to squash his ever-growing ego.

However, when he saw that Ashley was eyeing a man in front of her and was moving to take the man's picture, Joseph's face immediately darkened.

Ashley moved over closer to the man and took a picture of him. He quickly caught up to her, pulled her back, and ordered in a cold voice, "Delete that."

"What's wrong?" Ashley was distraught by the sudden shift in his mood. Flustered by how unreasonably he was suddenly acting, she decided to stand her ground against him.

"No reason. If I tell you to delete something, it means you have to delete it," he explained with a stony face.

'Are you kidding me? It's not like you need pictures of other men in your photo album!' Joseph snorted to himself.

"Why are you acting so unreasonably?" she shot back.

'What's going on with you? I want to take a picture for my friend, but now you want me to delete it? Are you joking?' Ashley wasn't keen on obliging him.

She shook his arm away and stormed off. He merely held his breath and watched as she walked away from him.

This woman was the first person who ever dared to disobey him and even become angry with him. He had no idea what to do with her. It wasn't like he could beat her or scold her, and the girl didn't seem to be afraid of him.

The two remained silent as they stood on the top of the pyramid. The mood between them suddenly became cold.

After a few moments, they both decided to head back down in silence. It was getting late, and the temperature was quickly dropping.

Ashley shrugged her coat on before she had a simple dinner of dry food and water. Then, she took the tent out from the trunk and set it up for herself. She quickly prepared her bed and entered the tent. Not one word was spoken between the two.

Leaning against the car, Joseph quietly watched Ashley set up their campsite. He assumed she would ask him for help when she set the tent up, but she managed to do it without saying a word to him. The moment she fixed up her bed, Joseph went over to talk to her, but she immediately closed the door of the tent when he came closer.

Only now did he realize how unpredictable she could be. 'Really? Is this how it's going to be? It's not like I said anything harsh! Why is she giving me the cold shoulder? If this were another person, I would've given them an earful by now!' Joseph thought to himself as he prepared his tent.

Ashley couldn't understand why she was so concerned about how Joseph felt. Why did she feel so uncomfortable? The fact that Joseph ordered her to delete the photo made her furious. What irritated her the most was that she didn't do anything to make him treat her like that. Now, he wasn't even taking the initiative to apologize to her.

As she gazed at the roof of her tent, she couldn't help but feel flustered at his lack of interest to make up with her.

When love came around, it didn't matter how wise a person was. They were bound to become blind and childish.

The night deepened, and the two soon fell asleep.

It was quiet for the most part, but then someone broke the calm in the middle of the night.

Ashley woke up when she heard a rustling sound outside her tent. By the time she opened her eyes, she saw a knife illuminated by the moonlight slicing through her tent. After that, she saw four brutish-looking men who were looking at her with predatory eyes.

"Hello, beautiful!" one of the men said as he looked over at Ashley with vulgar eyes.

She willed herself not to panic. As she observed them, she concluded that they were probably drug traffickers or unemployed vagabonds from Mexico.

She wondered if it would make a difference if she screamed or fought against them. However, she knew deep down that there was no way for her to beat four men by herself, with nothing to defend herself with.

All of a sudden, she realized that if she found Joseph, he might be able to save her. Her insides flared with hope, but the problem was, she had no idea where Joseph was, and she never got a chance to memorize his phone number.

As she listened to the men discuss who would enjoy her first, her panic grew ten-fold. She inched away from them while they were busy bickering with one another.

However, one of the men noticed that she was moving away from them. He lunged forward and grabbed her by the leg. "You b!tch! How dare you try to run away!"

When she saw the other men move towards her, Ashley screamed in a terrified voice, "Joseph! Help me!"

She could only hope that Joseph would be nearby. Another man grabbed her free leg, and she couldn't run away from them. Her only hope was that Joseph would save her in time.

She looked around in a panic, and could only see the darkness of the night. With both legs trapped, she could only shout, "Help!"

"Scream all you want! Let's see if someone will come to save you!" The men couldn't understand what she was saying, but they quickly covered her mouth to keep her from making more noise.

According to their sources, a foreign couple was set to camp on this deserted area tonight. The men targeted the woman's tent that night with the intention of assaulting her. They didn't dare make too much noise, because they were afraid that her strong companion would wake up. However, this infuriating woman was suddenly making a fuss and shouting for help.

When they successfully suppressed her, Ashley couldn't make any move or sound. She briefly noticed the man in front of her signal to the man beside him

to come closer. All she could do was watch in horror as they undid their belt with their brutal hands. Ashley began to sob controllably.

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While Ashley was struggling desperately to be free of them, the two men closest to her suddenly fell to the ground with a groan. The shackles on her body suddenly disappeared.

Through misty eyes, Ashley saw Joseph come into view. He looked like Ares, the god of war, as he fought the wicked men one by one. She was overwhelmed with relief when she saw him come to her aid.

The murderous look on Joseph's face made him look like the devil incarnate. He beat the men ruthlessly, sparing them no mercy. All of a sudden, one of the men picked up the knife and lunged to cut him.

"Watch out!" Joseph was preoccupied with fending off the three men that he didn't notice the man moving to stab him. Ashley rushed over and knocked out the man with the knife. The man with red-rimmed eyes noticed Ashley moving towards him, so he immediately aimed his knife towards her to cut her up.

Joseph had finished dealing with the other men by the time he noticed the man moving to attack Ashley. He gripped his wrist tightly then gave it a sharp jerk, breaking it hard. The knife rattled onto the floor as the man screamed in agony. Joseph then proceeded to kick him mercilessly.

