

Standing before Love Chapter 542

Heather shot him a look, and he gave her the key. Nobody could stop her once she had decided on something. There was an imperial vibe about her that stopped anyone from giving her a refusal. Once she took the key, she waved the guard down. "Come back here for the key after an hour."

She didn't get to swim right away though. Once the butler had settled Blake down, he came to see Heather. Right after the guard's departure, he came up to her slowly. "Old Master Langston requests you in his study, Miss Heather."

Heather stopped opening the door. Grandpa wants me to see him at this hour? That's weird. She couldn't just yell at the butler, so she asked somewhat annoyedly, "Why is he calling me?"

"I am not very sure. But you'll find out once you see him."

The butler looked serious, so she looked at the key she was holding before handing it to him. "Give this back to the guard, and don't follow me. I can see him by myself." Frustrated that her swim was disturbed again, Heather went to the study. Blake was nowhere to be seen when she came back to the living room, so she thought someone must have taken him back to his room.

The air still reeks of alcohol. She scrunched her nose up. The butler will handle it later. Then, she tiptoed to the bedroom, since everyone was asleep. Her elders were living on the second floor, so she couldn't make any loud sounds.

The study room was ajar, and she could see the light coming from inside. Heather opened the door and came face to face with Robert, who was in the center of the room. After that, she closed the door before going up to him.

"Where were you going?" Robert was inscrutable, so she couldn't guess what he was thinking. Did I make him mad?

"Downstairs," she answered honestly, since Robert seemed to know what she had done. Obviously, the butler told him everything.

"The pool's closed at this hour. Don't you know the rules? This isn't the time for a swim." Robert was troubled by her rebellious tendencies at home.

“I just felt like swimming. Can’t control the urge, you know. Why should the pool be restricted anyway? It should be open 24/7,” she retorted. Heather wasn’t one to acknowledge anything easily.

Robert didn’t want to argue with her about the pool’s opening hours. He noticed that Heather had been acting very weirdly since morning, and she was more caustic toward Matthias than before. Something happened. “Tell me about your relationship with Matthias.” They could talk openly, as they were alone in the study.

She stared at him, dumbfounded. Why is he bringing Matthias up? There’s nothing to talk about. “What do you want me to talk about? Be specific.” She didn’t want to answer it. If it weren’t for Caleb, she wouldn’t have gotten into this mess.

“Answer me. You don’t want me to match you up with him, right?” He was sacrificing his sleep because he wanted to talk about something important with her, or it’d only be a waste of time.

“Isn’t that obvious, Grandpa?” She thought it was obvious that she hated Matthias. Heather had never considered the possibility of marriage, but Robert wanted to marry her off to him. She would act it out if she could, but she would never really fall for him. Matthias wasn’t the kind of partner she wanted, and she knew that. Since he didn’t meet the criteria she set, it was impossible for them to date.

“Matthias is your best choice for now, at least compared to Caleb. Are you sure you don’t want to give him a chance?” Caleb was the reason Robert wanted Matthias to court Heather. He knew Matthias wasn’t Heather’s perfect partner, but there was no better option, at least for the time being.

Heather wasn’t there to see the horrors caused by the Moriartys, so she didn’t understand how terrifying they were. The moment Caleb laid eyes on her, he had decided that she would be his prey.

“And I have to sacrifice my happiness just because of the Moriartys?” Heather was hesitating. She didn’t understand the terror of the Moriarty Family, nor was she sure what they wanted to do to her.

“Now that Caleb has chosen you, it’s time we face this matter head on. I don’t want you to fall to his hands. He’ll ruin you,” Robert said genuinely, because the Moriartys loved to ruin the things precious to him.

“But if Caleb has set his eyes on me, he can still ruin me even if I date Matthias. Can he even help me out? If the Moriartys are that terrifying, can the Locke Family even win?” Heather had her own concerns. She wondered why she was ‘chosen’. Chosen for what?

“At least you have a fighting chance, so why don’t you give it a shot?” As long as he could keep her away from the Moriartys’ jaws, Robert would give anything a chance, even if Heather had to do something outrageous.

