

Rewritten 151

Chapter 151

Madelyn walked ahead, with George close behind. He spoke earnestly, "Miss Jent, being a Jent means standing strong. Otherwise, people might try to take advantage of you."

George was perceptive. Madelyn agreed with a smile, "You're right."

"We just wanna make sure you're safe," he added.

George's words struck her. She wondered, 'What did he mean? Do they know everything?'

Jadie saw Madelyn get into a fancy Cayenne-a car not everyone in Ventropolis could afford- through the rearview mirror. She asked, "Madelyn ain't comin' back with us?"

"She has got some stuff to take care of. I'll drop you off at home first," Kevin said, buckling his seatbelt.

"Thank you, Kevin."

"You're welcome." Kevin's mind wandered, 'If Madelyn had Jadie's maturity and didn't cause so many problems, Mr. Jardin wouldn't need to worry as much.'

The Cayenne had been driving for almost twenty minutes. It was getting close to six-thirty, and the sky had grown dark. Streetlights were casting a soft glow on the road. Madelyn peered out at the peaceful streets and felt a bit peculiar.

She asked, "George, where are we heading?"

"You'll see soon. We're almost there.'

Before long, the car came to a stop. The chauffeur circled around to the back and opened the rear door for Madelyn.

“Please walk straight ahead from here, and you’ll find it,” George said.

They had arrived at Amberley Street, a vibrant spot in Ventropolis known for its array of tasty treats. The street bustled with activity, able to accommodate a large crowd.

Madelyn felt a mix of uncertainty and curiosity. After stepping out of the car, she watched it drive away. Feeling a bit lost, she followed George’s guidance, each step feeling like a piece of a puzzle falling into place.

After Madelyn walking about eighteen steps, an adorable girl around six years old appeared. She was all dolled up like a real princess, with two braids that framed her face.

The little girl clutched a single rose in one hand while her other hand held onto her mother’s. With an infectious enthusiasm, they approached Madelyn and said, “Miss Jent, happy birthday!”

This surprised Madelyn. A feeling that she couldn’t quite find the right words for flowed over

her. Whether it was from her past life or from right now, it was like nothing she had ever felt before. Blushing just a bit, she stammered out, “Thank... Thank you...”

The girl then pointed forward as she said, “Go that way! Just be careful not to get lost.” Her voice bubbled with joy.

Madelyn smiled as she watched the girl. “Okay,” she agreed, and off she strolled, following the direction the girl had pointed her in.

Every time she took about eighteen steps, another pair of mother and child would come her way and offer her a rose.

But truth be told, Madelyn's mind wasn't too focused on those roses or what lay ahead. Instead, she found herself lost in thought, wondering, 'If my child from my past life had made it through, would they be as adorable as these children? Would they call me "Mommy" with those same sparkling eyes?'

But life has its twists. Having her very own child was something she could only dream about.

So, with each step she took, her thoughts weighed a little heavier. And as she kept on, she ended up with a total of eighteen roses.

The further Madelyn walked, the quieter the surroundings became. The crowd began to thin out, and it was almost like she was in her own little world.

And then, just as if it was part of a grand story, the melodious sound of a piano started to drift through the air.

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Madelyn's attention was drawn to an open-air restaurant, where a familiar face caught her eye. Bathed in the soft glow of the lights, the person sat gracefully before a piano, coaxing forth a soothing, rhythmic melody.

She could see the tattoos on his hands and the ones that were underneath his collar. His features were gentle, and his posture exuded poised elegance. Every motion he made embodied a noble elegance that distinguished him from everyone around.

A waiter approached Madelyn and said, "You must be Mr. Arnold's guest. We have a table reserved for you. Please follow me."

Madelyn held the bundle of roses. Her eyes were drawn to a small, glass-enclosed space set aside for private dining. The transparent walls allowed diners to enjoy the scenery outside. It would be a perfect spot to watch the snow falling, if it ever did.

"Please wait a moment. Mr. Arnold will be with you shortly."