When he was sure that they had been subdued, Joseph dialed a number and quickly issued orders before he hung up.

Ashley immediately threw herself into his arms and sobbed, "I'm so glad you were here."

"Don't worry. Everything's okay now." Her entire body trembled against him as he stroked her head gently and whispered soothing words into her ear.

She clung to Joseph's waist tightly and buried her head in the crook of his shoulder as she cried. Until now, her legs still felt a little weak.

He could feel how terrified she was, so he let her hold him and gently stroked her back to console her.

The two held each other close underneath the moonlight, closing the distance that had grown between them.

As he recalled the look of terror and desperation in Ashley's eyes when he found her, he couldn't help but feel a sharp pain in his chest. Fortunately, he had made it in time. He couldn't even picture what would have happened if he weren't there, and didn't even want to think about how painful it would've been for her.

Joseph suddenly realized how much Ashley had grown to mean to him. His heart ached with yearning every time he looked at her.

He no longer wanted to keep her at arm's length. All he could think about was how badly he wanted to protect her.

When did he fall in love with her?

After a few moments, a few people arrived at the scene. They moved to carry away the criminals still paralyzed on the ground and quickly left.

Joseph swore to himself that anyone who dared hurt the people dearest to him would suffer a horrible death.

"I'm sorry I was late," he apologized in a soft voice.

Ashley raised her head from his shoulder and replied in a soft voice, "I should thank you for helping me."

When she saw the pained look in Joseph's eyes, her heart began to race. Never would she have expected Joseph to be affectionate towards her. She had to get her thoughts in order!

He noticed that she struggled to maintain eye contact with him, and he didn't want to force her to own up to her feelings for him.

"It's late. You should get some rest." Joseph gently took Ashley's trembling hands in his and walked her over to his tent. "Try and sleep. I'll stay outside and keep watch."

Ashley noticed that Joseph set up his tent close to her, which was why he had arrived so soon to help.

She was deeply touched by everything he had done for her. Even if they had gotten into an argument earlier, he didn't want to be far from her so he could protect her.

As she looked back at her destroyed tent, she pulled him closer and said, "Can we sleep together? I'll be afraid without you." She worried that Joseph would catch a cold if he slept outside.

When she realized what she was implying, she lowered her head shyly. It was the first time she had requested such a thing from a man.

Joseph pretended to be oblivious to the shyness on her face. It was more important for her to feel comfortable so she could rest after what had just happened to her. How could he deny sleeping next to such a beautiful woman? He was happy to oblige her.

Joseph went back to her tent to take her pillow and quilt, then tidied up his tent before he let Ashley enter.

She gingerly crawled onto the bed he had made for her. Then, she heard Joseph close the door of his tent and lay down next to her.

For a long time, the only sound that could be heard was their shallow breathing. Ashley could make out the faint smell of tobacco from his bed. When she recalled how long she had sobbed in his arms, her cheeks suddenly flushed with embarrassment.

Flustered with herself, Ashley struggled to fall asleep. She gently turned to her side to see if Joseph was asleep.

As soon as she turned to face him, she came face to face with his intense eyes that heavily contrasted the dark night. She was dumbstruck for a moment at the sight.

To ease the tension she felt, she asked in a low voice, "You can't sleep either?"

"Yes," he whispered back to her.

Ashley wanted to scold herself for asking such a dumb question. It was too quiet in the tent, so she changed the topic and asked, "Did you hear me cry out for help?"

Joseph had always been vigilant whenever he slept at a new place and was a light sleeper, to begin with, so he immediately heard Ashley cry out to him. When he heard her, he immediately ripped his tent open and found her in danger.

Joseph explained briefly, "I woke up when you first screamed, and I immediately rushed out to help."

Ashley knew he wouldn't elaborate, so she didn't pry any longer.

After that, they continued to talk about other topics to distract themselves from the horrors they had just survived. "Will you watch the sunrise with me tomorrow morning?" Ashley suddenly asked.

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"Okay. You should go to sleep first," Joseph replied in a low voice when he noticed her eyes drooping.

'I've waited a long time for the person who would spend their life with me, and I've always wanted to watch the sunrise with them,' she thought to herself.

However, exhaustion overwhelmed her, and she couldn't help but fall asleep.

As he stared at her peaceful face as she slept, he reached a hand out to tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. Then, he slowly propped himself up to plant a gentle kiss on her rosy cheek.

"If you can promise yourself to me, I will give you a peaceful and happy life," he murmured against her cheek.

After a few moments, Joseph also fell asleep. In the middle of the night, he suddenly jolted awake when he felt Ashley wrap her arm around him out of the blue.

When he opened his eyes, he saw her leg peek out from underneath the quilt and cross over his knees.

Although Ashley was wearing thick pajamas, Joseph was concerned that she would get a cold. Temperatures dramatically dropped at night in Mexico. He gently tucked her arm back underneath the quilt.

However, before he could finish tucking her in, Ashley suddenly realized something. She stretched an arm out to shrug the quilt off, then moved to lie on top of Joseph's, holding him in a bear hug.

He felt helpless as he watched her toss and turn restlessly in bed.

'Did she usually sleep this way? Maybe she mistook me as her doll bear once again.' He moved to pick the discarded quilt up before he draped it over her again. When he was sure that she was covered up, he lay back down.

He could feel the warmth of her body even through the quilt. Combined with the pleasant fragrance unique to her, Joseph couldn't help but feel aroused.

The woman dared to play with fire, but he wouldn't dare to make a move on her at this moment. 'I'll be hoping for another intimate moment like this with you in the future! Just you wait!' Joseph thought to himself as he struggled to reign in his desires.

