

Rewritten 41

Chapter 41

Hayson's voice turned icy as he said, "Either you stay in Ventropolis, or you don't further your studies at all. What's the use of getting into university anyway? Sooner or later, you'll end up getting married. We have a banquet in a few days, and I want you to come with us. Some of my friends are eager to meet you."

Madelyn knew he would say that. In her previous life, Hayson had never respected women. In his eyes, women were mere tools for procreation, and once they got married, they were only fit to stay at home, tending to their husbands and children.

"Father, things have changed now," she said. "I've made some friends, and they've all gone abroad for their studies. Do you know Serena Smith?"

Hayson raised an eyebrow. "Chadwick Smith's daughter?"

"Yes, Serena mentioned that she's preparing for a foreign language test. She wants to study abroad and settle there permanently, even change her nationality," Madelyn continued. "But Father... compared to that, I just want to go to Lorville. At least during vacations, I can come back home." She paused for a moment before adding, "And what if someone asks about my education? If I only have a high school diploma, won't it become a laughingstock? It's fine if others laugh at me, but I can't let you lose face."

Madelyn's words hit Hayson's thoughts precisely. He frowned, displeased. "Must it be Lorville University?" Hayson cared deeply about his reputation. With his own limited education, he relied entirely on Zach to manage his company.

Madelyn nodded, her voice unusually gentle. "Father, I know you're worried about me. But think about it, if I go to Lorville University, someone will take care of Grandma. I promise, I won't cause any trouble for you."

Grandma was her final trump card. Despite Hayson being a jerk, he was a devoted son. He had been trying to convince Grandma to come to Ventropolis for years, but she insisted on staying in Lorville, a remote and impoverished place, to spend her old age. Hayson was concerned, but he always visited Lorville every Chinese New Year.

Madelyn pushed further, giving it her all. "What if I can persuade Grandma to come back?"

Hayson was contemplating her words.

Jasmine raised an eyebrow, a slight smile playing on her red lips. "Actually, Madelyn has a point. Nowadays, besides looks, education is also crucial for girls. Since Madelyn has her own aspirations, why not just agree to it? Besides, I graduated from Lorville University's education degree program. It'll be easier for her to find a job when she is a Lorville graduate."

Madelyn nodded in agreement. "Mhmm."

Hayson finally compromised. "If you perform averagely in school and fail to graduate, you'll

come back immediately and get married."

"Don't worry, Father. I won't let you down," she thought to herself, 'By the time I graduate, the Jent family will probably be long gone.'

Hayson looked content, his gaze filled with satisfaction. "It's rare to see you show some ambition. Clear out your room and let Jasmine move in."

"Ahem..." Madelyn choked on her sip of cream soup.

Jasmine chuckled and patted Madelyn's back. "Let's wait a bit longer! Madelyn might not be ready for it just yet."

"No, no..." Madelyn quickly denied, "Ms. Manning, I'm just really happy that you can move in. Now I won't be bored at home anymore. I can chat with you when there's nothing else to do."

But if you doesn't excel in her studies, I'll be strict," Jasmine teased.

"I promise to submit assignments on time," Madelyn replied. She was caught off guard because she remembered that in her previous life, Jasmine and Hayson's relationship had not progressed this quickly. But Madelyn didn't want to dwell on it. After all, in just five or six months at most, she would be free from this household.

Madelyn lowered her head, pretending not to notice the intriguing scene happening under the table. She couldn't even imagine what it would be like when Jasmine moved into her room...

She couldn't stomach the food anymore. Setting down her utensils, she quickly made up an excuse and left, leaving them to continue their meal. She poured herself a glass of water and headed back upstairs to her room because she still needed to take her medication.

For Madelyn, the most challenging part wasn't dealing with Jasmine; it was the constant need to put on an act in front of them every day.

Chapter 42

The Jent residence didn't have many rooms. Hayson had always sleeping alone, so the study on the second floor and the master bedroom were off-limits. The third floor had originally been Madelyn and Zach's rooms, while Jadie occupied the fourth floor.

Now, Madelyn had to give up her room on the third floor, and her only option was to move to the fifth floor, the very top of the house. However, the fifth floor was incredibly peaceful. The room boasted a spacious balcony where she could care for her plants, savor a cup of tea while gazing at the nighttime scenery. Even if she had to spend the entire day in her room, she wouldn't feel bored.

Madelyn swallowed a couple of painkillers, took a sip of water, and began tidying up the room.

Just then, Rosario walked in, her expression somewhat sour. "If someone had to give up their room, it shouldn't have been you," she remarked.

Madelyn gently grasped Rosario's hand, her lips curving into a reassuring smile as she tried to console her. "To be honest, it doesn't matter who takes over my room on the third floor. I prefer the room on the fifth floor. I recall there are numerous paintings by Mom there, as well as her photographs. If I live there, maybe Mom will visit me in my dreams at night. It's been such a long time since I dreamt of her."

That was also the place where she felt closest to her mother.

