

## Seduced 191

### Chapter 191

I was still sobbing when Jade called. Surprised by my sniffling voice, she asked if Felix and Lilac had bullied me again.

Now that she brought it up, I realized that I hadn't seen them for a long while.

Did they have a moral epiphany and decide to stop pestering me? Good for them!

"Luna, you dummy. When they bully you, you fight back. It's time to stand up for yourself. You're five-foot-five, and meekness doesn't look good on you. You're willing to endure the bullying, but I'm not. Let me avenge you. I'll call Felix right away and give him an earful."

"Don't, don't. I haven't seen them in a while. My eyes and ears appreciate the current peace, so please don't provoke them."

Jade then wondered, "So, they aren't trying to get your attention now? Felix can live without your attention, but I highly doubt Lilac can do the same."

I had the same question too. Life was full of surprises.

"I don't know why they're doing this, but I'm not complaining."

"Right, you can now enjoy your peace."

I'd love some peace in my life, but some people just wanted to bother me when they saw I

was too comfortable.

It rained the whole night again. Loud splatters, coupled with the howling wind, made me feel extra cold.

I woke up expecting another gloomy and rainy day. However, I was mistaken. The sky was blue, the clouds were fluffy, and the weather was clear.

Like everyone, beautiful weather was enough to make my day. I carried my books and left my apartment in a gleeful mood. I planned to have breakfast in the cafeteria before attending my lectures.

As soon as I went down, I saw that the apartment building was surrounded by a mob.

“She’s here. She’s here. Make way.”

Someone from the group shouted, and the crowd parted to the sides. They left a small path

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for me to navigate through.

I was confused, but I continued my journey through the path. Many pointed their fingers at me as if I were some scandalous celebrity.

My confusion cleared up when I saw that glamorous yet mean-faced lady.

Matthew’s mother, Brenda, was here. She was clearly after me.

I knew it wouldn’t end this soon. Trouble had come knocking on my door.

I did what I was told and left Matthew. Why was Brenda here looking all confrontational?

“Luna, how dare you show your face after what you’ve done to my son? Are all poor people as shameless as you?”

She pointed at me and barked as soon as I got my bearings. Two women whom I had met back then were behind Brenda, watching the drama unfold. One of them was Georgina,

Helen’s mother.

Normally, out of respect for Matthew, I would have tolerated Brenda’s antics so long as she didn’t do anything outrageous.

But today, she accused me of having no shame, and she mocked my modest background.

That was too far.

If I didn’t fend for myself and allowed her to tarnish my reputation with unfounded accusations, I would be shunned away by everyone at Jesselton College. I couldn’t let Brenda do that.

Jade was right. I should stand up for myself. Otherwise, people would think I was an easy target.

Brenda charged at me like a raging bull charging at the bullfighter. Her purple nails were about to slap my

face.

I shoved the textbooks to a nearby person and grabbed the incoming hand. Then, I pushed it back with all my might.

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No wonder every parent wanted their children to be tall. Being tall made one look intimidating; being short diminished you.

Brenda clearly didn't expect my retaliation. Her portly figure fell back clumsily, and she had to gather herself. Humiliated, she cursed at me, saying that I was uncouth and uncivilized.

I was so mad.

She truly thought that I would allow her to disrespect me blatantly. Fine. I had tried to be courteous, but she would have none of it. I wasn't going to let her accuse me of something I'd never done.

"Mrs. Loxley, please mind your words. Your baseless accusation provides enough grounds

for a defamation lawsuit."

"I don't need any evidence to prove that you're a bitch. You seduced my son, and you deserve to be called out. Look around you. You're in Jinovy. You're on my territory now."

Behind her, the two women continued to fuel her anger. Somehow, Brenda truly thought that she owned Jinovy. She continued to hurl insults at me as if I was a scumbag who needed debasing. As the spectating crowd grew larger, her antics became more exaggerated.

From where I was from, we called petty women like her Karens.

However, deep down, I was quite happy. Now, everyone knew Brenda's true colors.

Those who were watching the drama would know who the bad guy was.

Brenda could insult away. She was just digging her own grave.