Fortunately, the morning was near. He saw the arrival of dawn through the transparent fabric of the tent. After a few moments, Joseph's desires waned, and he was able to suppress them.

He settled back onto the bed before he gently patted her cheek and whispered, "Wake up."

After calling her name a few times, Ashley's eyes finally opened, and the first thing she saw was Joseph's handsome face. She immediately sat up, and when she noticed that Joseph had draped his quilt over her, she felt embarrassed.

When she saw this, she realized that she had slept restlessly again. Joseph was pushed to the edge of the tent as they slept, and she knew that she was the culprit.

"Sorry, I'm a bad sleeper," she said sheepishly as she lowered her head.

"I know, it's alright," he reassured her in a calm voice after he saw the embarrassed expression on her face.

However, his calm reassurance only flustered her even more. She didn't want him to think she was barbaric for the way she slept last night. Ashley couldn't help but feel ashamed for what she made him endure.

If she only knew that she did the same thing the first night they slept together, she would feel even more embarrassed.

Joseph decided to stop teasing her when her cheeks flushed a scarlet red.

He opened the tent and walked out first. After that, he reached a hand out to Ashley, who still had her head lowered in shame, and said, "Come. Let's watch the sunrise together."

She looked out of the tent when she heard his magnetic voice. It was still dark outside, and Joseph's figure was cloaked in darkness. As he stretched his hand out to her, Ashley suddenly thought that he looked like a prince out of a fairytale book.

It took her a few moments to get back to her senses before she took his hand.

She blamed her slowness on the fact that she was still waking up. Smiling apologetically at Joseph, she then walked out of the tent with her hand in his.

Joseph took out two lawn chairs from the car and placed them next to the tent. Then he instructed Ashley to bundle up before she took a seat.

She followed obediently and walked over to the car to retrieve a knitted sweater. Then, she picked up the coat hanging from the driver's seat before she left the car.

"It's cold out. Why don't you also bundle up?" she said softly. She then draped the coat over his broad shoulders.

Joseph's heart warmed at her considerate words. Aside from his grandfather, he couldn't think of another person who had cared for him like this.

When she saw the wistful look on his face, she sat down next to him and held his hand. Looking into the distance, she said in a soft voice, "It might be cold outside, but we feel warm."

Her words soothed a place in his cold, lonely heart. He reveled in the feeling of her warm palm against his.

Although Joseph was a powerful and wealthy man, he found that it was difficult to come across genuine happiness in this life. Ashley's presence was like sunshine thawing the cold, dark snow after a long winter.

"Thank you," Joseph replied in a low voice. "Thank you for coming into my life."

"You're welcome," Ashley replied with a radiant smile.

"Look! The sun is rising!" Ashley pointed excitedly to the sky, which was turning red at the horizon. She quickly went back into the tent and took out her camera to document the beautiful sunrise they experienced together.

Joseph couldn't help but laugh at her child-like excitement. After spending more time with her, he realized that though she may look cold on the outside, she was just an innocent girl that yearned for love.

In the following hour, Ashley made sure to film the moment of sunrise. There were no tall buildings to obstruct the beauty of the sunrise. The sunrise here showed the pure beauty of nature.

They had spent a couple of blissful days together so far. Whenever Joseph looked at the lively expression on her face, his heart was filled with contentment every time.

Joseph recalled a line from a popular song that went, "The most romantic thing I can think of is to grow old with you." These lyrics described the longing and desire that lived in Joseph's heart. His wish was simple. All he wanted was to grow old with Ashley and to enjoy the beauty of the world with her.

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After watching the sunrise, Ashley put away the camera and cozied up to Joseph. "I haven't showered the whole day! I feel so uncomfortable," she complained in a cute way. "We have to find a place where we can shower!"

Joseph chuckled. "Sure," he replied in a deep voice. "We better start packing things up, then." With that, he began dismantling the tent.

Soon, everything they used—the tent, quilts, and beds, amongst other things—was neatly packed and ready to be loaded into their off-road vehicle.

After a whole day of contemplation and reflection, Ashley felt incredibly refreshed. Moreover, her state of mind was completely different from the one she had when they arrived. No longer did she find the handsome yet aloof Joseph cold, unapproachable, and distant—when known better, he was actually a warm and friendly person. They truly got along very well.

'He is an excellent man who is strong and has a deep sense of responsibility. I can't say that a lot of men are like that,' she thought, smiling to herself.

Memories then started filling her head: she recalled how her heart was filled with hope when she saw him in a moment of despair; when she was panicking, she found a deep sense of security in his strong arms; how even when he was in danger himself, he still found the time to help her with the crisis she was facing; and how she found sleeping beside him comforting. Ashley felt a deep sense of gratitude that she met Joseph in this trip.

A profound expression and sweet smile appeared on Ashley's beautiful face.

"What are you thinking about? You look... very happy but also absent-minded." Joseph couldn't help but ask Ashley this when he saw her in the corner of his vision. The way she looked outside the car's window made him think she was thinking about something deep.

Ashley immediately turned to Joseph when she heard his deep voice. "Nothing," she answered, smiling. "I just zone out occasionally." After a short pause, she asked, "By the way, where are we going?"

Despite spending time with him, Ashley still couldn't figure out what was going through Joseph's head from time to time. She had dropped hints that she was starting to like him, but she wasn't sure whether or not he was receptive to it. As Joseph was known to be a bit distant when it came to women, she was actually scared that he would just shun her out of the blue. These worries, however, immediately faded away when she remembered how protective he was of her over the last few days.