Rosario's face brimmed with compassion as she held Madelyn's hand. "Our dear Madelyn, why are you so understanding?"

"Because I've already grown up, Rosario. In truth, I've learned a lot of things," Madelyn thought to herself, addressing Rosario. 'Just give me a little more time, and I'll take you away

from here.'

Madelyn began to pack her clothes and gather the basic items she would need.

Shortly after, the housekeeping personnel arrived. They swiftly replaced the old furniture in her original room and covered the previously pink walls with white wallpaper. In less than two hours, the room, once delicate and brimming with youthful charm, underwent a complete transformation. Additionally, a personalized clothing company delivered batches of clothes

and dresses to the third floor.

Hayson had always been generous with women. Madelyn was aware of his previous relationship with a sugar baby, a college student, and how he had bought her an apartment as compensation when he decided to end things due to his fading interest.

Madelyn didn't possess many belongings, so organizing the already tidy room was a quick task. She pushed open the glass door that connected the room to the balcony courtyard and stepped outside. To her delight, she discovered that the flowers her mother had once cared for

were still flourishing. In one corner, an easel stood, indicating that this was where her mother used to paint. She walked over and leaned against the railing, feeling the gentle breeze caressing her face as she absorbed the captivating light and scenery. From this vantage point, she even caught a glimpse of Ethan's room.

Madelyn suddenly felt that this room on the fifth floor was her own private sanctuary compared to her original room. From now on, she could lock herself in here and indulge in whatever activities she desired. The only minor inconvenience was the need to navigate the stairs, but at least Zach would no longer have a reason or excuse to enter her room.

Filled with a sense of elation, Madelyn flopped onto the bed and playfully rolled around.

Rosario entered the room, clutching a framed sunflower painting.

"Madelyn, you just made the bed. Don't mess it up," she said.

"Rosario, you don't have to clean my room anymore, especially since you have trouble with your legs. I'll take care of it myself, and I'll even handle my own laundry," Madelyn replied. Then she added, "Rosario, please leave the painting here."

"Okay." Zach's voice unexpectedly interrupted.

Madelyn immediately sat up on her knees, pulling the blanket off her head. She inquired, "Hey, what brings you here? Are you feeling better?"

Zach coughed lightly a few times. "I'm getting there. If you don't like it here, you can move to my room. The higher floor and the hassle of going up and down the stairs might be inconvenient for you."

"It's fine, really. It's a good opportunity to get some exercise. Besides, the view from here is stunning, and I can sit on the balcony at night to admire the stars. You don't need to worry about me," Madelyn replied.

Suddenly, Zach walked over to the edge of the bed, placing his large and comforting hand on top of her head. "I'm just concerned that you might feel disheartened."

In her mind, Madelyn cursed at him, 'Uncomfortable? How could I even dare to feel disheartened? If you can simply spare my life, I'd be eternally grateful.'

Chapter 43

Madelyn looked up and smiled, saying, "Not at all. I don't feel the slightest bit disheartened." But deep down, she inwardly mocked him, thinking, 'Handing over my room is exactly what you desire. It makes it easier for you to rendezvous with Jasmine.'

Zach replied, "If there's anything you need, don't hesitate to reach out to me."

"Okay," Madelyn acknowledged.

Once Zach departed, Madelyn fetched the electric kettle from downstairs and placed it in her room. This way, she wouldn't have to make frequent trips downstairs for a drink of water. It also minimized the chance of encountering Zach and Jasmine.

Time flew by in the blink of an eye, and Jasmine had already been staying at the Jent residence for several days. Once Zach recovered and left with Jadie, he hadn't returned. Due to their infrequent visits, Madelyn rarely crossed paths with Jasmine and Hayson within the household. Thus, most of the time, she found herself alone.

Madelyn took about a week to recuperate at home before returning to school. As she had anticipated, Jasmine had a lighter class schedule. Teaching music, which wasn't closely tied to the core subjects, meant that Madelyn seldom caught a glimpse of her at school.

Madelyn resumed her own classes, and just two days ago, the results of the practice quizzes started being announced one by one. These quizzes were prepared by the teachers themselves. Madelyn had already received satisfactory scores in three subjects, averaging around a hundred in humanities and around ninety-something in sciences. These scores were adequate for her to secure a spot in the education degree program at Lorville University. She felt that striving for higher scores wouldn't make much difference.

During class, the assistant homeroom teacher, announced the ranking for Class Six, revealing Madelyn in fifth place. Everyone gazed at her with disbelief. Someone even questioned, “Ms. Kempson, is this for real? Are you sure it’s not fifth from the bottom?”

The teacher cleared her throat a few times and replied, “Madelyn’s recent efforts have been evident to all of you. Everyone should learn from Madelyn. Although you all come from affluent backgrounds, the knowledge you acquire is your own, and sometimes money isn’t everything. Alright, now that the results have been announced, let’s continue with our self- study.”

The teacher then added, “Madelyn, please come with me.”

Madelyn discreetly set aside the romance novel disguised as a math textbook and nervously walked out of the classroom.