“If that is what you wish, Grandpa, then so be it.” Heather didn’t want to talk about it. Every time she brought the Moriartys up, her grandfather would show her a look of sheer terror. Giving in at times was fine for her. She would go down hard on most occasions, but she would take a step back whenever someone she loved was involved. Only when she was before her grandfather would Heather be a complete person; those were the only times she would have emotions, and only then would she negotiate.

Robert heaved a sigh of relief after she agreed to it. He thought she would argue with him for hours, but to his surprise, she agreed easily. Still, he was glad that she did so, since that showed that she understood his situation. “I can see that Matthias likes you, and he told me he’s courting you,” Robert said.

Heather’s face fell, for she never thought Matthias would tell Robert about it. She stared downward, her face scarlet from anger and embarrassment. “Do you think he can be trusted, Grandpa?” Heather grumbled. She never thought Matthias was serious about it.

Love was something sacred for Heather. Only when a couple was in love could a family be built, and only then could they bear a child out of love. Also, it was only then could a family be happy. Heather’s parents didn’t marry out of love, and she had had enough with the imbalance of the power dynamics. She wasn’t born out of love, so she wasn’t loved by her parents.

Heather didn’t want her children to have the same fate as she did. She wanted to give her children a complete and loving family, which she couldn’t see if she was married to Matthias.

“A man knows how another man thinks, so I know he loves you.” Robert was only matching them up because he could see that Matthias loved Heather; he wouldn’t have done it if he didn’t.

“But he hated me. I ruined his first love. I ruined his pure, unadulterated relationship, but now he has fallen for me? I-It’s insane!” Heather couldn’t stay calm anymore. She thought she had to tell Robert that no man could love someone who ruined their first love.

Robert sighed, then he beckoned Heather to come closer. She obliged, and Robert patted her head. “That’s what happened between me and her,” he said cryptically.

Heather was confused, so he explained, “The one I loved ruined my first love too, but I fell for her nonetheless. She’s my sweetheart. You might fall for someone, but that doesn’t mean you’ll end up together. I loved her my whole life, but I didn’t end up together with her.”

That was the first time she heard Robert talking about his past. Wow, this is colorful. She blinked innocently and thought, Men sure are weird. “Men can be really forgiving, huh?” Heather commented. She had to do it, or it would be annoying.

“No. Some men only realize love later in life. Most think that their first love is true love, but true love comes unexpectedly, unknowingly. You would feel something tugging at your heart the moment you see them, then you’d end up trying to vie for their attention,” he explained. Finally, Heather realized what he was talking about.

That’s an experienced person for you. She couldn’t understand him earlier, but she was slowly getting it.

“Men would date the vulnerable woman when they’re young. They love women who are submissive and innocent, but when they get older, they’d start branching out to the sexier women. They didn’t do it when they were younger because they didn’t know if they could, but once they get into the groove, they’ll branch out,” he kept explaining.

Oh, I get it. So that’s why. “Is that the case with Matthias too?” she asked. I would have told Grandpa about it if I knew he had this kind of past. Why’d I even dwell on this?

“Yes, and it happens to most men. They’d fall for someone they never thought they would,” he said. Love was irrational that way, and that was why everyone was crazy for it.

“Thank you, Grandpa. I know what I should do now.” Heather felt much better after listening to him, and the prospect of dating Matthias didn’t seem so bad then.

“Be patient with him. He’s a gem in the rough, at least in the dating scene. He needs to be polished. Men are like children when it comes to love, so women would have to guide them. Women are more mature than their male counterparts if they’re the same age, you know.” Robert didn’t think Heather was that much better than Matthias in romance. In fact, she was even more of a gem in the rough, but if he needed to get her into the groove, he had to praise her. That’s how you deal with women.

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Heather learned a few lessons from the heart to heart session. She knew Matthias didn’t understand women, but now she knew she didn’t understand men either. In the end, they were idiots when it came to relationships. They didn’t know how to love, so they ended up hurting each other.