It was the first time Ashley had fallen in love with someone. It was a feeling so foreign to her that she was totally oblivious to the fact that Joseph was in love with her too, and that he could not wait to be with her.

“To my villa in Mexico. It’s a bit far, but I’ll drive. You can sleep while we’re on the way there,” Joseph explained.

“Sleep? No. Let’s talk! I can’t afford you being bored.” This simple act was Ashley’s way of expressing her deep care for Joseph.

“If you say so,” Joseph replied, a smile blossoming on his lips. Ashley’s tenderness made him warm inside.

“So... about yesterday’s photo. I... didn’t delete it because a good friend of mine asked me to send her a photo of a handsome foreigner.” By the end of her sentence, Ashley’s voice was almost inaudible. To her, explaining the whole thing felt weird.

Just yesterday, she insisted that Joseph should apologize for his attitude first before she gave him her reason. Today, however, she took the initiative to explain herself, as if she was admitting that she made a mistake.

Joseph was caught off guard. He didn’t really expect that Ashley was still thinking about that issue, let alone mention it all of a sudden and offer an explanation. His mood instantly improved by a whole lot—he was happy seconds ago, but now, he was ecstatic.

‘So, it turns out that she didn’t want the photo herself. Besides, that man is not better looking than me,’ he thought, smirking a bit. ‘But what kind of a friend asks a person to take a photo of other people? Seems like some boundaries need to be made with the people Ashley’s hanging out with. I need to deal with that,’ he continued.

The person Joseph was thinking about was Yasmin, who was, unfortunately, innocent. She was even forbidden to see Ashley days before her wedding! But this story was for another time.

“Well, I have to apologize. I know I didn’t act the best yesterday,” Joseph said, sincerely and happily.

Being a smart man, he had already figured out ways of doing things in front of the person he liked. For example, since the other party took the initiative to explain a previous misunderstanding, he now needed to reflect on his own so that he, too, would be able to prevent any misunderstanding in the future.

As expected, what Joseph said made Ashley happy. Since both sides had already admitted their mistake, any kind of tension between them had already disappeared.

Throughout the whole trip, the two just talked and talked and talked until they ran out of things to talk about.

“You know what, the biggest thing I gained from this trip is your company,” Joseph said as they were nearing their destination.

These sentimental words immediately made Ashley’s heart beat uncontrollably.

She blushed, and shyly replied, “Me too, Joseph.”

‘Is this some kind of a love confession?’ Glancing at Ashley’s ruddy face, Joseph wondered whether she understood what he meant.

He wanted her to know that she made the travel worthwhile. He wanted to express his love for Ashley this way, but when he saw the woman’s eyes wandering as if she wanted to end this conversation, it dawned on him that Ashley might not have understood what he meant.

‘Forget it. There’s still time. I’ve already made up my mind to confess my love to her. I’ll prepare for it well! Maybe I can propose to her at the same time.’

But when he remembered what his grandfather had told him, he felt a little troubled. Judging from the current situation, it was indeed very difficult to get married.

But he didn’t care. Now that he had admitted to himself how much he adored Ashley, all he wanted to do now was shower her with pure, unbridled love. He had long abandoned the idea of forcing her to marry him. Now, he was willing to work hard to make her fall in love with him so that she would agree to marry him herself.

Silence ruled the car until the two arrived at their destination—a villa located in the east of Mexico City, near the city center. While the villa was not big, it was beautifully constructed. It was in the local architecture style, and it was elegant and classical.

Ashley felt dirty—not only because she hadn't taken a shower since yesterday but because she had been almost molested by those desperadoes. As soon as Joseph pointed out where the bathroom was, she almost ran to it, locked the door, took off her clothes, and drenched herself in water.

Unfortunately, she forgot to take her clothes into the bathroom! The opulent bathroom looked down on her as she looked upset, thinking about how to resolve the problem.

She couldn't go out naked, because Joseph was still outside; she couldn't go out with the clothes she had just taken off, because she had completely wet them; in the bathroom, there was nothing but a towel...

When Ashley thought she had no other choice, she saw her phone on the mirror rack. She had been in a hurry and hadn't had time to put it in her bag. After hesitating for a while, Ashley dialed Joseph's number.

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"Hello, what's the matter?" Sitting in the living room, Joseph was surprised to receive a call from Ashley who was supposed to be taking a shower at the moment.

"Um, can you... Can you please get me a change of clothes, including a pair of underwear, in my suitcase? Thank you!" Ashley was hemming and hawing at first, but she realized that there was no other way to go about it if she wanted to get out of the bathroom. For this reason, she had no choice but to pluck up the courage and ask Joseph a favor in one breath.

"Okay." The other end of the line was filled with silence for a few seconds before Ashley heard a reply from Joseph. Finally, she breathed a sigh of relief and hung up the phone.

When he heard Ashley hang up the phone, Joseph seemed to have thought about how embarrassing that was for Ashley. In a low voice, he helplessly sighed, "What a careless girl."

Without delay, he opened the suitcase that Ashley had just put in the living room. As expected, it was mostly filled with clothes. Joseph casually pulled out the set of clothes that was on the top of the pile, but when he saw that

Ashley had several different colors of underwear, he had no idea which one to choose. In the end, he just grabbed a pair of pure black underwear and walked towards the bathroom.

Holding this delicate piece of clothing in his large hand, Joseph felt a sudden surge of heat flowing through his body. It reminded him of the sensation he felt on that night he spent with Ashley.