“Oh? Explain to us then, Mrs. Loxley. How did I seduce your son? And did you just call me a bitch? I’m just an ordinary citizen. What did I do? If you can’t explain it, maybe my friends and lecturers at the law faculty can help you.”

“Because of you, Matthew was injured and hospitalized. You broke my son and you show not remorse. You’re a villain!”

I was so mad that I wanted to laugh. I had seen people who twisted the truth, but I had never seen someone who could lie through their teeth! She knew very well why Matthew was injured. Also, look who was making a scene now? Her voice was so loud that the entire building was shaking.

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“Mrs. Loxley, I planned to forget what happened that day because I didn’t want to hurt Matthew’s feelings. You know what nasty thing your family did. But since you came all the way here to smear my name, I’ll be seen as the pariah if I don’t tell everyone the truth now.

“So let’s air all the dirty laundry, yeah? First of all, Matthew and I went to the same high school. From the day I met him till the day I came to Jesselton College for my postgraduate, I never had any personal contact with him. Feel free to verify this with your son.

“I believe his call history and text history will provide very convincing proof. Therefore, I never seduced Matthew. Saying that I did is defamation. Secondly, it is by pure coincidence that Matthew and I ran into each other here.

“He wanted to date me. I appreciated his feelings and told him that I’d consider it, but I never pestered him. You can ask my roommate, Helen, about this. Other than my classes, she knows where I’ve been and what I’ve done.

“Additionally, I never planned to attend Mr. Loxley’s birthday party. But Matthew was

looking for a companion. He begged me many times to help him out, and I only said yes out of kindness.”

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“Lies! Don’t listen to her words, everyone! My son knows many socialites. He has plenty of options to choose from.

“Why would he pick you to be his companion to the party? Quit flattering yourself. Why don’t you ask one of the socialites Matthew knows?”

Brenda yanked a woman to the front from behind her. “This is Yanice. She desperately wanted to be Matthew’s companion. And guess what? Her family is many times more prestigious than yours. If Matthew turned her down, what makes you think he’d say yes to you?”

Yanice was originally quite happy to be brought to the limelight. But when Brenda told

everyone how desperate she was, her face turned beet red. She hid behind Brenda, glaring at me silently.

I felt even angrier. Why glare at me? I wasn’t the one who told everyone that she was desperate. She should be glaring at Brenda instead. Why take it out on a nobody like me?

Urgh, all these people were beyond reasonable.

“Well, I feel rather sorry for Yanice now. You called her a desperate little girl in front of her mother. I wonder if she still wants to date Matthew? After all, you just humiliated her, no?”

Yanice’s mother blanched. She froze for a second before storming off.

Seeing how badly Brenda was handling the situation, Helen’s mother distanced herself to

save face.

Honestly, I couldn't fathom why Matthew had such a petty mother. Facing a woman like this made me feel like I was being tried by God himself. I was surprised that Matthew grew up to be a gentleman, given that he was raised by a bitter woman.

Noticing her mistake way too late, Brenda was abashed and tried to claw at my face. "Bitch, you just made me look bad in front of my friend. I'll never let Matthew date you. Do you hear me?"

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I swerved to the side swiftly to dodge her attack. She was barbaric, but I was a lady. I would protect myself without getting physical with her.

"Thank you, then. I feel bad for Matthew because he has a mother like you. Where was I? Oh, I didn't want to tell everyone this because he's my ex-classmate. We might run into each other in the future, and I don't want to hurt his feelings.

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"We couldn't be lovers, but we're still friends. Yet you making a scene here has forced me to reveal everything. You know very well who's trying very hard to ask the other out in this relationship. If you don't know, call your son and ask him.

"Matthew and I have never dated each other. I've never received any gifts or favors from him. When he gave me flowers, I gave him back something more expensive.

"In other words, I don't owe him or your family anything. You don't have the right to make a scene here or frame me for something I didn't do.

"I agreed to attend the birthday banquet because I wanted to be nice to my ex-classmate. You've jeopardized your son's image by making a fool out of yourself here, but I won't do the same because I will never do anything that might hurt my friend.

"Mrs. Loxley, let me tell you loud and clear. Matthew should feel ashamed to have a mother like you."

"Ashamed? Bitch, you—"

Before Brenda could finish her sentence, several male students passed by and held her down. They warned her not to make a scene in public.