Outside, she asked, “Did you need something from me?”

Kayley Kempson, a woman in her forties wearing glasses, was the homeroom teacher for Class One. However, due to Jasmine’s unavailability, she also assisted in managing Class Six as the assistant homeroom teacher.

“I heard from Ms. Manning that you’re considering transferring to a different class?” Kayley inquired.

Madelyn nodded, saying, “Yes, Ms. Kempson.”

“To be honest, Madelyn, transferring classes at this stage wouldn’t make much of a difference. It might even disrupt your learning since each class is progressing at its own pace. Besides, there are only a few months left. Hang in there. And if you’re considering the transfer because of Forrest, don’t worry, he’s been sick and hospitalized recently, so he won’t be coming to school.”

“Forrest is hospitalized? What happened to him? Is he seriously injured?” Madelyn asked with genuine concern.

Kayley frowned and replied, "The situation is quite serious. He remains unconscious. Madelyn, I know a little bit about your family's circumstances. If possible, try to reason with them. They can teach him a lesson, but don't be too harsh on him."

Madelyn also wanted to see how Forrest was doing, so she asked, "Can I take a leave to go see him?"

The incident of her injury had nothing to do with Forrest. She understood Forrest, and while he did dislike her, he wouldn't go as far as trying to harm her discreetly.

"Wait until the last class, then you can go. For now, focus on your lessons."

"Yes, Ms. Kempson, I understand," Madelyn replied.

Chapter 44

Madelyn took a leave and went to SereneCare Hospital without attending her last class. She arrived at the hospital entrance in a taxi, holding a bouquet of white chrysanthemums that she had purchased from a flower shop. Uncertain of Forrest's preferences, she had decided to choose the flowers randomly. However, white chrysanthemums were the only type available at the shop. Despite feeling heartache for having to spend fifty bucks on a bouquet, she had requested the owner to wrap them beautifully.

Approaching the hospital reception, Madelyn inquired about Forrest's room number. With the information in hand, she entered the elevator, ascending to the twelfth floor.

"Hey, babe, what are you looking at?" Jasmine, wearing sunglasses and dressed provocatively, held onto Zach's arm.

Zach nonchalantly shifted his gaze, silently wondering, 'Was that Madelyn just now?'

As the elevator doors closed, Madelyn stood inside, her heart pounding with anxiety as she clutched her chest. 'Oh my goodness, I really hope Zach didn't notice me just now. Those two are something else,

flaunting their affection in a hospital of all places. If Hayson were to discover them, it would undoubtedly cause trouble.’ All she desperately wished for was that Zach hadn’t seen her.

Soon, the elevator reached the twelfth floor. Madelyn stepped out, holding the bouquet of flowers, and coincidentally crossed paths with a middle-aged man pushing a teenager in a wheelchair. The teenager, around nineteen years old, possessed striking handsomeness, resembling a character from a comic book. A distinctive blue tattoo adorned the back of his hand, extending beneath his long sleeves, adding an air of mystery and nobility to his persona. He emanated an aloof and unapproachable aura.

The teenager was incredibly handsome, like a character in a comic book. He had a peculiar blue tattoo on the back of his hand, extending and hiding under his long sleeves. He exuded an air of mystery and nobility, with a somewhat aloof and unapproachable demeanor.

Madelyn couldn’t help but steal a few more glances at him, but she quickly averted her eyes as they passed each other.

Unexpectedly, the middle-aged man pushing the wheelchair abruptly halted and turned his head, just as they had exited the room that Madelyn had entered moments ago. “It’s Ms. Jent. She went into Forrest’s room, but it seems she didn’t recognize you.”

Ethan’s brooding eyes, partially concealed by his bangs, radiated a sense of gloom, reflecting his displeasure.

In a cold tone, Ethan uttered, “Once Madelyn leaves, arrange for Forrest’s transfer to another hospital. Ensure he receives proper care and shield him from any disturbances.”

“As you wish,” replied the person accompanying Ethan.

As they neared the elevator, Ethan caught the sound of voices emanating from a nearby room.

A bouquet of white chrysanthemums was flung out, and Forrest exclaimed, “Madelyn Jent, am I already dead? Why bring me chrysanthemums? Are you trying to curse me or something?” In Venturian culture, white chrysanthemums were symbolic of death and mourning, rather than life.

Madelyn kept stepping back, deftly avoiding the glass that was hurled in her direction. Instead of becoming angry, she continued to explain and apologize, her voice filled with sincerity, Forrest, I genuinely came to visit you. I went to the flower shop and bought these flowers for you. Unfortunately, this was the only bouquet they had left, and it cost me fifty bucks, which is already quite expensive.”

“Get lost, Madelyn Jent! If you dare show up in front of me, I’ll fucking kill you.”

Madelyn bent down and picked up the fallen flowers, maintaining a good-natured tone as she spoke, “Forrest... What’s wrong with you? Why so grumpy? Can’t we just call it even?”