With his heart racing a little, he walked towards the bathroom door, took a deep breath to calm himself down, and knocked on it. Moments later, Ashley stretched out her fair-skinned arm, which was still dripping wet. And as soon as he handed the change of clothes to her, Joseph left.

He was afraid that he might lose control of himself, turn into a wild beast, and pin Ashley against the wall inside the bathroom. In fact, he barely even saw her arm, but he was almost overcome by lust that he had to walk away as soon as possible to prevent himself from doing anything he might regret. 'Is what Zachary said about sexual desire true? Will I really get so horny if it keeps accumulating like this? Or if I meet someone who could turn me on?'

While Joseph's head was in the clouds, Ashley finished getting dressed and appeared in front of him without him realizing it.

"Are you done freshening up?" Joseph raised his head to look at Ashley, whose ears had turned red from embarrassment, and asked knowingly.

"Yeah," Ashley replied, trying to look as calm as possible as she sat on the other side of the sofa.

The thought of how Joseph had just given her the underwear made Ashley feel a bit hot. Because of this, she wasn't sure what she was supposed to say to him right now, let alone look him in the eye.

"I feel like I can't think straight when I'm with you," Ashley whispered under her breath.

"It's okay. I'm here for you." Hearing this, Joseph quickly answered in a soft and reassuring tone.

'I won't mind even if you get confused. You don't always have to be so sophisticated when you're with me... All that matters is that you are happy.' Looking at Ashley who was patting her hair dry with a towel, Joseph thought

to himself. After all, there was no way he could say these things to her out loud.

Not expecting to hear those words coming from Joseph at all, Ashley was caught off-guard and was left speechless for a moment. Then, she lowered her head and couldn't help but blush.

"Why don't you hop in the shower as well?" Ashley asked while staring blankly at the smooth floor, unable to look at Joseph directly. Not wanting him to see her flushed cheeks, she covered her face with the big towel and rubbed her dark hair.

"Okay, I'll go take a shower." Joseph could tell clearly that Ashley was just trying to change the subject, but he still gladly answered her question.

Today, much to Joseph's surprise, he found out that Ashley also had this shy and honest side to her, which he thought was cute. Although Ashley was trying so hard not to let her embarrassment show, there was no way that Joseph, who had always been watching her, would fail to notice it.

After saying that, Joseph picked up his clothes and went to the bathroom to take a shower.

Sitting on the sofa, Ashley felt a sense of relief because it was just too awkward staying in the same room as Joseph right now. Thinking of the sweet words Joseph said to her just moments ago, a foolish smile crept onto her face.

Ashley was over the moon that she could be with the one she loved. At this moment, she just couldn't help thinking about all the wonderful things that had happened between her and Joseph.

When Joseph walked out of the shower, he saw Ashley leisurely watching a variety show. She seemed to be in a good mood and was taking her time drying her hair with a towel.

With a faint smile on his face, Joseph turned around and went to the room to get a hairdryer. Then, he gently walked towards Ashley.

"Here, let me help you dry your hair." Standing right behind Ashley, who was sitting in the sofa, Joseph ran his fingers through her hair and offered to give

her a hand. Then, he grabbed a few strands of her hair with one hand and turned on the hairdryer with the other.

In the middle of enjoying the show she was watching, when Ashley felt the pleasant warm air coming from the hairdryer, she was caught in a daze for a while. In the end, the TV show blurred into background noise for her.

She was so into the TV show just now, so much so that she didn't even notice that Joseph had approached her from behind. When Joseph's low and soothing voice rang in her ears, he started drying her hair gently before she could say anything. The warm air coming from the hairdryer together with the warmth from Joseph's fingertips as they grazed her scalp gave her a warm fuzzy feeling.

A handsome man with a firm face and gentle eyes leaned over and carefully helped a beautiful woman who was sitting on the sofa with a sweet expression on her face dry her hair. This scene felt so tranquil and relaxing that it painted such a beautiful picture.

After making sure that her hair was completely dry, Joseph put down the hairdryer and sat down next to Ashley on the sofa. Then, ever so gently, he reached out his hand, rubbed her hair, and said, "Wake up."

Hearing this, Ashley opened her eyes at once and came to her senses almost instantly. She looked up at the direction where the voice came from and found that Joseph was staring at her with a smile in his eyes.

Feeling a little embarrassed, she didn't know what to do, so she just lowered her head again. 'What the hell? Why is he staring at me like that?' Ashley thought to herself.

"Let me help you dry your hair too. Don't move." When she noticed that Joseph's dark hair was still a little wet, Ashley insisted in a firm tone.

Parts of his hair were still damp, and some were all over his forehead, which made Joseph's cold and handsome face seem so arrogant. Ashley's eyes were glued to Joseph for a while. Moments later, she grabbed the hairdryer, half knelt on the soft sofa and inched closer towards Joseph.

After that, she helped him dry his hair. At this moment, Joseph was having trouble keeping himself together.

Since Ashley was half kneeling on the sofa while holding the hairdryer to dry his hair, Joseph, who was quite tall, saw her beautiful figure from a special angle. When she raised her hand to reach for his hair, the loose collar of her blouse revealed a portion of her snow-white bosom. Moreover, the pure black bra she was wearing further accentuated her ample white chest, which he found so alluring.

While as Joseph was busy trying his best to resist temptation, the sound of someone's stomach growling filled the otherwise quiet and spacious living room. With that, Ashley put down the hairdryer in her hand and sat down on the sofa. Then, she awkwardly turned her head to look at Joseph and said in a rather pitiful tone, "I'm hungry..."