“Madelyn.” A clear and deep voice sounded from behind her. Madelyn turned around slowly to find Ethan standing there. The air was crisp and cool, and he approached her.

The waiter tactfully stepped away, leaving them alone.

Ethan was really handsome. Madelyn felt her heart start to race.

He could now stand and walk on his own. Madelyn had been confident he would recover after his time in the hospital and the treatment he received.

Nervousness overtook Madelyn. She couldn’t quite fathom why her heart was racing so fast, a sensation she rarely experienced. She wondered, ‘Is it because I’m sick?’

“I... I... thank you...” Madelyn struggled for words.

Ethan brushed her forehead with his fingertips, looking at her affectionately. “Go inside, don’t catch a cold.”

Madelyn knew he was Ethan Arnold, the boy she had saved.

Thinking of all that had happened before, she had lost count of how many times she had embarrassed herself in front of him.

Seated across from him, Madelyn lowered her head, toying with the bouquet of roses in her hands. She asked, “Did you need something from me?”

“Madelyn,” he began, “am I scary?”

She shook her head and said, “It’s just... I don’t know what to say.”

Madelyn had come here to tell Ethan that they shouldn't meet again. But now, how could she bring herself to say that?

Ethan chuckled, trying to lighten the mood. "It's okay, Madelyn. No need to be nervous. Let's treat each other like we always did, as friends. We've had a ton of chats before, right?" He continued, "Or do you not like meeting me this way? If it makes you feel weird, I'm sorry."

Hearing that, Madelyn accidentally plucked off a petal from one of the flowers. She quickly put them down. "That's not it," she hurriedly assured him.

Her gaze met his as she continued, "Actually, I'm really happy. No one has ever done something like this for me, and no one knew today was my birthday." She added, "Your birthday wishes are more than enough to make me happy. You've done so much for me, and I'm not even sure how I could possibly thank you."

Ethan said, "You don't have to do anything..." Inside, he thought, 'You've already done more for me than you know. You're the one who pulled me back when I was at my lowest. But you're still young, and there're certain things I should not rush or meddle too much in your life. Guess I'll just have to be patient for a couple more years...'

He just wanted to see her happy.

The food on the table was what Madelyn loved the most. It looked yummy, but it wasn't as amazing as the dishes she could make. After all, she was like a super skilled chef. The only other food she really liked was Rosario's cooking, but mostly she preferred what she made herself. She was pretty choosy about what she ate.

While they were both eating, Madelyn was deep in thought, trying to figure out how to tell Ethan they shouldn't meet each other anymore.

Ethan could feel that something was bothering her, but he didn't want to make her uncomfortable by asking too many questions.

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After dinner, Ethan and Madelyn went for a walk. They watched lovey-dovey couples stroll by, but between Madelyn and Ethan, there was an unusual silence, a strange atmosphere.

Finally, she couldn't hold back and blurted out, "What happened to your legs?"

Ethan lowered his gaze as his expression slightly changed. "It was a car accident," he replied, brief and to the point.

Madelyn nodded and said, "Well, be careful when driving in the future." Her words filled with genuine concern.

"Alright."

Madelyn's maternal instincts kicked in again. "You've walked with me for so long. Aren't your legs tired? How about we find a place to sit? If you're uncomfortable, you must tell me."

Ethan smiled. "Alright."

Madelyn bit her lip as she thought to herself, 'You basically say "alright" to everything!'

She dared not meet his gaze anymore, so she turned and pointed to a spot, her expression stiff, "I want to have that."

With Christmas approaching, the glaze fruit seller dressed up as Santa Claus. Madelyn hadn't indulged in these treats much before.

"Let's go," Ethan said, gently enveloping Madelyn's hand in his. His touch radiated warmth, creating a cozy feeling that embraced Madelyn.

He didn't notice the daze in Madelyn behind him. Her gaze were fixed at their connected hands, her heart fluttering and her cheeks flushed.

Madelyn had lived two lifetimes. Aware of Ethan's feelings for her, she did not acknowledge it or turn him down. Instead, she maintained the bond they shared, a companionship that she understood to be somewhat selfish.