Heather had never walked a mile in Matthias’ shoes, so she kept denying his love for her. But if he didn’t love her, none of the mess would have happened. Heather was feeling much better when she came back to her room. She was only angry because Matthias was overly attentive of Everly. Before this, she said she was keeping him away from her cousin, but the truth was that she was actually jealous that he was checking out someone else.

She tried her best to lie to herself, but to her surprise, she actually cared about Matthias more than she let on. When she got back to her room, Heather lay down on her bed and glanced at her phone, then she took it. A moment later, she realized Matthias had called her countless times and sent her dozens of messages.

There were a lot of messages, but she read through them patiently, and she realized Matthias only made an explanation after a few minutes between each message. She didn’t like that, but she didn’t know that Matthias needed to seek counsel from Evan after he got back. He wouldn’t know what he did wrong otherwise. That was why his messages took some time.

Evan disliked the new work, because Matthias was as dumb as a rock when it came to romance; not even Evan wanted to guide him anymore. Matthias had committed a lot of grave crimes in romance, and Evan wondered why Heather

kept forgiving him. If it were anyone else, they would have cut all contact with Matthias already.

Even though Heather kept giving him chances, Matthias showed no considerable progress. In fact, the mistakes he made kept getting weirder and weirder. At this point, even Evan the love counselor couldn't salvage the situation. Coupling that with how random Heather could be, Evan didn't think they could end up dating.

Meanwhile, Matthias was on the verge of giving up, for Heather had been silent for hours. He was holding on to his phone, and when he was about to fall asleep, Heather finally texted him, waking him up.

Matthias was relieved after reading the message. Thank god Heather is still giving me a chance. He thought it was a serious matter after hearing Evan's analysis, though reality turned out to be much kinder, and he smiled.

Hence, Matthias took the chance to ask her out on a date. Romance was all about dates, so he wanted to have more alone time with her. 'Wanna come with me on a ride tomorrow?' Someone gave Matthias a couple of free vouchers a few days ago, but he hadn't used it, so he wanted to invite Heather on a date.

'What kind of ride?' Instead of refusing him outright, Heather threw him a question. In other words, Matthias had a chance.

'A super high tech, super realistic ride.' Matthias recalled some of the vouchers were for high tech rides. Realistic rides sounded fun, so he thought Heather would like it.

'Place?' Heather still didn't refuse him. She's giving me a chance. This is good.

'Tech Plaza,' he quickly answered, for he had a feeling she'd say yes.

'Time.' On the other hand, Heather thought Matthias was slow in the uptake. Most people would tell their date the venue, time, and content of the date at once, but she had to ask Matthias for it one by one.

'Nine in the morning,' Matthias answered promptly.

'I'll think about it and get back to you tomorrow,' she answered seriously. It looked like they had a long way to go before they could date.

Then, she tossed her phone aside, ignoring him. Heather didn't like to spend much time on her phone, or else her life would only revolve around it. She brought her phone around to maintain contact with everyone, but she wouldn't check it most of the time.

She wanted to spend more time on work, and even if she was trying to wind down, she'd spend the time on something meaningful. Scrolling her phone was meaningless, so she never had an interest in it, and she had even less need of her phone when she was overseas.

People like her were rare in the modern era, but she wouldn't break her own rules even if it meant she'd have to go against the flow. Phone scrolling could easily waste an hour or two of her life, and she knew that was not a good thing. Time was a precious resource, so she wanted to spend it wisely.

Even though she was on her bed, Heather didn't feel like sleeping, so she got up and went to her bookshelf. It had been a while since she read. Heather thought everyone should read as much as they could, and as long as they could. Humans should spend their life getting their hands on professional knowledge and all kinds of information.

She sat on her bed and turned on the lamp beside her. Since the lamp was easy on the eyes, it wasn't too bright. She liked to turn on a lamp whenever she read, or she couldn't see the words. That much was obvious.

'A Hundred Years of Solitude.' She was only halfway through the book. It was a heavy one, and she couldn't understand why she read it before she came back.

Night time was perfect for a reading session, so she was reading seriously. Heather was the most attractive when she was quiet, and she drifted to sleep with a book in her hands that night. If there was one downside about night reading, that would be the fact that the reader would fall asleep easily.