The crowd now knew the whole story. Brenda's repeated insults at my modest background rubbed everyone the wrong way. Most people weren't born rich, after all. They were ordinary people like me.

Using our social class to belittle us had made Brenda the number one enemy at the scene.

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Furthermore, many people had seen Matthew coming to talk to me. Brenda's boisterous behavior and lack of substantive evidence also made many distrust her claims.

"Leave me alone now, Mrs. Loxley. If you hurt me, I'll hold

you accountable."

"I will shove you and you can't do anything about it!"

"Mom, what are you doing?" A loud bellow echoed through the air. Brenda froze in her tracks. Her stumpy arms and clawing fingers looked ludicrous mid-air.

I turned around, surprised. Why was Matthew here?



Leo and Helen slowly guided Matthew to the scene.

Then, Helen let Leo handle Matthew. She ran toward her mother and dragged her to where she had come from. On their way back, they were seen engaging in a hushed conversation.

Helen's mother followed her daughter obediently. She too was mortified by what Brenda had done just now.

Matthew leaned against Leo. His haggard countenance suggested that he was still in pain. He looked at his mother with a mix of emotions—there was sadness, disappointment, and

mostly despair.

After what Brenda had done, he knew that I could never be friends with him anymore. Maybe that was why he felt despair.

Matthew had lost even more weight after a night of hospitalization. His fragile stature swayed left to right as if he was about to collapse.

I felt bad. I wanted to offer some words of consolation, but I didn't know what to say. At this point, our relationship was no longer salvageable.

As no words left my mouth, I fell silent. I wasn't sure if he had overheard the conversation I had with Brenda. I could imagine how devastated he would be if he heard those nasty words coming from a woman he liked.

However, Brenda left me with no choice.

She was mean. She made a scene at the college so that I would be regarded as a pariah by my peers. I fought back to protect myself. I hoped Matthew could understand my decision.

He had to navigate through the conflict between his own mother and me. I did not envy his

position.

“Matthew, what are you doing here? I’m teaching this slut a lesson. Just go back. There are plenty of fish in the sea. She’s dumb enough to have rejected you. I mean, what does she have other than her looks? I won’t let her date you even if she pays us!”

Brenda continued to insult me. Matthew was utterly dejected. I looked away, unable to meet

his pained expression.

“Stop it, Mom. I’m begging you. Save our reputation. I’ve been in love with Luna for eight years. I was the one who tried to ask her out. I did everything out of my volition. Why must you insult her? Lulu kept telling me that we were from different worlds, that our relationship would not end well.

“I didn’t believe her at first. I told her that I would be her man and protect her. But look,

she’s right. What she said is happening. I love her, but I failed to protect her. And the one hurting her is my mother. How am I supposed to convince her to love me back now? Go back, Mom. This is ugly as it is.”

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The Loxleys’ white-haired butler came to take Brenda away. Her cussing only stopped when

she entered the car.

I faltered out of exhaustion, almost falling to the ground.

It was mortifying to be the subject of nasty insults in public. My mentality wasn't strong enough to endure the ordeal. Moments ago, all I could think about was to clear my name so

that people wouldn't view me as the villain.

Now that Brenda was gone, so was the strength in me.

Would I resent Matthew for it? Truth be told, I would.

Matthew's frail body swayed in the wind. In a hoarse voice, he uttered, "Sorry, Lulu. I

promise this is the first and last time you'll hear from my mother.

"To everyone present, please accept my apology for the scene and inconvenience my mother has caused. Luna has the purest soul I know. She cares not about money or fame. All she wants is a genuine romantic connection.

"My behavior has caused her a lot of trouble, and I'd like to apologize sincerely to her. I hope all of you will forget this incident. Let Luna go back to her carefree life. Thank you."

Matthew then lowered his head, his large movement tearing the wounds on his back in the process. The back of his white T-shirt was mottled with red spots.

How could I ever resent Matthew who had apologized to me so sincerely? I couldn't.

I wasn't a heartless person. And he wasn't at fault here. I had no reason to hold a grudge against him.

Helen returned to the scene. She stood behind Matthew and gazed at me, feeling conflicted.