There were many obstacles between them – Zach, Hayson, and Madelyn's own pain. The hurt from her past life had left her unable to open up to loving Ethan in this new life.

She hoped, 'Maybe Ethan's feelings for me will fade over time. We'll spend more time together, and those emotions might disappear... kind of like what happened to my feelings for Zach in last life.'

Madelyn thought of Ethan as someone beyond her reach. 'Someday, he'll meet girls prettier than me. There will be plenty of girls seeking his attention in the future.' This made her unwilling to risk her heart and face the possibility of heartbreak.

Even if Zach hadn't warned her to stay away from Ethan, Madelyn's feelings of insecurity and fear would still have kept her apart from him, especially considering her inability to conceive.

Madelyn had made the decision to undergo a hysterectomy to ensure her own well-being. The idea of pursuing another romantic relationship didn't interest her at all. She saw her future with just herself, no room for anyone else, not even Ethan.

She thought to herself, 'I'll let him hold my hand today. This moment will be a lasting memory for me, especially if we may not cross paths again.'

As the clock went past half-past nine, the night grew darker.

She stopped next to the square's fountain and told Ethan, "It's getting late. I should go back. I have classes tomorrow."

The drive from Amberley Street to Jent Residence at Southern Haven Villas would take at least forty minutes, and with traffic, it might be over an hour.

Ethan said, "Please stay just a bit longer."

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"But..." Madelyn hesitated, her eyes fixed on Ethan who was pulling out a small black velvet box from his pocket. With a careful touch, he unveiled a pendant in the shape of a crescent moon its translucent whiteness seemed to emit an otherworldly glow. The silver chain it hung from sparkled like distant stars.

Drawing closer, Ethan's hopeful expression met resistance as Madelyn gently pushed him away. "It's too precious," she murmured.

Ethan looked disappointed as he said, "I designed this necklace for you. Today marks not only your birthday but also our first official meeting. Could you not turn a friend down?"

The necklace was undeniably flawlessly crafted, so intricate that no one could resist its charm.

Ethan's gaze was intense. Despite her reservations, Madelyn found herself unable to refuse. Finally, she relented, her voice softening, "I just... I don't have anything to give you in return."

"Having you here today is gift enough for me."

Tightening her grip on her dress, Madelyn nodded.

'Yes! She's willing to accept it!' Ethan had always reminded himself to let things go with the flow, not to rush. Yet, his innermost desires were becoming harder to contain.

Leaning in, he gently placed the necklace around her neck, his fingers brushing aside a strand of her hair. He was close enough to notice the faint scent of strawberries that seemed to linger around her, captivating his senses.

Madelyn, sensitive by nature, had always recoiled from such proximity – perhaps a lingering self-preservation instinct, or echoes from her previous life’s traumas.

Ethan’s warm breath tickled her neck, causing Madelyn to shift uncomfortably. “Is it... Is it in place? It feels a bit chilly.”

“It’s done,” Ethan replied as he secured the silver clasp. The pendant, resembling a crescent moon, now rested against her chest, mirroring his perception of her pure and radiant like the moonlight that had guided him through his darkest times. Unlike the harsh glare of the sun, it was soft and soothing, enough to calm his inner turmoil and dispel the shadows within.

As they strolled along, the streets were almost empty, and the clock was inching toward nine. Usually, the curfew hovered between eight-thirty and nine o’clock, a precaution set by Hayson to keep Madelyn safe. It made sense though, considering, as Kevin had pointed out, the Jent family had quite a few enemies. So, Madelyn had to watch her step, even when she was alone.

Ethan noticed her distracted demeanor. “What’s on your mind? If you’re worried about getting in trouble when we get back, I’ll talk to your dad on your behalf. Or are you feeling tired? You can take a nap, and I’ll wake you when it’s time.”

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Madelyn snapped back. “Nah, I’m good.”

Ethan sensed there was more to it with Madelyn right now. She seemed all wrapped up in thoughts, like something pretty big had gone down.