She woke up at around seven the next morning and realized she was still holding the book. Much to her disappointment, she only read ten pages the night before. I thought I could read more. Oh right, I said I'd reply to him today. She wondered if she should say yes, then she recalled her grandfather's message.

It was obvious that she liked Matthias, but she thought it would be frivolous of her to say yes so easily, so she wanted to read through his messages first. But when she turned her phone on, the thing that caught her attention wasn't Matthias' messages; it was Myra's unread message.

Heather opened her Messenger app to read the message. Since Myra was on her priority list, she could always see her message.

'Hey, Heather, I think I've seen Matthias before. Can you jog my memory?'

That was not good news for Heather. She never expected Myra to ask her about that, but she knew she had to keep lying to her friend, even though she didn't want to. Maybe she remembered something, or she wouldn't bring it up. Caught between a rock and a hard place, she couldn't even take the time to answer Matthias.

'You're just overthinking, Myra. Wait, you got up at five?' Her sleep is being affected. No pregnant woman would wake up at five. And she didn't sleep early last night.

She shifted the topic, but Myra didn't answer her question. Instead, she asked, 'Is that so? But I feel like I've seen him somewhere, and the more I think about it, the stronger this feeling gets. Can you tell me the truth, Heather?'

Heather felt guilty after seeing the last sentence, though she knew Myra didn't mean it. Even so, it knocked on her conscience, and she realized that lying wasn't what a friend would do. The more she thought about it, the guiltier she got. Then, she started feeling that dating Matthias would be a slap in the face for Myra. 'Maybe it's just your pregnancy working, Myra. You're reading into it too much.' I have to hide it from her. I can't let anything happen to the baby.

'Every time I close my eyes, I dream of my high school. I wonder if I have met him before during high school.' The closer she was to the truth, the more frustrated Myra was. A lot of things didn't add up, but she couldn't figure out what was wrong.

'Have you told Tony about it?' Heather asked, worried. It'd get more complicated if Tony got involved. And possibly worse.

'No. Tony's been busy with work, so I don't want to trouble him.' Myra had thought about it, and she felt like she might have been overreacting, so she wouldn't trouble him with it before getting any definitive answer.

'Wanna hang out, Myra? You shouldn't sit around all day even if you're pregnant.' Now, she was inviting Myra to go out, forgetting everything about Matthias.

'Not today.' Myra added a troubled emoji, then she kept texting. 'I need to go to the Hart Residence today. Haven't been seeing Grandpa and Grandma ever since I came back.' Myra was a good granddaughter-in-law, so she would spend time with Tony's family while he was busy with work.

'Alright then.' Heather couldn't keep it up anymore. Myra was already a married woman after all, unlike her. Sometimes she envied Myra for having a happy family, and her baby would be born soon too.

On the other hand, she thought she had nothing but a lot of money in the bank. That was her only source of security, but she thought it was pathetic. A while later, she scrolled down to Matthias' chat window and saw that he was already asking her if she had made up her mind. Since she had nothing to do, she decided to go out with him. 'Sure. I'll go,' she answered curtly.

Despite the short answer, Matthias was overjoyed. He thought it was no dice, but surprisingly, she said yes at the very last moment. Evan suggested that he pick Heather up at the residence, since it would look more genuine, not to mention it was a gentlemanly move. "It'll be easier to get her affection," he said.

Matthias took the advice and left halfway through breakfast. Evan stared at the feast of a breakfast before shooting Matthias a nasty glare. "Gals before pals, huh? Despicable," Evan grumbled. Heather changed him. I sure hope it's for the better.

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Heather and Blake were having a quiet breakfast, as if the argument the night before never happened. The butler told Robert everything, but Robert decided to stay quiet. Even so, he was worried his grandchildren would fight again.

That was the moment when Matthias barged in at the worst time possible. Everyone was still having breakfast, so they stared at him the moment he

came in, and Heather frowned. Is this guy dumb? He came right after I said yes? She was slightly regretting her choice. Despite his uninvited presence, everyone turned their attention back to their breakfast, saying nothing about Matthias' arrival. Perhaps they had agreed to the relationship between him and Heather.