As we locked eyes, she gave me an apologetic smile.

As for Leo, he was silent during the whole debacle. His eyes brightened when Helen came back.

The people in this love triangle were all wounded. I wondered who would heal their wounds in the future.

The crowd slowly dispersed. I wanted to walk away too and cut ties with Matthew for good. But seeing his vulnerable frame in the autumn wind and his pained expression, I didn't have

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it in me to be cruel.

"Forget about this, Matthew. You should recuperate in the hospital. Your health is more important."

"Lulu, I..." Matthew's sentence trailed off. He had so many things to say, but in the end, only one sentence came out of his mouth. "Sorry, I promise I won't let what happened today repeat itself."

"Mmm, I trust you." I nodded with a smile.

"Matt, let's go back," said Leo.

After what had happened, the contempt in his eyes had vanished slightly. He now looked at me with a mix of emotions.

I believed many people in high society, including him, thought I was nothing but a gold-digger who had wished to buy an express ticket to nobility via Matthew.

I had never cared about what they thought of me anyway. They were insignificant in my life.

Matthew took a few steps toward me and paused. Then, he said bitterly, "Goodbye, Lulu."

I heard the finality in his voice. I replied, "Goodbye, Matthew."

Matthew then went back. There were only Helen and me before the apartment building. I

stood and stared at her in silence.

What happened just now reminded me of Georgina's sarcasm at the birthday party. I'd be lying if I said I did not hold a grudge against Helen.

She came closer and held my hands. Then, she said sincerely, "Lulu, I can't believe my mom colluded with Mrs. Loxley to do this kind of thing. I've chastised her and made sure this won't happen again. Will you forgive me? I still want us to be friends."

The heiress of the Johnson family was asking for my forgiveness. I bet no one would believe

me if I told them.

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Now that Helen had apologized to me sincerely, how could I be mad at her? Her mother was her mother; she was she. I was mad, but I shouldn't get the two things mixed up.

"You think I'll forgive you after a simple apology?" I pouted playfully and looked away.

Helen sniffled and continued, "What do you want me to do, then? Write an apology letter and post it on the school's forum?"

What a bad idea. I didn't need more publicity.

"You'll buy me breakfast for a week. Otherwise, I won't forgive you."

I gave her forearm a nudge. Helen was stunned for a while. Then, she leaped and clung to me like a sloth. "No, I'll buy you breakfast for a month! A week isn't enough to make my guilt disappear. Luna, you're a dummy! You should've used this opportunity to ask for anything. I can buy you a mansion if you want."

See? That was the difference between a rich person and an ordinary person.

I was off to a bad morning, but Helen brought warmth back to my world like the bright sun.

Matthew and I might not be able to be together, but I made a good friend. It was all worth it,

no?

After breakfast, Helen left me all alone. She disappeared for the entire day. Just when I thought I would be sleeping alone tonight, she returned with tons of snacks and two cans of

beer.

"I thought you weren't sleeping here tonight." I put down my pencil and placed a tray on her desk

Excitedly, she plopped down the snacks and removed the thick coat she was wearing. She then chirped, "I wasn't supposed to sleep here tonight. Then I remembered there was a piglet in the apartment, so I came back and brought her favorite snacks. I know you love this one. Here. Dig in."

I got up and grabbed some of the tortilla chips.

They tasted familiar. Helen must have gone to the restaurant I had visited with Matthew twice.

I loved the tortilla chips there, as well as the dipping sauce. Helen never paid attention to my

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food preferences. He must have helped her pick my favorite snacks.

I wanted him to stop being so nice to me because I didn't know how to repay him.

After downing half a can of beer, Helen became more talkative. She shared her upbringing with me.

She had never told me anything about her past. Perhaps the debacle in the morning renewed her impression of me. And now, she thought she could open up.

"Since I was little, I was followed by guards wherever I went. Even at school. I would be attending classes inside while the guards stood like soldiers outside. They had scary faces, which scared my classmates. Because of that, no one would play with me.

"During recess or PE classes, the girls would be having fun playing games. But I was forbidden to do anything. I cried so many times because of that. But Mom told me that she did that because she didn't want me to get injured.