Observing the casts on Forrest’s left hand and both feet, which seemed more severe than her own injuries, Madelyn couldn’t help but think, ‘Zach must have caused serious harm to Forrest. He can be incredibly ruthless.’

Considering her personality in her previous life, Madelyn was well aware that she had not grounds to pass judgment. However, Zach had succeeded in eradicating her arrogant and domineering nature in her in her previous life. Consequently, she had become genuinely kind – hearted, unable to bear witnessing anyone in pain. As her eyes rested upon Forrest, Madelyn experienced an unexplained wave of compassion, causing her to soften towards him.

“Just get the hell out of here!”

Adrian and Timothy emerged from the room, with Timothy displaying impatience as he tersely remarked, “Just go away! His wounds were healing fine until you showed up. You’re so evil, Madelyn Jent!”

However, as Adrian noticed Ethan’s presence by the elevator, unease washed over him, and he quickly signaled to Timothy, alerting him to the situation.

Upon realizing that Ethan had not yet departed, Timothy quickly reined in his rudeness, saying, “You can keep the flowers for yourself. And going forward, please visit less frequently.

”

Madelyn's face fell, disappointment evident in her expression. She spoke with a tinge of regret, "You really lack taste, Forrest. What's wrong with chrysanthemums? They are still beautiful flowers. I'll just take them back home and let them dry. I can even make tea with

them."

She continued, "I'll come to see you again tomorrow. Let me know your favorite flowers, and

I'll bring them for you tomorrow."

Chapter 45

Another glass went flying out of the room, accompanied by an enraged voice. "Madelyn Jent, shut the fuck up already!"

Just as the glass nearly struck Madelyn, someone swiftly pulled her aside. It was Zach, standing by her side, and she blurted out, "Z Zach, what are you doing here at the hospital?" Zach scanned her up and down with concern. "Are you alright? Did you get hurt?"

"I'm fine." Madelyn had barely stepped into the room before being promptly expelled. With Forrest's injuries, he posed no threat to her well being.

"Are you feeling unwell?"

"Not really, just some stomach discomfort, so I decided to come here and have it checked out."

Zach furrowed his brow. "Are you here to see Forrest?"

Madelyn hesitated briefly before replying, "Bro-Brother... Did you have someone beat up Forrest like that?"

Zach's expression darkened. "So, Madelyn thinks I'm that kind of person?"

Madelyn thought to herself, 'If it's not Zach, then who could it be? But if it was Zach, he would never hide it. And if it's not him, he certainly won't admit it.'

"No, it's not..." She swiftly attempted to pacify Zach's anger. "I thought you had someone confront him on my behalf. But I didn't realize it wasn't you."

"So now you're upset that I didn't seek revenge for you?"

Madelyn vigorously shook her head, fear evident in her eyes. "No, that's not what I meant..."

"Alright, I was just messing with you. Why are you so tense? Should I take you back to school or straight home?"

Madelyn declined, stating, "I took a leave. I have a piano lesson later, so I'll just walk there. It's not too far."

Zach glanced at his watch and said, "Okay, be careful on your own. After your piano lesson, remember to call the driver and don't wander around."

"Okay, okay." Madelyn nodded. She silently speculated that it might be even riskier to accompany Zach.

Madelyn pinched her forehead, feeling a headache coming on. 'Why do I keep bumping into Zach everywhere? It's as if he's haunting me. Perhaps I should visit Forrest tomorrow instead. It was rather abrupt to come today...'

Meanwhile, seated in the backseat of the parked Cayenne outside SereneCare Hospital, Ethan gazed at the blue tattoo on his hand and inquired, "George, do you think I look intimidating?" To conceal the tattoo, Ethan always wore long sleeves, ensuring it remained hidden from view.

"Not at all. Right now, Ms. Jent simply doesn't know you. Once you have a formal introduction. and spend some time together, she will come to understand you. Your serious demeanor naturally gives off an intimidating aura, making most people hesitant to approach. However, when interacting with

someone like Ms. Jent, who has a pleasant disposition, you can afford to smile more. After all, she's a girl."

Ethan held a tablet in his hands, its lock screen wallpaper featuring a candid photo he had discreetly captured of Madelyn from the window.

"However.... you should also listen to the doctor's advice so that you can fully recover."

"Alright."

The surgery to address Ethan's leg condition was scheduled for the following day. George Gibbon, Ethan's butler, reflected on how Madelyn's intervention had greatly influenced Ethan's decision to return to the hospital for treatment. 'Despite Madam's extensive efforts over the years, she had been unable to convince Young Master to step outside their home, let alone undergo surgery. Yet, it was someone like Ms. Jent, whom he wasn't acquainted with, who managed to emancipate Young Master from his painful past. One can only fathom the immense importance of Ms. Jent to Young Master.'

As Madelyn exited the hospital, she was taken aback by a call from the Jent family's chauffeur, who informed her that Zach was furious upon discovering that she had left school without keeping him informed.