Robert was still welcoming as usual, so he asked Matthias to come over, but the guy only had eyes for Heather. He seemed oblivious about the fact that he came in at the wrong time, and to top it off, he looked as happy as a lark.

What should I do with him? "You're early, Matthias." Robert pointed out the obvious, since he knew Matthias was there for Heather.

"Well, I did say I'll give you the proposal as soon as I can, so here I am." Matthias made up an excuse, though he did have a proposal at hand. After all, coming over without anything was inappropriate.

Robert said, "I'm still having breakfast, so I can't really go away." Then, he looked around before setting his gaze on Heather. "You're done with your breakfast, Heather? Good, can you take him to the study?"

Heather couldn't refuse her grandfather, so she nodded. "Sure." She wanted to take him away anyway, for Matthias had been doing a lot of over-the-top stunts around her family. This is not good.

In the meantime, Blake watched everything in silence. He wasn't surprised about their relationship, since they didn't keep it a secret back at the company. Now that they were getting closer, and Robert was greenlighting it, Blake realized that Heather must be getting along well with Matthias. And he hated that.

He hated it when everything was going well for her. Why is she the one who's getting it good? Compared to her, Blake had been having a bumpy ride over the years, but all of it was his fault. Instead of reflecting on himself, he decided to put the blame on Heather, much to her chagrin.

Blake thought Heather had a smooth life, but it couldn't be further from the truth. She ran into a lot of problems too, but Blake ignored all of it.

On the way to the study, Heather put some distance between her and Matthias. She didn't want to talk to him, much to his confusion. Since he

couldn't figure it out, Matthias asked her carefully, "You don't seem to welcome me, Heather."

"Yes, you're right," she snapped back. You came right when everyone's having breakfast. Of course I don't welcome you.

This is not a good start. Matthias was still confused. He was an idiot when it came to women, for he knew nothing about pleasing them. They came to the study a short while later, then Matthias followed her in.

Heather turned around, asking formally, "Where's the proposal?"

He took it out of his suitcase and handed it to her. They didn't seem like a couple, though he wanted to approach her. However, he didn't know how to do it; he knew he would mess things up, for she was a hard obstacle to overcome.

It was getting closer and closer to nine, but Heather still didn't bring the date up. He wanted to remind her of the date, but she didn't seem too happy. On the other hand, Heather seemed to be putting on airs to test Matthias. Matthias didn't want to be late, for the most exciting part was at the start. In the end, he mustered up his courage to ask, "It's getting late, Heather. I think we should be going now." He was as careful as he could, for he was worried he might upset her.

In response, Heather looked at the time. We'll really be late if we don't set off right now. She was coming up with a way to get past the living room without anyone noticing, since some people were still having breakfast down there. None of this would have happened if he called me before coming. The more she thought about it, the more annoyed she was.

"Don't call me by my name. I thought I told you so." Heather was getting irritated. Matthias was shameless and forgetful, but she couldn't do anything about it.

Right when they were about to argue, Robert came in. Ah, this is familiar. She's annoyed, so I guess they're upset again. Hmm, they're really a perfect couple.

"Grandpa." She greeted him politely, her enthusiasm for the date doused.

“Hello, Mr. Langston.” Matthias greeted him even more politely, worried someone might take it the wrong way.

“Do what you have to do. I’ll go through the proposal.” Robert knew what had happened once he took a look.

Heather looked at him, then at Matthias. She was still annoyed by Matthias, even though he never did manage to make her happy once, much to her chagrin.

“Can I borrow her for the morning then?” Matthias asked. Since Robert was there, he was feeling more confident. Actually, Matthias didn’t know what he should do around her. No matter what he did, she would still be angry. As a result, he had to think about everything a hundred times before he went for it.

That was how it was like to fall for someone. Love would change someone, turning them into the kind of person they hated the most. Matthias never expected himself to bow down for love, for he never thought about getting down after reaching the top of the world.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Robert waved them down, though he was smiling. Matthias seldom takes the lead. This could lead to something good.

Heather shot him a disgruntled look. “You haven’t asked my opinion, Grandpa.” She couldn’t believe Robert would just let Matthias take her away without asking her.