"I said I wanted to play with others. She then told me that we had all sorts of board games, musical instruments, and sports fields. She said I could play with the nannies or guards. I shouldn't play with bratty kids.

"Luna, believe it or not, other than the other kids in the same circle, I never had other friends. You're my first. I had to go on a hunger strike to convince them to let me befriend you."

"What? You're an adult now. You study at the college every day, so you can befriend whoever you want."

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"What? You're an adult now. You study at the college every day, so you can befriend whoever you want," I said with my mouth full.

"That's because you don't know my parents. They won't let me stay at the dorm. I can't make any friends during classes. And as soon as I come out of the lecture hall, two scary- looking guards begin tailing me.

"They said it's to protect me. But by doing that, they're alienating me. Who wants to befriend someone who's perpetually followed by two intimidating men?"

I tried imagining meeting someone who had two security guards with them 24/7. I had to say, the idea of it scared me. I would stay as far away from the person. One accidental bump and I might find myself in a lawsuit.

After a hearty meal, I felt very content. I lounged on the bed and enjoyed the rest of my day.

At 9:30 pm, Colin sent me a voice message, "What are you doing?"

"I had a bunch of snacks, and I'm going to sleep now. You don't have work to do? I'm surprised you left me a voice message." I then gleefully made a video call to Colin.

Colin picked up instantaneously. His handsome face appeared on my screen.



We hadn't video-called each other for a few days now. I saw that Colin had lost some weight and looked skinnier. His voice was hoarse too.

"I've been very busy lately. I'm handling several contracts now, and I also need to find a suitable candidate to lecture those few students. I'm overwhelmed."

"You have until the end of the year for those contracts. Why are you handling them now? Take it slow."

No wonder Colin had lost so much weight. He had to personally oversee several projects simultaneously. That must have worn him down. If only I were there to reduce his burden, I could run errands for him or draw some simple graphs.

Knowing that Colin must have toiled tirelessly every day, I regretted my decision to pursue a postgraduate in Jesselton College. My parents had never approved of my decision anyway. They said I would eventually regret it. However, I was worried about Dad's health and I enrolled myself stubbornly.

And now, I regretted it.

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If I had listened to my parents, I wouldn't have to deal with the annoying Feliz and Lilac now. I wouldn't have reunited with Matthew, and I wouldn't have suffered so much.

Urgh, I should have listened to the words of wisdom from my parents.

"Something came up, so I need to handle the contracts as soon as possible. Anyway, how have you been? I hope nothing bad happened to you."

Oh, boy. Something terrible did happen to me, all right. It almost ruined my reputation.

I relayed to Colin what happened at the birthday banquet and the scene Brenda made.

As he listened to my story, his expression darkened. His expression was so cold that it threatened to freeze everything around him.

"I can't believe the Loxleys did that in public. Do they not care about their image at all? Were you scared?"

I grinned smugly. "I was scared at first. But they went overboard, so I fought back. I

defeated Brenda."

Colin raised his brow. His dark orbs scanned my face. "You fought her? Were you injured?"

See? Colin was the best. He put my safety above everything.

"No, I'm a civilized lady. I defeated her with my words. You should've seen the humiliation on Brenda's face when she left. It felt so satisfying."

I might have exaggerated my victory a little bit. If Matthew hadn't come that day, the process would've taken much longer even though I was confident it would've ended with my victory nonetheless. Brenda might have assaulted me too.

If Matthew and Helen hadn't shown up, the whole debacle wouldn't have ended that quickly. I wouldn't have won that convincingly either.

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Matthew and Helen played a pivotal role in my resounding victory. They were the reason why the debacle concluded that quickly.

“Are you sure?” Colin squinted his eyes dubiously.

“Hehe, I might have exaggerated the whole thing a bit. Matthew came, and let’s just say that an explanation from him was a hundred times more effective than anything I could say.”

“I see. Either way, always prioritize your safety. Give me some time. It’ll be over soon.”

I was so caught up in my overconfidence that I didn’t hear what Colin said in the end.

After we hung up, Helen, who was about to fall asleep, propped her head up on one elbow and stared at me.

“Shouldn’t you go to sleep? It’s eerie to stare at me like this when it’s so late at night.”

Helen pursed her lips as if she had just found something amusing. “Lulu, you like Colin, don’t you?”