“Hey, you know you can always talk to me, right?” Ethan said reassuringly. “Whatever’s on your mind, I’ve got your back.”

Madelyn hesitated, her gaze fixed on Ethan, a mix of emotions in her eyes.

‘Can I really confide in Ethan? Can I ask for his help to break away from my family?’ She pondered. ‘My family seems so small compared to the Arnolds. Ethan holds the power to change everything with just a word. But what if he refuses?’

Madelyn figured that if Hayson discovered she sought Ethan’s aid, it wouldn’t stop at Hayson; Zach would also get involved. And what could she even say to Ethan to make sense of it all?

‘Plus, the more I reveal, the more Ethan might feel suspicions about my family. What if he digs up my family’s criminal activities, and that brings them down?’

Madelyn questioned the worth of giving up her life to see the Jent family’s downfall. She contemplated, ‘Even if my family wasn’t in the picture, Zach’s talents could easily drive him to power... So if I ask for Ethan’s help and Zach finds out about it, my life will be more agonizing than death...’

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Madelyn mused, ‘Zach’s willingness to go to any lengths to achieve his goals is almost frightening.’

However, a glimmer of optimism surfaced as she considered, “Yet, with Ethan’s support... Maybe I can study overseas after high school. It seems like a better plan. I won’t have to wait for Ventropolis’ annual foreign exchange program.”

“Ethan...” Madelyn’s uncertainty grew as she grappled with how to broach this topic. Her rapport with Ethan was still developing, and she wasn’t sure if she could rely on him for help.

Ethan raised an eyebrow, “Yeah?”

Madelyn’s words stumbled out hesitantly, “I... um...”

Just as Madelyn was about to voice her thoughts, a blinding light suddenly engulfed them.

“Look out, Mr. Arnold!” Leyton swiftly turned the steering wheel, and George held tight to the handle above the passenger seat.

Madelyn saw it too – a huge truck, heavy as anything, barreling straight at them.

Right before the crash, Madelyn prepared for the worst, squeezing her eyes shut, until a strong, comforting hand pulled her close.

Ethan's deep voice came, "You're safe, no need to be scared."

His voice was soothing. Madelyn nestled into his chest, hearing the quick thump of his heart. She realized he was trembling too.

Even though he was in the same danger, he acted just like Zach, protecting her when things were really bad.

A memory popped up for Madelyn – the picture of a dog jumping at her when she was small. Zach had shielded her even though he got hurt himself, his arm still showing the deep scars. In his arms, Madelyn listened to his heartbeat. Strangely, unlike Ethan's, it was calm and steady.

Zach seemed almost unaffected by fear, like nothing could scare him. In Madelyn's previous life, everyone in Ventropolis knew Zach ruled the city. But even though he had all that power, he kind of ignored his wife, treating her less important than his pet dog, which people found funny..

"Madelyn..."

Madelyn snapped back to reality at the voice cutting through her thoughts.

Leyton had swerved to avoid the oncoming truck, but it resulted in crashing into the guardrail. The fancy Cayenne was now a complete wreck.

Madelyn still looked visibly shaken.

"I'm sorry..." Madelyn's mind was foggy. The idea of what might have happened if that truck had collided with them, wiping everyone out, brought tears to her eyes.

Ethan smiled. His face was pale with beads of cold sweat on his forehead. He was holding back the pain. "It's not your fault. What are you apologizing for?" 1

Madelyn lowered her head, tears streaming down.

She was apologizing because she knew it wasn't an accident. She knew who was responsible. But she couldn't reveal it.

Azure Corporation held her late mother's hard work and effort. If the Jent family crumbled, her mother's legacy would crumble too.

The crash impact was substantial, causing Leyton's hand strained, but he looked mostly unhurt. George wasn't as lucky; blood trickled from his forehead.

Meanwhile, in an Audi, Jadie sat in the passenger seat, hugging a huge pink teddy bear. She asked, "Zach, do you think something happened up ahead? I feel like I've seen that car before.