“Ah, you youngsters should go on a few dates. The weather’s good, you know. And you’re only young once.” Robert wanted them to go on the date right away. The more he thought about it, the more he thought they were a great couple, not to mention the fact that he wanted Heather to be happy.

“But it’s overcast, and the air’s dry. This is not a sunny day.” Heather took her own sweet time to argue with Robert, but Matthias was getting nervous.

Robert smirked, reminiscing about his youthful days. Ah, to be young. You can do anything and dream of everything. Time and hope is on your side.

When they left the castle, it was already eight thirty. Heather plopped down on the passenger seat, mocking, “There’s only half an hour left. Are you sure you can make it?”

Matthias was vexed that Heather seemed so indifferent about it, but in a sense, he was the only one to see her acting that way, so he just excused it as preferential treatment. “Don’t worry. We’ll be there in time. Buckle up.”

Oh, I know he loves to drive fast. Guess he’s breaking the traffic rules again. “I don’t want to get involved in another car crash,” she said sarcastically.

“If I remember correctly, you were the one who crashed into me both times,” he answered calmly, grinning. Matthias looked great when he smiled, but he made one mistake—he didn’t realize that he shouldn’t argue with the girl he liked. Sure, he might have won the argument, but he killed the conversation, so Heather stopped talking.

He didn’t drive fast though, for Heather was there. Everything he said was a joke, since he wouldn’t endanger Heather just to get there in time. He wanted everything to be safe when she was around.

Along the way, he tried to chat with her, but Heather didn’t show any enthusiasm. Chatting with Matthias was a tiring chore, so she didn’t want to give him the chance to annoy her.

Time was slowly running out, so Matthias tried to go with the less congested routes, sometimes going through the narrower roads, even. He did that just because he didn’t want to be late. Since it’s a date. I want to leave a good impression. He had his own creed, and he wanted to work hard to change her opinion of him.

“We’re here.” He parked his car in Tech Plaza’s underground parking lot. Much to Heather’s surprise, he only took twenty minutes to get there.

Once they got out of the car, Heather walked over to the plaza elegantly, asking, “So tell me more about the super realistic ride.” It was just a concept after all, so she didn’t know what the ride would entail. I’ll have to get some answers first.

“It’s a ride in space. Some spacefaring tech in the future.” Matthias loved that kind of stuff, but he forgot to ask what Heather liked, so he glossed it through in the chat.

Heather wasn’t interested, but she wasn’t uninterested either. She didn’t know much about the industry, but she was willing to see more.

“Have you ever dreamed of being an astronaut?” Heather remembered Matthias saying he wanted to become an astronaut, but it was a vague memory, so she asked it for confirmation.

Matthias was surprised that Heather actually remembered it, for he only mentioned it in passing. The fact she remembered it delighted him. Well, he left a lasting impression on her back then, but all she thought about then was business and profits, so he was already overjoyed that she actually remembered his dream.

“Yes, and you told me you wanted to be a great businesswoman.” Matthias remembered that, for Heather had that dream since she was a child.

“I see.” Heather smiled for once, and the atmosphere loosened up a little. She had probably forgotten what she said back then, but she could imagine herself saying that.

They chatted happily and eventually came to the science museum. There was a long tunnel inside, and lights hung from the walls as far as the eye could see. Apparently, they were going down a time tunnel.

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The road was paved with glass, creating an illusion of walking on space. Also, the path was flanked by a starry sky, and Matthias seemed to have reverted to a childlike state. His eyes were gleaming happily while the stars were smiling down at him. Heather envied him for that, as it had been a long time since she last felt like a kid who got her wildest dream fulfilled.

She wondered what her wildest dream was anyway. Every time she was asked that question, Heather would tell them about how she wanted to be a successful businessperson. But is that really what I like?

“Feels like we’re walking in space, huh?” Matthias looked at her.

Heather nodded with a smile. She didn’t want to snuff out the light in Matthias’ eyes, for dreams were something to be respected, and she respected everyone’s preference. The older she got, the vaguer her childhood dream was, but she knew she never wanted to be a filthy businessperson in the first place.