Madelyn couldn't help but curse silently in her mind, 'It's Zach Jardin once again!'

Chapter 46

As Zach strolled off, Madelyn remained rooted in place before the bus stop sign. Clad in her Ventrocloud High School uniform, she proudly sported the emblem of a knight on a horse shooting an arrow, emblazoned across her chest.

Standing amidst the bustling street, anyone observant enough could easily identify her as a student of Ventrocloud High School. Coupled with her remarkable beauty, it was inevitable to avoid drawing the attention of unsavory characters.

At that moment, three thugs approached. It was still the year 2000, and surveillance cameras weren't yet widespread in Venturia's streets. In fact, the technology of that time paled in comparison to what we

have today. So, if anything were to happen, it would be challenging to find evidence. Even if the culprits managed to escape and hide, tracking them down would be truly arduous.

Seeing the three thugs getting closer, Madelyn lowered her head, hoping they wouldn't come any closer. However, unfortunate circumstances sometimes strike regardless of the day.

"Hey there, beautiful, where are you headed? Need a ride?" one of the thugs jeered.

"I never would've guessed you were a Ventrocloud High School student. I've heard that the kids who go there are either loaded or from wealthy families. Do you have any spare cash for me, sweetheart?" another one sneered.

Surrounded by the three individuals, Madelyn found herself with no means of escape. Onlookers simply turned a blind eye, avoiding any involvement in such matters.

Feeling frightened, Madelyn instinctively took a few cautious steps backward, her trembling hands reaching into her backpack. She retrieved a black purse, but before she could even open it, one of the

thugs snatched it from her grasp. His eyes gleamed with delight as he laid eyes on the bills nestled within. "Didn't expect you to be carrying this much cash!"

"There's a student ID in here too," remarked another thug, holding up the card. His expression subtly shifted as he read the name, and the trio exchanged a quick glance.

With a lecherous gleam in their eyes, one of them spoke, his hand inching toward Madelyn. "School lets out so early. How about you join us for some fun?" His words dripped with an unsettling intent.

Across the street, Jasmine leaned against the car window, her hand resting on her forehead as she calmly observed the unfolding scene. "Darling, aren't you going to rescue her? Or perhaps it's better if you don't. That way, our little affair won't be exposed," she murmured, leaning in closer and linking her arm intimately with Zach's. She couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy as she gazed at Madelyn's beautiful face and figure.

“Jasmine, aren’t you afraid for your own safety?” Zach’s eyes grew cold, his demeanor turning

chillingly intense.

But Jasmine clung to him, unfazed by the danger, wearing a smile filled with affection. Her red manicured hand glided across his solid chest as she spoke. “Well, then! Let’s face death together, like Romeo and Juliet. It wouldn’t be so terrible. We could be lovey-dovey in hell.”

He forcefully grasped her hand on his chest, pushing her away with impatience. “Do you truly believe Hayson wouldn’t uncover your infidelity? Jasmine, be careful not to push the limits. too far, or you may end up burning yourself.”

“What can he possibly do, even if I push it too far? I have you. You’ll protect me, won’t you, Zach?”

Zach met her gaze with a cold, piercing stare. “Do you believe your demise would affect me in any way? If Hayson discovers the truth, do you think he’d want you dead or me? I am a businessman motivated solely by self-interest. Don’t attempt to test your significance in my heart.” He reached out and pinched Jasmine’s cheek, a smug smirk playing on his lips. “What if you can’t even compare to Madelyn as a mere pawn?”

In Zach’s eyes, there existed only two categories of individuals: pawns to be exploited and friends who could provide him with advantages. Women were nothing more than disposable toys to him. He held no regard for whether any woman would marry him or bear his children.

The warmth in Jasmine’s eyes gradually faded, her lips still curved in a smile, but her gaze turned icy. “We’ve known each other for a decade, and I can’t even measure up to a Madelyn? Zach, you’re heartless!”

“Are you even worthy?” he retorted.

As Zach watched the thugs laying their hands on Madelyn, a moment of hesitation enveloped him, unsure whether to intervene. Suddenly, a group of well-dressed bodyguards swiftly emerged, overpowering the assailants, their screams piercing the air. Even from across the street, Zach could hear their cries distinctly.

Trembling with fear, Madelyn clung to a nearby billboard, her clothing disheveled, buttons torn off, and her once neatly tied hair now a messy cascade over her shoulders. Her expression was one of sheer terror and apprehension, tears glistening in her eyes.

A sleek black Cayenne pulled up by the bus stop, and the window glided down slowly. The handsome young man came into Madelyn's view, his voice tender as he inquired, "Are you alright?"

Madelyn resembled a forlorn princess amidst the bustling street, a tragic beauty. She timidly shook her head, sniffled, and trembled, tears streaming down like scattered pearls.

The person before her was the charming teenager she had encountered at the hospital. As she caught sight of the curve of his lips, Madelyn felt a soothing sensation wash over her, the intensity of her fear diminishing. It was as if she was being healed by his mere presence.