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The thing that broke the thick tension between them, and rescued Joseph from his losing battle with restraint, was the sound of Ashley's growling stomach. She hadn't been able to have a decent meal since yesterday, and today she had been busy watching the sunrise. After that, she had travelled to this place and taken a shower. It was no surprise to anyone that she was hungry.

When he heard her stomach, the corners of Joseph's lips curled up. "I'll cook for us. Wait here for a minute."

They had barely eaten these past two days, so she must be hungry. Joseph could understand her patterns by now. Ashley stood up and made a move to follow after him, but Joseph turned around and commanded in a gentle voice, "I'll do it. Just watch TV and wait for me."

She looked up at his handsome face for a moment before she said, "Alright. I want a hearty meal though, is that okay? I could eat a feast!" Rolling her beautiful eyes, she continued to tease, "I'll be looking forward to tasting your cooking."

"Okay, you little piggy. Wait for me," Joseph replied in an amused tone.

He noticed the excitement and anticipation radiating off of her face. An indescribable sense of satisfaction rose from deep inside of him. As long as it brought her happiness, he was willing to do anything for her.

Joseph walked towards their makeshift kitchen to start prepping their meal. All of a sudden, a thought occurred to him. He turned around to look at his phone for a few moments. After that, he handed the phone to Ashley and said, "If you get bored, you can chat with Grandpa and let him know how we're doing." When she took the phone from his hands, he continued, "I'll start cooking now. Take your time."

Before Ashley had a chance to answer, he turned around and left. Not long after, his phone began to vibrate, and Ashley answered.

"You b.rat! How's it going?" The moment Ashley answered the phone, she heard Leonard's booming voice from the other end.

"Hello Leonard, this is Ashley," she greeted.

There was a brief moment of silence from the other end of the phone. Then, Leonard came back to his senses and said in an enthusiastic voice, "Oh! Hi, Ashley! It's so great to hear from you! How are you doing?"

From the other side of the continent, when Leonard heard that Ashley had called him using his grandson's phone, he could only assume that they were having a great time together. The mere thought of that was enough to have him jumping for joy. He was in a cheerful mood, and his tone was light and full of happiness.

Joseph had done his best to woo her, and the thought of having them get together was almost too much for him. He struggled to contain his excitement since he didn't want to frighten Ashley. All of a sudden, he didn't know what to say.

"We're both fine," Ashley replied. She followed Joseph's instructions and spared him the details.

'That's great! Perfect! That was what I hoped for!' Leonard was ecstatic by her report.

"That's good to hear. Take good care of yourself. If Joseph doesn't treat you properly, you must let me know! I'll beat him to death when he gets back!" Leonard beamed in a kind voice.

After hearing Leonard's kind words, a warm feeling bloomed in Ashley's chest. She quickly reassured, "Don't worry, Joseph's been a perfect gentleman."

Leonard was proud of his grandson when he heard this news. It was a shock for him to hear that he was able to romance this woman so soon. 'You're doing great, my grandson!' he thought to himself.

After that, Leonard asked what adventures the two had experienced. The two ended up chatting for quite a while.

As she narrated their adventures, Leonard made sure not to mention Joseph anymore. Poor Joseph, Leonard thought Ashley more important than him.

When she ended the call with Leonard, she then chatted with Mike and Yasmin on the phone to tell them about their trip and their next travel plans. After that, she finished making calls. She had just finished talking to three people, but she didn't dare to mention anything about the danger she encountered last night to any of them. The last thing she wanted was to make people worry about her.

By the time she finished, Joseph began to serve the dishes. When she heard him, she rushed over to help.

The moment she walked into the kitchen, she noticed a small apron hanging off his tall frame. Although the sight was enough to make her giggle, she found it endearing instead. It showed the hidden side of Joseph; underneath his arrogant and reserved exterior.

"What did you talk about with Grandpa?" he asked when he saw how excited she looked.

"It was nothing. We just caught up and talked about our travels so far," she answered as she studied the fancy dishes laid out on the table.

He snuck a glance at her beautiful face as she looked at the food before he opened the pot to check the soup and asked in a soft tone, "Did he mention anything to you?"

She strode over to his side and sniffed the steaming soup before she said, "It was nothing serious. He just asked me how our trip had been so far. All he kept saying was 'good'."

Joseph couldn't help but feel proud when she told him this. That was what he needed to hear. Joseph deliberately asked Ashley to answer the phone because Joseph knew that his grandfather would believe her words more. Day and night, all his grandfather could think about was how badly he wanted them to get married. It wasn't a surprise to him to hear this news of his grandfather.

In the future, he made a mental note to make sure Ashley answered all his calls. That way, he could avoid being bombarded by his grandfather's questions and also make him happy. It would be a good thing for everyone. He decided happily.

Following Joseph with a plate of dishes in her hands, Ashley observed his tall and graceful figure and sighed, "It's rare to find a handsome man like you who also knows how to cook."

Indeed, men in modern times tended to be chauvinistic. They often assumed that cooking was only meant for women, and that men who knew how to cook were disgraceful. However, here Joseph was, taking the initiative to cook without complaint. She was touched by his efforts to take care of her.

'I appreciate the compliment, but I could sense the irony in her tone,' he thought to himself.

"Don't take it for granted," he said in a low voice as he made his way towards the table.

Ashley was rendered speechless by his words. 'What an arrogant man! Regardless, I will cherish him whatever he says,' she thought to herself.

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"There's more soup over there. Have a seat, and I'll bring it over for you," Joseph said to Ashley as he gathered the dishes in his hands.