“Look up there. It’s the planets.” He poked her gently, reminding her of the view.

Heather looked up and saw the planet’s hologram. I see. This is no normal path. They started off with something normal to get the customer into the mood, but the deeper we go, the more magnificent it gets. “Super realistic ride, huh? Interesting,” she commented calmly, but that was already an acknowledgement coming from her.

It wasn’t a long ride, but they spent more time than everyone else normally did. Matthias would point out all the projections, then when they were nearing the end, the projections turned into AR visuals.

A spaceship was floating above their heads, and Matthias tried to touch it. Heather watched him as he tried to get closer to the spaceship, and she thought Matthias was really adorable that day.

Then, two women in spacesuits appeared at the end of the tunnel and announced simultaneously, “We shall open this door of mysteries for you.”

Heather was surprised that the ride was better than she thought it would be, while Matthias looked excited. He suddenly held her hand, and Heather wanted to shake it off. However, she hesitated when she saw how delighted Matthias was.

Matthias took her to the door and tried to push it, but it was an automatic door, so it slid open before he could touch it, just like in the movies.

They went inside the spaceship, though Heather was just curious, while Matthias was in there to learn. It was a nice view, for the simulation was no AR visuals, but real-life objects. Matthias tried to touch everything he could. At that moment, it was as if they were flying in space, and a big screen stood before them.

They could see what was happening outside through the screen, then they looked at each other and realized that the people around them looked emotionless. After a while of observation, they realized that the people were just simulations instead of the real deal.

Matthias wondered if the simulations could talk to humans, so he took Heather and went up to the captain to greet him. “Hello, captain.”

The captain was sitting in the center, but he ignored Matthias. Matthias looked at Heather before trying again, though he knew it must look stupid. "Can you understand me, captain?" He had to get the answer for that, or it'd become an obsession.

"Be quiet, sir. I'm trying to lead my team here," the captain answered, much to their surprise. Apparently the simulations could talk to people.

"Sorry, captain, but I have a lot of questions—"

Before he could finish, the captain interjected, "A moment please, sir. I'm very busy right now."

Matthias kept quiet and turned to the screen. Apparently, the spaceship was traveling smoothly, so the captain didn't have anything to do. And nothing was happening, as everyone was working as usual. Matthias whispered, "Looks like the captain is ignoring us." Matthias was still looking at the captain.

"Or maybe you're just annoying," she teased. Compared to Matthias' curiosity, Heather would much prefer a quiet observation.

"It's probably pre-programmed." Matthias wanted to salvage the situation. Since simulations weren't really advanced, it was impossible for a simulation to have a conversation with a normal human.

Heather smiled. It was a gentle smile, for Matthias was acting like a curious teenager that day; the sight of it even made her tone down her fierce look.

"Mr. Locke, Miss Langston, please take your seats," someone suddenly called them, much to their surprise. Simulations have gotten this far?

They looked in the direction of the sound and saw a robot around half the size of a normal adult. It looked like it was an adorable child, and it was coming up to them, eventually standing before Matthias and Heather.

"Mr. Locke, Miss Langston, we will be warping soon. Please take your seats." It then pointed at two empty seats on the right.

Matthias and Heather looked at each other before going to their seats and sat down, just like how the robot advised. The seats turned on auto mode and buckled them up the moment they sat down. It was as if they were in a Hollywood set, where everything felt real but also fake at the same time.

After that, they heard the captain commanding the crew, and Matthias held Heather's hand while grinning gently at her. "We're going to leave Earth for another planet now. I'm glad that you're with me on this journey." Seemingly thoroughly enjoying the process, he got into character.

She blinked at him, feeling interested about Matthias' change. A while later, she nodded. "We're gonna colonize it." She started beaming, and he laughed.

"Nicely worded. We'll build a big colony," Matthias answered.

They had a fun time and ignored the bumpy ride along the way. Warping could be extremely uncomfortable, but they didn't feel it before they lost their grip on gravity. Once they realized they were in a gravity-free space, they could feel the floaty feeling even in their seats.