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As Zach's car pulled closer, Jadie's eyes widened as she saw Madelyn, with a man she seemed to have met from somewhere.

"Zach, let's pull over. That's Madelyn," Jadie said.

When Madelyn saw an Audi with a familiar license plate, her face turned pale in an instant.

Just now, smoke had started billowing from the Cayenne Madelyn quickly got out, but her legs gave way as soon as she touched the ground.

Leyton quickly used a fire extinguisher to put out the smoke, while Ethan went to check on Madelyn.

“Are you hurt? Can you get up?”

Madelyn was fine, thanks to Ethan shielding her during the incident. She didn’t want to admit. that it was fear that had caused her legs to give way. She couldn’t shake thoughts of the person behind the accident.

George wiped a speck of blood from his forehead as he said, “Looks like she got really scared.”

Ethan’s eyes flickered with a chilling determination, but he spoke gently to Madelyn. “Don’t worry, I’ll handle this. Let me help you up.”

Madelyn asked in a gentle tone, “You’re not hurt, are you?”

Ethan smiled, “I’m perfectly fine.”

Madelyn felt relieved as Ethan helped her stand. Her legs were a bit shaky, but she managed to stay upright. Concerned about Ethan’s pale face, she asked, “Are you feeling unwell? Is there something

wrong with your legs? Roll up your pants, let me check...”

Ethan held onto her hand. “I’m fine, really.”

Leyton chimed in, “I’ve already called for help. A car will be here soon. Hang tight.” Both Leyton and George knew Ethan’s legs weren’t fully healed. If it wasn’t for his determination, Leyton wouldn’t have allowed him to leave his bed. Ethan had a special place in his heart for Madelyn.

No one anticipated this turn of events. When the car swerved suddenly and hit the guardrail, Ethan had injured his legs.

Jadie quickly came over, worry etched on her face. “Madelyn, it’s really you. What happened? Are you hurt?”

—

Madelyn noticed Jadie holding a pink teddy bear the same one she had secretly wished for when Ethan asked her about her birthday gift. She hadn’t anticipated that Jadie would like the

same bear.

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“Zach, come over here,” Jadie called out in haste.

When Madelyn saw Zach approaching, anger flickered in her eyes, but she looked away

quickly. She thought, ‘Zach Jardin, of all times to show up. Are you here to see if we’re dead? Sorry to disappoint.’

“Mr. Arnold, did you have an accident? Are you alright?” Zach asked.

Madelyn sensed a subtle tension between Zach and Ethan when their eyes met, an invisible pressure that hung heavily in the air.

Ethan stayed silent. He didn’t hold Zach in high regard. Ethan had dug deep into the history of the Jent family and found some dirt. It was a far cry from Madelyn, who seemed to shine with goodness and innocence. To Ethan, she was like a beacon of light in a family with a not-so- great history. Without Madelyn, he wouldn’t even bother dealing with the other Jents.

Turning to Leyton, Ethan asked, “How much longer we have to wait?”

Leyton replied, "About fifteen more minutes."

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"Leyton, did you manage to see that truck?" Mr. Arnold asked.

Leyton looked down, saying, "I'm sorry. I couldn't get a good look at it."

Ethan's tone turned icy in a flash. "I want the one responsible caught in three days."

Leyton nodded. "Yes, sir."

Jadie came over and held Madelyn's hand, showing concern. "Madelyn, are you okay? Zach and I were planning a birthday party for you at home. If it weren't for Rosario, neither of us would have known. I missed your last birthday, but not this one. I even got you a gift. But you weren't around. Maybe we can celebrate the next one together."

Madelyn's expression turned distant, and she pulled her hand away. "You don't need to go through all this trouble. You and Zach should head back. We'll manage things here on our own."

She sensed Zach's unwavering gaze on her, but she avoided meeting his eyes completely.

Zach chimed in, his voice firm. "Let's not involve Mr. Arnold in our family issues. Remember what your dad said? You're supposed to let me know whenever you run into trouble while you're out."