Chapter 47

Madelyn thought to herself, 'He's not as intimidating as I initially thought. He looks incredibly handsome when he smiles.'

The young man reassured her, "You don't need to be afraid anymore. Where are you headed? I can give you a ride."

Madelyn wiped away the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. "No, thank you. My driver will be here soon."

A faint smile graced the young man's lips. "No trouble at all. I'll wait with you. Are you a student at Ventrocloud High School?"

Madelyn nodded. "Yes."

"Ms. Je I mean Miss, here's your purse." One man took the purse from the thug's pocket and handed it over to Madelyn with both hands.

Just moments ago, fear had gripped Madelyn so intensely that she had lost track of where the bodyguards had taken those three thugs.

The young man spoke, his voice filled with concern, "Please check your purse to ensure nothing is missing."

Madelyn opened her purse and quickly glanced inside. Her ID card and student card remained safely in place. "Everything is here, nothing is missing." She then inquired, "Where did those guys go?"

"To ensure this doesn't happen again, I had them taken to the police station," Ethan replied. His attention shifted to the torn state of Madelyn's school uniform. "Your clothes!"

young

Madelyn looked down, hastily covering the exposed collar that revealed her fair skin and the faint outline of her bra. A blush crept up her cheeks. Despite her age surpassing this man's grandmother in combined lifetimes, she couldn't help but feel a tinge of embarrassment in this situation.

In that moment, the young man extended a black jacket through the car window. "I keep spare clothes in the car. This jacket has never been worn, it's clean. If you don't mind, you can wear it to avoid any further exposure."

Madelyn pressed her lips together, her gaze briefly flickering between the tattoo on his hand and the jacket. Despite her hesitation, she eventually accepted it. "Th-Thank you. I'll return it to you later. Oh, please provide me with an address, and I'll return the jacket to you tomorrow.

"No need, you can keep it."

"But..."

Just then, the young man's driver caught sight of the approaching Mercedes in the rearview mirror. "Miss, is that your car?"

Madelyn glanced in its direction and nodded. "Yes." However, before she could utter another word, the luxurious Cayenne had already driven away, leaving her standing there, holding the borrowed jacket.

Madelyn's driver noticed her and quickly pulled up the car in front of her. "Ms. Jent, wh-what happened? What's going on?"

"It's nothing, just a minor incident that caused my school uniform to get damaged," she replied, downplaying the situation. She didn't want to make a fuss about what had just occurred. Dealing with it would only add further trouble for her.

"Are you heading back home or...?"

"Take me to Skyrise Tower. I have a piano lesson."

"Alright, Ms. Jent."

Madelyn wiped away the lingering tears from her eyes and removed her school uniform. She pondered over the missing buttons on the garment. Instead of purchasing a new one, she decided to have Rosario fix it. After all, the uniforms were quite expensive, and two sets would cost nearly three thousand dollars.

As Madelyn donned the young man's jacket, a subtle scent of mint and the soothing aroma of medicinal herbs wafted in the air.

"That boy just now... I feel like I've seen him somewhere. Could he be Ethan Arnold?" Madelyn contemplated silently. 'No, that can't be right... Based on our usual conversations, Ethan seems more like a caring older brother figure, not some tattooed mob boss.'

After all, her family already had two individuals fitting that description. If Ethan were to turn out similar to them, Madelyn didn't know what to think. The thought flashed through her mind, prompting her to swiftly take out her phone and send a message to Ethan.

Chapter 48

Ethan's car happened to be heading in the opposite direction when he saw the traffic light ahead turn red. Just then, he received a message from Madelyn: [Ethan, where are you?]

Ethan always kept his phone close to him, eagerly anticipating her messages. Whenever he saw her message, he would respond promptly. However, this time he made a deliberate decision to turn off his phone.

George glanced at the rearview mirror. "Is that a message from Ms. Jent? Has she discovered something?"

"Probably... but I don't want to deceive her," Ethan neither confirmed nor denied. He wished to wait a little longer, until he could stand on his own two feet once again. Then, she would see him in his entirety, rather than as a broken and disabled man.

George added, "Maybe she wouldn't mind, though?"

"It's not about whether she minds or not. I mind. Let's head back home!" Ethan wearily closed his eyes. The recent incident had been a close call. Fortunately, he had purposely lingered near the hospital entrance. If he had left at that moment, he couldn't bear to think about what might have happened to Madelyn.

Ethan opened his eyes, a glint of icy determination shining within them. "Notify the police. station. Those three individuals are not to be released without my permission."

"Yes, sir."

Madelyn didn't receive a reply from Ethan, and she decided not to send another message. 'I suppose that young man wasn't Ethan after all. If he were, why wouldn't he let me know?'

Not long after, Madelyn reached the piano training center located in Skyrise Tower. She had chosen one-on-one private lessons for a more focused learning experience. Moreover, the particular piece she was practicing was one she had played countless times in her previous life. As a result, she gave the impression of swift progress, at least on the surface.