“Of course, I do. He’s my friend. I love him.”

She shook her head. “I’m not talking about that kind of love. When you were talking to him, your eyes sparkled. Joy was oozing out your face. I noticed similar things when Matthew looked at you. Admit it already, Luna. You like Colin. And it’s the boyfriend–girlfriend kind

of like.”

Not another person who tried to taint the pure friendship I had with Colin! Gosh! I grabbed whatever my hands could reach and launched it at Helen’s face. “Shut up. You’re drunk. If you make things up again, I won’t help you woo Matthew.”

Helen tossed back the item and turned her back on me. “Pfft. It’s like talking to a wall. You’ll cry so much for this one day.”

Not wanting to deal with her, I closed my eyes and tried to fall asleep.

Right before I fell asleep, I heard her voice again. “No wonder you’re not into Matthew. Colin is handsome and talented. And he puts you above all else. He suits you better than Matthew does.”

“Are you done? Or are you planning to give up Matthew for Colin now?”

“Impossible. In my eyes, Matthew is the best. No one can outshine him. I’m not saying that

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Colin is better than Matthew. I just think that he suits you better.”

I was so done with Helen, so I went to sleep.

The next day, I ran into a rare sight—Felix. He was in the cafeteria at noon.

He was wearing a thick hoodie, dark sports pants, and a pair of white running shoes. His lanky frame stood at the stall next to me. He was staring at me silently.

I felt a pair of eyes on me, so I turned around. Instinctively, I took half a step back.

“Am I that hideous?” He protested and walked to the front as the queue shortened.

“Yes, it’s like running into a ghost. A ghost shouldn’t appear in broad daylight, though.”

Felix snorted. He pointed at me with his left hand. “Look who’s talking big now. I shouldn’t have helped you.”

Help me? Did he...

"You called Matthew that day?"

Felix shrugged. "I couldn't let you be bullied, could I?"

"So you knew what his mom was like."

He shrugged again and grinned, basically telling me to guess.

I began to get angry. Couldn't he tell me the answer directly? Did he have to be so cryptic? "What's wrong with you, Felix? You should've warned me. Was it fun to watch me be

humiliated like that?"

"It's not like you'd listen to me anyway. Guess why I intercepted his love letters for you?"

I was shocked.

So that was the reason.

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When I heard that Felix had intercepted Matthew's love letters for me, I was so mad that I went to his house to argue with him. I gave Felix an earful and refused to talk to him for a very long time.

Now I knew I had gotten angry for the wrong reason. He was just trying to protect me.

But he could have warned me. If I had known Brenda was this unreasonable, I would have

stayed away from Matthew. The whole debacle wouldn't have transpired.

"I know what you're thinking. But back then, you glared at me as if I was your arch-nemesis. I was sure you wouldn't believe me. You might even think that I was plotting something and

resent me further."

Felix was right. I knew I might not have believed him even if he had told me. Still, this wasn't a valid excuse to keep everything from me.

I knew he wouldn't believe me if I told him about what Lilac had done. But I did it

nonetheless. Several times too. Couldn't he do what I did?

Regardless, I decided to forgive him since he intercepted the letters to protect me. I was ready to move on.

To make it up to Felix, I ordered meatballs for him. He ate them while complaining about how stingy I was. He said I had a lot of money but I wasn't willing to buy him anything fancy. Furious, I tried to snatch the plate of meatballs from him. In the end, he swallowed

his words and the meatballs.

The next time I saw Matthew, a month had passed.

It could get below zero degrees in Jinovy in November. I put on the small jacket Colin had given last year on top of my cardigan. To top it off, I also put on a mini-skirt and a pair of thigh-high boots. It was a simple yet cozy look.

Since I left early, I took a stroll on the rubbery running track to kill time. To my annoyance,

a small pebble got into my boot. It stabbed against my heel from time to time.

I walked toward the platform, sat on it, and removed my boot to shake off the pesky intruder.

At my most unflattering moment, a pair of polished, leathery shoes appeared before me. As

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my eyes traveled upward, I first saw the black slacks and then Matthew, who was looking at me with a simper.

I hadn't seen him in a month! He was still as handsome as I remembered. He had lost some weight, but he looked much more spirited. His eyes sparkled under the light.