He continued, his tone instructive, "Alright, girls, get in the car. I'll have a quick word with Mr. Arnold before driving you home." He seemed to be holding back his frustration. He had warned Madelyn before he would teach her a lesson if she secretly met Ethan.

Ethan pulled Madelyn to behind him. "Don't worry, Mr. Jardin, I'll make sure Madelyn gets home safely."

Zach smiled, ignoring Ethan's words. His gaze remained fixed on Madelyn. "Madelyn, be a good girl, okay? Get in the car."

Madelyn stepped out from behind Ethan and said, "Ethan... I think I'll go home with Zach." She thought to herself, 'I have no choice now. I won't be able to escape Zach's control for now as long as I'm in the Jent family.'

A hint of sadness flashed in Ethan's eyes. He reached out, gently patting her head, and spoke with a fond tone, "Give me a call once you're back home."

Madelyn quickly nodded, her response a quiet "Sure," before she turned and headed to Zach's Audi. Being tactful, she took the rear seat, so Jadie could take the passenger seat.

"Zach, I'll wait for you in the car..." said Jadie.

Seated in the Audi, Madelyn stared out the window, unable to catch the words exchanged

between Zach and Ethan.

Jadie turned her head, addressing Madelyn curiously. "Madelyn, that guy just now, he treated you differently. Are you two dating?"

"This is something personal..." Madelyn shut her eyes. She dreaded what might transpire once they reached home. She lacked the strength to challenge Zach for now.

Jadie's smile remained, and she nervously tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "I'm sorry! I was just concerned about you."

Madelyn didn't respond. She heard the driver's door open and shut.

Jadie said something to Zach in a hushed voice, but Madelyn didn't really listen.

When they finally got to the Jent residence, Zach's voice turned serious, "Get out of the car!"

Madelyn opened her eyes. She hadn't spoken a single word during the ride. She hadn't even paid attention to what Zach was talking about on the way home.

Inside the mansion, the living room was all lit up. Margaret sat up, looking a bit sleepy. A table in front of her was covered with all kinds of food, including a cake sitting in the middle, not as perfect-looking as before.

Margaret jolted awake upon hearing the noise. She hastily wiped a trace of drool from her chin. "Miss Jent, why are you returning so late? I've been preparing this elaborate feast. Allow me to warm it up for you."

Madelyn's expression remained impassive. "No need, I already ate. I'm going upstairs to rest."

"Wait a second!" Zach tossed the car keys onto the table as he strode in, exuding an intimidating aura.

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"Jadie, head upstairs and rest," said Zach.

Jadie glanced from Zach to Madelyn, then replied, "Alright. Madelyn just went through a car crash, so let's give her a break, okay?"

Jadie wasn't comfortable leaving Zach alone with Madelyn.

Every now and then, Jadie found herself wondering if Zach genuinely loved her. If he didn't, she couldn't help but question why he was so nice to her. But he had never actually said he loved her, which made her feel insecure about their relationship.

Jadie went upstairs.

Margaret noticed the tense atmosphere and stammered, "Sh-Should I leave too?"

Zach shot her a cold glare, and she hurriedly fled the scene.

Now, it was just him and Madelyn in the living room.

An oppressive feeling hung in the air, making it a bit hard for Madelyn to catch her breath.

"Am I just talking to myself here?" Zach approached her, his demeanor cold. Even without looking at him, Madelyn could sense his anger.

This was a stark difference from the Zach who seemed genuinely concerned about Madelyn in front of Ethan. He had a knack for concealing and maneuvering his emotions.

"I haven't forgotten," Madelyn nervously wiped the cold sweat from her palms, avoiding his gaze. She explained further, "George came to pick me up today, and I couldn't refuse. I took. this chance to tell

him I would not meet him anymore. I followed your instructions, so what else do you want from me?"

"Look at me," his voice was commanding.

Madelyn lifted her head, locking eyes with his.

Zach smirked, "You know your biggest flaw when you lie? Madelyn Jent, no lying to me!"