After nearly three hours of piano practice, darkness had already fallen outside. Madelyn's fingers were a bit sore from playing the piano for such a long time. When the car arrived to pick her

up, Madelyn was taken aback to see that it wasn't Jordan, the usual chauffeur, but

Zach.

Feeling a mix of apprehension and curiosity, Madelyn hesitated for a moment before approaching the car. She couldn't help but wonder about Zach's unexpected presence. Questions raced through her mind. 'Why is he here? Is he coming to confront me? But back at the hospital, I pretended not to see him with Jasmine. Why would he still come?'

Normally, she would instinctively open the passenger door, but Madelyn hesitated and decided to sit in the back. However, as she opened the car door, she heard Zach's cold voice

pierce the air, "Madelyn, I am not your chauffeur."

Startled, Madelyn quickly moved to the passenger seat, taking a moment to fasten her seatbelt before Zach could assist her. As she settled in, her eyes were drawn to the spot where she had previously placed her belongings, only to find it now occupied by a pair of adorable bobblehead dolls—a boy and a girl. Instantly, she recognized them as Jadie's favorite decorations. Additionally, a different fragrance filled the air, signaling that Zach had added a bottle of anti-nausea perfume for Jadie, who often experienced motion sickness.

Taking in these changes, Madelyn shifted her gaze out the window, trying to maintain her composure. "Do you need to pick up Jadie?"

"Jadie is staying at school hostel."

'What?! Jadie is staying at school? How could he bear to do that?' Madelyn was somewhat surprised. She asked, "Why is Jadie staying at school hostel? I remember your place is not far from her school."

Zach replied, "I'm usually swamped with work and can't take care of her. Besides, she has to handle household chores and keep the house clean on regular days, which might affect her studies. So, I thought it would be best for her to stay at school for now and come back on

weekends."

Madelyn, not particularly invested in their matters, responded nonchalantly, "Well, that's

understandable."

A brief silence hung in the air before Zach spoke again, his voice tinged with curiosity. "Did your piano lesson tire you out today?"

"Not really, the teacher did a good job," Madelyn replied, her attention still focused on the passing scenery outside the car window. It seemed as though she was somewhat distant during their conversation.

Zach cast a sidelong glance at Madelyn and noticed her distracted demeanor. Furrowing his brows, he asked, "Madelyn, have I been asking too many questions? Does it bother you?"

Madelyn sensed a hint of dissatisfaction in Zach's tone, unsure of its cause.

Chapter 49

"Of course not. How could I ever find you annoying when you care about me?" Madelyn tried

to reassure Zach.

Zach's eyes wandered over Madelyn's loose and visibly ill-fitting clothes. He hadn't seen her in that particular outfit before, and it appeared to be men's clothing, so he asked, "Not wearing your school uniform today?"

Madelyn glanced down at her attire, realizing her oversight. "I-I did wear it... But the buttons. were broken. I borrowed this outfit from someone else, and I have to return it later."

"So, it's a men's outfit?"

Madelyn nodded, choosing not to hide the truth. "Yes."

Zach chuckled lightly, but there was no trace of emotion in his eyes, even a hint of coldness. Looks like Madelyn is in love."

Madelyn protested, "No... He's just a friend of my classmate."

Zach continued, "It's not a problem if you're in a relationship now. It's normal for young people to develop feelings for others during their youth... If you ever encounter any problems about love relationships, remember that you can always come to me and talk."

"

"Okay," Madelyn replied, her response cautious and guarded. She remained alert, sensing that even the slightest lapse in her vigilance could lead her to be ensnared by Zach's seemingly gentle façade.

Arriving at the Jent residence in Southern Haven Villas, Zach skillfully parked the car in the garage. A surge of anticipation coursed through Madelyn as she eagerly reached for the car door, only to find it still locked. Her heart quickened, anxiety bubbling within her.

To her surprise, Zach approached her, his masculine presence enveloping her senses. The fragrance of camellias emanated from him, further heightening her unease. "I-Is there something else?" she stammered.

Zach's hand gently cupped her face, his thumb brushing against her soft lips, leaving a delicate trace of pink on his fingertips. Madelyn instinctively flinched, her eyes wide with evident fear.

“Did you apply lipstick?” Zach inquired.

“N-No, it’s not lipstick. It’s a lip balm I bought. It has a tint,” Madelyn hastily explained, her mind racing to comprehend Zach’s intentions. In recent days, she had consciously avoided provoking him and had attempted to keep her distance. Yet, she couldn’t fathom what she might have done to earn his sudden interest. Within moments, she mentally retraced her steps, analyzing her actions, but she couldn’t discern any wrongdoing on her part.

12

“Are you afraid of me?” Zach’s question hung in the air.

Madelyn mustered a strained smile, her lips forming a faint arch. “No, why would I be afraid of you? I... like you.”