Embarrassed, I put on my boot and cursed at myself for handling this at the most inopportune moment. To have let Matthew catch me in this state was mortifying.

"How have you been?" he asked.

"I'm good. What about you? How are your injuries?"

He turned around, and we walked together toward the teaching faculty.

"They healed long ago. I heard that Professor King picked you for the competition. How's the preparation coming along?"

“I have a rough idea. All I need to do is pick a direction and produce a small sample.”

“All the best and break a leg.”

“Thank you.”

He walked me to the teaching faculty and stared at me as I entered the building.

I walked toward the staircase. When I turned around, he was still there. His eyes continued to linger on me.

Noticing that I had turned back, his bony face flashed me a smile. His right hand waved at me, and I saw light in his almond-shaped eyes.

I ran to the classroom, sat in the corner, and rested my head on the desk for a very long time.

At around 10:00 pm, I put down my pen and splashed my face with some water. Right when I decided to read some e-books before sleeping, I received a text message.

I checked my phone and saw Matthew’s moving profile picture. There were only a few words in the message. “Lulu, can we never get back together?”

I felt something heavy in my chest again. It sucked out the air in me.

I stared at those words until my eyes were wet and glossy. Tears rolled down the corners of my eyes and disappeared into my hair.

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I deleted and recomposed my reply many times. In the end, I only sent out one word, Goodnight.”



Matthew didn't send me more text messages. I stared at my phone screen until it automatically switched off.

While I couldn't return Matthew's feelings, hurting him was not my intention. Yet he was hurt both mentally and physically after what had happened.

His birthday fell on Sunday. Helen called and asked if I wanted to attend his birthday party.

She told me that his childhood friends would be there to celebrate the occasion. None of his

family would be there.

For a moment, I was enticed. I wanted to be there to apologize to him. Regardless of what his family had done to me, I couldn't deny that he had given me his heart.

But as I thought further, I was sure that Matthew had endured much of the grief in the past month. The answer I had given him that night must have plunged him into the depth of

despair. Soon enough, he would begin healing and move on.

Attending his birthday party might give him some false hope. It wasn't fair to him, and it'd only prolong his suffering. I couldn't do that.

Therefore, I turned Helen down.

Helen paused for a while before uttering, "Lulu, you're coldblooded when you're rational."

I didn't refute it. Instead, I hung up silently.

She could chastise me. Everyone could chastise me. After all, I did break Matthew's heart.

But what about the injustice I experienced? Why couldn't anyone put themselves in my shoes? What did I do wrong in the whole situation?

I was in a bad mood, so I slept fitfully.

At night, I woke up from a nightmare. I opened my eyes to greet the darkness in my room.

The phone next to my pillow suddenly lit up.

"Sorry."

It was a message from Matthew.

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I looked at the clock on the phone. It was 1:35 am.

I racked

my brain but couldn't figure out why he apologized.

And because of the sudden message, I no longer felt sleepy. I stared at the scenery outside until dawn broke.

I got up groggily. Helen returned when I was brushing my teeth.

She glanced at me and removed her coat surreptitiously. Then, she threw herself on the bed as if she just had a very long night.

“You came back at this ungodly hour.” I spat out the foam in my mouth and stashed my toothbrush away. Then, I squeezed out a dollop of cleansing cream to wash my face while I asked Helen the question.

She

gave no response.

I saw from the bathroom mirror’s reflection that she was lying motionless on the bed. Thinking that she had fallen asleep, I made sure I proceeded with my business quietly and asked no further questions.

Once I was done, I came out. Helen was up and changing her clothes.

Her flawless back appeared before me. I thought I could admire a masterpiece, but what I saw shocked me.

Helen’s fair back was covered in red spots, from the area under her ears to below her shoulder. Some even had scabs on them.

“Helen, you’re injured?” I asked in disbelief.

But before I could finish my sentence, my body instinctively went to caress the wounds on her back. I wondered what had happened to her.

No wonder she looked exhausted. She was injured.

Yet she swatted my hands away and covered those wounds with a new sweater. She sat on the bed and snarled. “He has agreed to go out with me. I asked him.”

With whom? What was she on about?