After all those years side by side, he knew her favorites, her not-so-favorites. He could figure out what she was thinking with just a look.

Madelyn had the words bottled up inside her. She had intended to say them outright, but she held back and settled for just two words, "Got it." Then she tacked on, "If that's all, I'd like to head back upstairs and rest."

She turned to go upstairs, but Zach's voice halted her, "It's not even twelve yet. Come here." He pulled out two chairs, settled into one casually, and gestured for her to sit.

Madelyn was uncertain about his intentions. She hesitated.

"Do I need to repeat myself?"

Madelyn slowly moved over, taking the seat beside him.

"You always enjoy Rosario's cooking, right? It's a shame to let today's dishes go to waste."

Madelyn looked at him with surprise. The food Rosario had prepared was now cold, and given her stomach issues, eating cold food would likely make her feel unwell.

"Are you trying to make me sick?" she said.

Zach was well aware of her health condition.

He said, "You did not listen to what I had said, so it's time for some discipline. That's the rule."

This might be your rule, but it's not mine!" Madelyn shot up from her chair, sending it tumbling. "You're not even my real brother. You have no right to control my life. Believe it or not, there's no future between Ethan and me. Whether it's you or Ethan, I'm not letting myself fall for anyone ever again. If you're so keen on this meal, enjoy it yourself."

Madelyn spun around, her foot just hitting the first step of the staircase, when Zach abruptly yanked her to the dining table. A swift, forceful motion and Madelyn found herself pressed against the chilly floor. She struggled to rise, but he had a firm grip on her neck. "Maybe next time you'll listen to me," he hissed.

His gaze were terrifying, and for a moment, Madelyn almost thought he was going to kill her. His grip grew tighter, causing discomfort and a sense of suffocation. However, she didn't utter a single word, her brow furrowing.

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Madelyn met Zach's intense gaze. It was as if he was taking pleasure in her pain, finding some sick joy in it.

Zach was waiting for her to beg for mercy, but despite the torment she was going through, she refused to give him the satisfaction.

Her unyielding demeanor irritated Zach. "So, you've forgotten how to beg now?" he taunted.

Madelyn knew Zach too well. She understood that if he truly meant harm, he wouldn't be foolish enough to act right here and now.

Maybe the events of that night had ignited something in him, a desire to see her break and plead. But Madelyn was determined not to let that happen.

Tears welled up in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks and making her look pitiful. Anyone who saw her like this would surely feel sympathy.

With a push, Madelyn managed to create some space between them. "I'll never beg you, Zach Jardin, even if it means giving up my life. You'll face the consequences for your actions, even if it's in hell." She couldn't help but silently curse, 'He's stained with the blood of so many lives, yet he faces no consequences. It's just not fair.'

'Hell?' The word caught Zach's attention. "Then I guess I'll take you down with me," he thought, 'You're the one who won't cut ties with Ethan Arnold. You're leaving me no choice.'

Zach suddenly grabbed Madelyn as she tried to escape.

In the blink of an eye, he lifted her, grabbing her by the collar. Her body was pressed against the wall, his hand around her neck. He locked eyes with her and then forcefully pressed his lips against hers.

His kiss was suffocating, his grip on her growing tighter. Madelyn's world began to blur as her oxygen supply ran low, and in her daze, she could feel him harshly nibbling at her lips. The taste that lingered between their mouths was unsettling yet strangely captivating. In her struggle, she clawed at his face and neck, leaving a trail of marks.

She couldn't catch a breath or find a moment to escape. She was entirely in his control.

He showed no sign of stopping. It was as though he had completely lost his sanity.

Jadie cautiously descended the stairs, feeling uneasy. Everything unfolded before her eyes, leaving her speechless and her mind blank.

Zach noticed her presence on the staircase. When their eyes met, a wave of heartbreak washed over Jadie. The weight of reality was too much, and she hurriedly retreated upstairs.

In that momentary distraction, Madelyn saw her chance. She pushed Zach away and, without a second thought, her hand landed a slap on his face.

Without hesitation, her hand delivered a resounding slap to his face.