She immediately sat down with no hesitation. As she looked at the array of delicious international dishes on the table, she felt impatient to pick up her fork and taste them all.

“This looks amazing! Where did you learn how to cook like this?” she asked Joseph as he sat opposite her. Before he could reply, she was already digging into her food.

“I learned to cook for myself when I was studying in the United States,”

he answered briefly.

‘I can see why he cooks so many international dishes now. The food he made for me tops what I’ve eaten in high-end restaurants! It tastes home-made, which only makes it more delicious!’

Her heart filled with warmth as she recalled the effort he went through to prepare this meal for her.

Back then, her parents had always forced her to cook for them, which made Ashley despise cooking for a time. She swore to Mike that she would find someone who could cook well and would be willing to cook every day for her.

Now, it seemed like her wishes had been answered. In front of her now, was a man who knew how to cook delicious food. He was also a considerate man who wanted to hold her hand and grow old with her. Ashley couldn’t believe that she had found such a person.

Ashley was in a good mood as she enjoyed the food he prepared for her.

“Eat slowly. It’s not like anyone will take it away from you,” he scolded her softly with a doting look on his face.

“I’m starving! It’s so delicious. I want to eat everything!” she mumbled as she stuffed more rice into her mouth.

Everyone knew that Ashley’s weakness was delicious food. Whenever she came across good food, she would abandon years of etiquette training and fill her stomach like there was no tomorrow.

As he watched her enthusiastically eat his food, he couldn’t help but burst out laughing. How could he resist such a sincere and innocent woman?

The atmosphere was warm and jovial as they enjoyed their meal together. It seemed as if you only needed simple things to be happy. As long as Joseph could keep his loved ones safe and happy, it was enough for him.

When they finished the meal, Ashley was keen on pulling her weight and began to clear the table and wash the dishes. Due to her insistence, Joseph relented and watched quietly as she went about cleaning everything.

“You must have been tired these past few days. Maybe you should go back to your room and get some rest. We can go out later,” Joseph suggested when she finished cleaning the dishes.

“That sounds good. Take me there,” Ashley agreed.

The villa was made to look like a European-style building. On the first floor was a place for receiving guests and for the living areas, while the second and third floors housed the bedrooms. Ashley chose to let Joseph decide on their housing arrangements.

He led her to the master bedroom on the second floor with her luggage in tow. The room was spacious with an elegant layout. A large double bed was placed in the center of the room, and when she saw it, she immediately threw herself on the large bed.

“This feels so comfortable!” she sighed as she rubbed her cheek against the satin sheets.

“I’m glad you like it. Please get some rest. I’ll step out for a bit to take care of something,” he replied.

Ashley jumped off the bed and raised her head in question as she asked, “Where do you have to go? Wait, where are you going to stay?”

She began to grow anxious because she assumed he would leave her all alone at the villa. Immediately, she realized that her question could have another meaning. She didn’t want Joseph to think she was eager to have him in her room, so she quickly re-phrased her question.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be staying in the room next door.” He knew what was on her mind, so he was quick to reassure her.

“Well, please get some rest. Enjoy your nap!” Ashley was relieved by his words. Somehow, she found herself depending on him. She gave him a small

smile and said, "Okay." Joseph then walked towards the door and gently closed it before he left.

His eyes immediately hardened as he made his way into his bedroom next door. After whipping out his mobile phone from his pocket and dialing a number, he asked in a cold voice, "How is it going?"

"Sir, everything has been taken care of. We've also caught the people behind the attack." The cold and menacing voice of a middle-aged man came from the other end of the line.

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. If they try to pull something like this again, we'll have to eliminate them all." Joseph's voice was eerily calm as he gave out orders, which made him look frightening and fierce.

"Yes, sir!" The man on the line was on standby.

Anyone who would dare to provoke him would suffer greatly for it. This was the true power that Joseph wielded.

Ashley's petrified face had been ingrained in his mind, and Joseph wanted nothing more than to make those who dared to hurt her pay. He wanted to make sure that their lives would be a living hell.

As he looked at his hands, he was suddenly lost in his thoughts. 'My hands are covered with blood. Would I ever be worthy of such a beautiful and innocent woman?'

All of a sudden, he was overwhelmed with fear that she would leave him once she knew of his true identity. If she found out about everything he had done, would she ever accept him? The mere thought was enough to make his heart ache. Joseph would never tell her how he dealt with the four Mexican drug dealers. The last thing he wanted was to ruin the image of him she had in her head. He wanted to cover up all the grime of his life and show her only the good because he was afraid to lose her.

When she woke up, she wanted to travel with Joseph again. She never expected the two to ever live together.

In the next few days, the two went out early and returned late into the night. They spent their days taking road trips to various scenic spots all over Mexico. In addition to all the restaurants they tried, they often went back home to cook

for themselves. The few blissful days they shared were filled with happiness and laughter.

During this time, neither dared to confess their love for the other. Although the two got along well, it was enough for them to enjoy each other's company for the time being.

As Ashley showered him with her beauty and love, Joseph suddenly forgot all about his troubles and worries. He cherished every moment he had with the person he loved.

Under Ashley's influence, Joseph found himself smiling more, which made Ashley fall in love with taking pictures of him. She wanted to capture all of the smiles he gifted to her and she would be happier if she succeeded. Joseph couldn't help but sigh at her stubbornness. Later, he made sure to take plenty of pictures with her that showed them smiling contentedly. The happy times they shared would be frozen forever in those precious photos.

A week passed like this. However, it couldn't last forever. Soon enough, an emergency forced Joseph to proceed with the ceremony he had secretly been planning these past few days.