Zach’s eyebrow arched playfully, a glimmer of amusement dancing in his eyes. “Like? How much do you like me?”

to

Madelyn’s mind raced, cursing herself inwardly for her hasty response. ‘Madelyn Jent, why did you say that? It came out so awkwardly!’ She resisted the urge to smack herself for blurting out nonsense due to her startled state. Despite her internal turmoil, she had to find a way salvage the situation. She replied, “I like you as I would like a real older brother, someone I can rely on...”

Zach couldn’t help but thought, “This girl didn’t even think before she lied.’ He then responded, “Well, don’t wear it next time. The tint doesn’t suit you.”

Madelyn possessed striking features, radiating bold and irresistible beauty that left a lasting impression. Zach found her lip shape particularly appealing, and the touch of light pink on her lips was alluring, akin to blooming peach blossoms, only more captivating. In that instant, he couldn’t help but feel that this girl had somehow grown up.

Madelyn nodded absentmindedly. "Okay."

Zach unfastened her seatbelt, but Madelyn didn't rush to exit the car since the doors were still locked.

"Is... there something else?" Madelyn's voice trembled slightly.

Zach leaned in, his hand gently slipping through her hair, unnoticed by her. Madelyn was entranced by his tender gaze, causing her breath to grow shallow. She found herself completely captivated by his presence...

Chapter 50

When Zach was about to kiss her, Madelyn snapped back to reality and pushed him away abruptly. "No!" Her heart started racing.

Zach sat back calmly, his eyes filled with emotions she couldn't decipher. "So now you're saying no to me," he said.

Madelyn tightly clutched her black pleated skirt. "I've told you, I only see you as a brother. Please, don't do these strange things anymore. If Jadie finds out, she won't be happy." In her mind, she cursed, 'You cheater! While I was waiting for you to come home, were you fooling around with other women in your car too?'

Madelyn no longer loved him. She knew he only had eyes for Jadie, and no one else. Even though Cecilia bore a resemblance to Jadie, Zach only saw Cecilia as someone who could bear his child. In Madelyn's past life, her heart belonged entirely to him, but in the end, she suffered a devastating defeat. Now, she felt genuine fear.

Zach's eyes turned cold. "You're more mature now! I apologize for acting impulsively and for what happened last time."

"It's okay... I've already forgotten!"

"Good... let's pretend it never happened."

Zach unlocked the car doors, and Madelyn swiftly escaped by opening the door and stepping

out.

As Madelyn walked into the foyer, she happened to see Jasmine coming downstairs wearing a charming purple pajama set. "Madelyn, just got back? Your dad has a business engagement tonight, so he won't be coming home. How about we have dinner together?"

But Madelyn had no appetite. When she saw Jasmine, images of Jasmine and Zach fooling around in various places flooded her mind. She felt an intense repulsion, and her stomach churned with the urge to vomit.

Madelyn was about to decline when Zach's voice came from behind her. "Silly girl, don't you need your backpack?"

Jasmine turned toward Zach at the door. "Zach, aren't you at the office? Dinner is ready. I was bored, so I cooked. Come and taste my culinary skills."

Jasmine then noticed Madelyn standing motionless, wearing a perplexed expression. A profound smile appeared on Jasmine's face. "Madelyn... What are you standing there for? Come and join us for the meal."

Unable to escape, Madelyn stiffly replied, "Okay."

Rosario brought over three sets of silverware, and Madelyn took a seat next to Jasmine.

Jasmine said, "I know you love carne frita. I specifically learned how to make it from Rosario. Let's see if it suits your taste."

Madelyn looked down at the dish Jasmine offered and took a bite. "Thank you, it's delicious."

“As long as you like it, I’ll make it for you again next time.”

“Okay.”

Jasmine turned to Zach and asked, “Would you like some wine, Zach? Hayson brought an excellent bottle of red wine from outside yesterday. He’s not in good health, so I convinced him to stop drinking. It would be a shame to let it go to waste.”

Madelyn barely touched most of the dishes in front of her, but her plate of Mediterranean rice was nearly empty. Eating hastily, she suddenly choked and began coughing violently.

Rosario rushed over and patted Madelyn on the back. “Don’t eat so fast, no one is going to snatch it from you. Drink some water quickly.”

Madelyn held her chest, feeling a dull pain from the coughing. “Rosario... could you please get me some painkillers? I forgot to take them.”

“Okay, okay... just bear with it for a moment, I’ll fetch them for you.”

Less than a month had passed since Madelyn’s injury, and her bones were still fragile. In that moment, it felt as if her ribs were on the verge of breaking again. Enduring the pain, she said, “Jasmine, Zach... I’m full, please excuse me. Enjoy your meal.”

Jasmine rose from her seat with concern. “Are you okay? Should I take you to the hospital...”

“No-no, there’s no need. I just need to take some medicine.”

Worried that Madelyn might stumble while going upstairs, Rosario offered support and helped her up. In the living room, only Zach and Jasmine remained.

“Are you satisfied now?” Zach’s voice was icy.

Jasmine casually tousled her wavy, shoulder-length curls. “It’s not like I did it on purpose. Who would have guessed she couldn’t handle a little teasing?”