The sharp sound of the slap echoed through the room, mixing with Madelyn's heavy breaths.

Tick-tock, tick-tock...

In a softly lit room, a clock kept on ticking. It showed twelve thirty, the early hours of the morning.

Beside a toilet bowl, Madelyn stuck her fingers down her own throat to induce vomiting. When her stomach had emptied, a sour taste lingered in her mouth, accompanied by a faint ringing sensation in her ears.

Half an hour earlier, her resistance had only fueled Zach's sadistic tendencies. He had forced her to eat everything on the table, enjoying her struggle. It wasn't until after midnight that he finally let her go.

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Moonlight streamed through the window, casting a soft glow in Madelyn's room. Her long hair was all messy as she stood there. Her gaze seemed hollow.

On the bed, her phone kept flashing with bright light, accompanied by a ringing tone that echoed through the room. The caller ID showed: Ethan.

Madelyn watched as the call was rejected by itself, time and time again, only to start ringing once more. She didn't pick it up. After a while, she eventually walked over, switched it off, and tossed it aside. Resting in one corner of the room was the crystal crescent pendant necklace.

The following morning, Madelyn descended the stairs to find Hayson, Jasmine, Zach, and Jadie already having breakfast.

At the dining table, Hayson seemed oblivious to anything unusual. He was engrossed in discussing company matters with Zach, just like any other day.

Listening to their talk, Madelyn realized that Hayson had gradually delegated most of the significant responsibilities of his company to Zach. Many of the important projects were now under Zach's control.

At present, Hayson was completely captivated by Jasmine, leaving him with little time to focus on company affairs.

“Join me at a banquet tonight. The Young family’s daughter wishes to personally express her gratitude for the recent incident. Choose an appropriate gift and put some thought into it. You know what appeals to young girls.”

“Alright, Father.”

“The Young family?’ Madelyn found the name somewhat familiar, though she struggled to recall exactly where she had heard it before. 1

After sipping half a bowl of creamy soup, Madelyn gently placed her spoon down and stood up. “Father, I’m off to school now.”

Only then did Hayson shift his attention toward her. “Have you caught up on all your missed after-school classes?”

Madelyn replied, “I’ve made up for the three months of classes I missed. Don’t worry, I won’t fall behind.”

A hint of relief crossed Hayson’s face, and he nodded. “Go ahead to school. Be careful while you’re on your way.”

Just as Madelyn was about to take her school bag from Margaret, Hayson called out to her. “ Hold on.”

Madelyn paused and turned back, her expression calm.

Hayson inquired, “How’s your wound?”

The wound on Madelyn’s arm hadn’t fully healed yet. It had begun to scab over. As long as it didn’t come into contact with water, it wouldn’t split open.

“It’s not too deep. I think it’ll be better in a few days,” Madelyn replied.

Hayson felt a pang of guilt for letting his business occupy him and neglecting his daughter lately. "Don't push yourself too hard. If you need some time off, take a break for a few days." His eyes then caught sight of the wound at the corner of Madelyn's lips. His expression subtly shifted, yet he refrained from prying for more details. 2

Madelyn really wanted to keep her distance from Zach and Jadie, especially after the whole thing that went down the night before. But, life threw her a curveball: she found herself having to share a ride to school with Jadie in Zach's car. And so, there they were, the three of them, sitting in the car in silence. None of them mentioned the incident from before.

As tension filled the air, Madelyn closed her eyes, trying to wrap her head around why Zach had kissed her. 'Jadie saw it too... Does he not care about her? He's head over heels for her. He's been waiting patiently, not even looking at anyone else, just to be with Jadie when she's ready.'

A bunch of stuff suddenly didn't make sense to Madelyn.

Even as they reached the school gate, Madelyn stayed quiet. She simply hopped out of the car and made her way into the school building.

Back in the day, Jadie would've given Zach a peppy goodbye, reminding him to drive safely to work. But this time, all she could muster was a plain, "I'm off to school."

"Okay," Zach's voice sounded distant.