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The two planned to have a day off in the villa. Joseph drove out early in the morning to get gas for the car and to shop for the daily necessities they needed. The moment he stepped into the living area on the first floor, he heard Ashley chatting happily with someone on the phone.

This wasn't anything new for Joseph. Ashley was often on the phone while he was around, but the person she called wasn't a family member of hers or a female friend.

With his keen hearing, he overheard something unusual with her phone call. He couldn't help but notice that Ashley said the man's name affectionately. When he heard the tone she used with him, Joseph was immediately alarmed. After he set aside the things in his hands, he sat down close to Ashley and pricked up his ears to listen.

“Zaiden, when did you get back? I’m sorry I didn’t get a chance to pick you up at the airport,” she apologized.

It had only been minutes since Ashley began the phone call. She was speaking to Zaiden, one of Mike’s classmates and closest friends. A few years ago, she met Zaiden through Mike, and the two had maintained a good relationship ever since.

Moments before Joseph returned, Ashley suddenly received a call from Zaiden. The two of them spent a few moments catching up with one another. She found out that Zaiden had recently returned home and vaguely remembered that she had promised her brother to pick him up at the airport. Since she had broken her promise, she felt the need to apologize to him.

“I got home two days after you went on your trip abroad. There’s no need for you to be so formal with me. As long as you remember me, that’s good enough for me,” Zaiden explained in a soft voice.

He remembered how disappointed he felt when he didn’t see the person he was looking forward to seeing the most waiting for him at the airport. Later that day, Mike had come to pick him up. He then explained that Ashley had recently taken a trip abroad days before he returned home.

It was not that Zaiden’s return home had slipped her mind. She just missed it by chance.

However, he was oblivious to the fact that she was forever lost to him. The girl he had been thinking of day and night had begun to fall in love with another man. This man would care for her for the rest of her life.

“Of course I remember! I haven’t seen you in so long, Zaiden. We always had a fun time together,” she immediately reassured him.

From what Ashley could remember of him, Zaiden had always been handsome, but somewhat cold. Over the years, they kept in touch, calling each other a few times throughout the year. Ashley assumed that he was only joking to lighten the mood.

Joseph had always had a strong sense of hearing and heard the mellow male voice on the other end of the line. He observed how happy Ashley was when

she spoke to him. His face grew somber at the sight. Unfortunately, Ashley was oblivious to the shift in his mood as she continued to speak to Zaiden.

When she heard Zaiden chuckle, she said, "My brother told me that you were planning on starting your own law firm. How is that going for you?"

"It's almost done. I've decided to settle down in Ariosa," he replied as he sifted through the cases he had been working on recently.

"That's good to hear. I'll come and visit you as soon as I get back home," she answered.

When Joseph heard her promise to see another man when she got home, he was furious!

However, if he snatched the phone away from her and ended the call, it would seem as if he had no respect for her. After all, he had no right to prevent Ashley from making friends. Joseph suddenly felt helpless and flustered that he couldn't do anything in this situation.

He was a man who always got what he wanted, and he refused to back down in this situation.

"I'll be looking forward to it. Are you okay traveling alone? Take good care of yourself, okay?" Zaiden reminded her.

When Ashley was about to reply that she wasn't traveling alone, she suddenly felt a weight on her shoulder. Turning her head, she found Joseph slumped on her shoulder. His slender body was curled up on the sofa, with one arm draped over his abdomen.

She immediately threw the phone aside and gently placed Joseph's head against her legs. When she saw the look of pain on Joseph's face, she asked in an anxious voice, "What's wrong?"

Joseph was reassured of her affections for him when he saw how fast she cast aside the phone call to attend to him. He clearly saw the look of concern on her face, and his heart filled with satisfaction and warmth.

However, he couldn't show his satisfaction, because his ruse would be exposed. Answering in a weak voice, he said, "It's nothing. I just have a stomachache. It's no big deal."

Joseph, the cunning man that he was, knew that this was the way to catch her attention. He was determined not to give his rival in life a chance to make his way back into her life. To him, this method was simple but effective. Joseph was a successful businessman, so he was trained to deal with things efficiently and effectively.

The truth was, Joseph wasn't completely lying. He suffered from chronic stomach pains, but he wasn't having an attack this time around. When he lived in the United States, he often worked long hours while he dealt with gang matters. Because of his hectic work schedule, he often missed meals. At the time, he suffered from severe stomach pains. When he returned home, his stomach pains eased through the supervision and care of Leonard. In recent years, whenever he forgot to eat regularly, he would be plagued with stomachaches.

However, while he was vacationing with Ashley, Joseph maintained a regular diet and was often in a good mood, so it would be unlikely for him to fall ill.

"You don't look okay to me! We need to see a doctor," she persuaded after she heard how weak he sounded.

When he saw how anxious and concerned he made her, Joseph suddenly didn't want to continue his ruse. How could he let his beloved worry about him?

The moment Joseph was about to change his mind and confess, Ashley's phone rang again.

She picked up the call and found that Zaiden had called her back. She answered, "Zaiden, I have an emergency to take care of. I'll call you back some other time." Then, she hung up the phone.

"Does it still hurt? I can go to the hospital with you," she repeated.

After seeing the determined expression on her face, Joseph changed his mind and didn't dare to attempt telling her the truth anymore. Fearless as he was, he was afraid that Ashley would be upset with him when she found out that he lied to her. Therefore, he replied again in a weak voice, "I'm fine. It will go away in a bit. I don't need to go to the hospital."