

Rewritten 8

Chapter 8

Madelyn sat at her desk, Jadie's unopened gift before her. She already knew what it was; a Swarovski crystal hair clip—an opulent trinket from the year 2000, a time when the average wage was only a few hundred dollars. She had never cared for jewelry, feeling as if each piece was a chain that bound her. Perhaps it was all psychological, but it unsettled her nonetheless.

With a sigh, Madelyn tucked the gift into the drawer of her desk.

She pulled out her senior math review booklet. The problems were not particularly challenging for her, and the pages were still crisp, seldom flipped through. Once upon a time, Madelyn had been the bottom of her class. It was not until she sought help from Zach, having him tutor her outside of school, that she began to improve. Despite Zach only having a middle school education, he was fluent in five foreign languages, all self-taught through his relentless dedication to learning. His intellectual prowess was almost otherworldly at her school. Even Ventropolis's top student could not compare. Zach, with his intelligence and determination, could always make miracles happen.

No wonder Hayson had taken such a liking to Zach. But Hayson had never showed any interest in her academic performance. Instead, he was more focused on her extracurricular activities. He treated her like a budding socialite, immersing her in an array of dance classes, piano lessons, golf, cooking, and embroidery. These were the skills Hayson wanted her to perfect most. After all, he had it all planned out; he was going to marry her off to a well-matched, wealthy business partner, merging their families in a corporate marriage. In his eyes, a woman's worth was in her virtue, not her intellect. Her role was to be a wife and mother, to stay home, not to be seen, only to serve and appease her husband.

Looking out the window, Madelyn watched a black sedan exit the front gate. It seemed they had finally left. Hayson would not be back for three days, leaving her with a rare period of freedom. Tossing her

book aside, she resolved to do what she wanted, no longer shackled by the restrictions of the Jent family.

Rushing into the backyard, she sought out the jujube tree. Rosario had told her it was planted by her mother while she was pregnant with her. The tree now towered above the walls, a single branch as thick as an arm, winding its way into the neighboring mansion. Here, the mansions were connected,

separated only by a few strategically placed trees. The jujube tree was laden with fruit, tempting Madelyn to climb up, enjoy the view, and munch on the sweet fruits.

However, she had overestimated her climbing skills and had to bring over a ladder. Sitting atop the wall, her figure obscured by the lush canopy of the jujube tree, she picked a ripe fruit. Rubbing it clean, she popped it into her mouth, swinging her feet in utter contentment. She had never felt as free as she did now. With eyes closed, she reveled in the gentle breeze—keenly aware, fully alive.

Suddenly, the sound of shattering porcelain and a boy's angry voice erupted from the mansion next door. "Get out, all of you. Get out!" The voice came from the second floor. Madelyn looked up just in time to see a cane being flung out the window.

"Ethan, I'm just worried about you. Let's go for a walk, okay? You're always cooped up in the house, and it's really worrying."

"What's best for me? You all think I'm just a burden, don't you? Wouldn't it be better if I were dead? You wouldn't have to waste your time on this useless cripple. Get out! Everyone get out!"

"Ethan..."

"Didn't you hear me? I said get out!" The boy's voice roared.

The woman's voice finally yielded. "Alright... I'll leave, Ethan. Just don't hurt yourself."

'Who lives here? What a temper,' Madelyn thought to herself.

She recalled that about half a month after her own suicide attempt, Zach had taken her to the hospital for a checkup. When they returned, she saw an ambulance parked outside the neighboring mansion. Medical personnel were carrying out a body draped in a white sheet. The individual had died the same way she had tried to—suicide by wrist-cutting. His fate was even grimmer; his body was not discovered until two days later in the bathroom.

Rosario had told her that the suicide victim was Ethan, the future heir of the renowned Arnold family of Ventropolis. After a childhood car accident left him with crippled legs, he sank into a deep depression, becoming a recluse and eventually developing mental illnesses. He had always shown suicidal tendencies; he had just been lucky in his previous attempts and had been saved.

'Such a shame to die so young, at only eighteen,' Madelyn lamented.

Madelyn plucked a jujube from the tree and tossed it through the broken window.