Heather held Matthias' hand tightly as the simulation became more and more realistic. She started feeling as if she was on an actual space trip with Matthias. The super realistic ride slowly deconstructed her perception of reality, bringing her into the mood, and then putting her into the scene.

Soon, Heather was starting to feel dizzy and uncomfortable; her mind was all jumbled up. That was the moment when the robot popped up and handed her a pill. She looked at it before turning to Matthias, who nodded at her, and she took the pill hesitatingly. Then, the robot answered cutely, "This pill will lessen your nausea, Miss Langston."

Wait, how did it notice my discomfort? "Can I really take this?" she asked. Heather couldn't believe that they had actual medicine lying around, and the pill she was holding looked like a cocoa bean.

"Don't worry. It won't harm you," Matthias persuaded her. He seemed confident that the pill would work.

Thus, she popped it into her mouth. Wow, it even tastes like a cocoa bean. Bit sweet. She felt better after taking the pill, though she suspected that it was just a placebo effect.

"The effect is the strongest ten minutes after ingestion. It will soothe all your discomfort." As the robot spoke, it slapped its belly and revealed a clock that was counting down.

Heather didn't know how far technology had advanced, since she didn't read much about it. She was surprised that robots had come so far though, and the simulated humans were great too. Since they were in a dark room, it was hard to tell that they were simulations.

The spaceship was still warping, but Heather was feeling better after taking the pill. On the other hand, Matthias looked fine, much to her envy. Since men had better physical abilities than women in general, Heather couldn't win against him when it came to this aspect.

He was showing concern for her, and she smiled. "I'm feeling much better now. Keep your eyes on the screen, not me." Matthias was looking too adorable, so she couldn't even bring herself to scold him.

The screen was showing some realistic footage, and the guests could see what was happening in space. Hm, this is interesting. Heather thought she could fall in love with space after the ride, while Matthias was getting more and more excited, as if he were a hot-blooded teenager.

"Space is awesome!" he commented. Traveling in space was his dream, and the trip fulfilled that wish of his somehow.

"Slow down," the captain commanded. As the spaceship started slowing down, the feeling of vertigo was slowly disappearing too. Matthias and Heather stared at the screen, which was now showing a beautiful planet. The beauty of that planet captured their attention, and Heather grabbed Matthias' hand. "What is that planet? It looks like Earth."

"Kepler-452b," he answered. That planet was 98% similar to Earth.

"Are we going to land on this planet?" she asked. Since they could simulate a space trip, she was looking forward to the simulation of the landing.

"The captain will answer that, Miss Langston." Heather was amused by the robot's sudden appearance. Then, they saw the captain coming down from the helm and walking up toward them. Matthias and Heather were starting to get a little nervous, since the captain finally had time to answer their questions.

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Even Heather—who was usually uninterested in space—got into character. She looked at Matthias, and he answered, “This is more interesting than I thought.”

She nodded in assent. I seem to have underestimated modern tech. I totally didn’t expect simulations to be so realistic now.

“Pardon me for my rude behavior earlier, dear guests. Do you have any questions for me?” the captain asked politely, unlike how he acted earlier.

Matthias stared at the screen and asked, “Will we be landing on Kepler-452b?” That was the question he wanted answered the most.

The serious captain finally cracked a smile. “Yes, we shall be landing on Kepler-452b.”

Matthias looked at the captain up close. Since they were just simulated humans, they should be different from real humans. If he can smile, that means he has a real-life model somewhere. There were a lot of simulated humans around the deck, but most of them had a deadpan look on their face. The details were lacking, but obviously the creator had poured a lot of soul into the captain. It must have been hard to make even one character like that, so Matthias didn’t nitpick.

A moment later, a timer appeared on the screen, much to Matthias’ confusion. Then, the captain answered, “We’ll be landing in three minutes. Please remain seated and buckled up.” The captain started going back to the helm to get ready for a bumpy landing.

Heather was keeping her silence, since everything that was happening was already beyond her. She was hoping Matthias would explain the science behind it, but the most important thing at the moment was the landing.

Every second felt like an eternity, and a minute felt like infinity. The timer on the screen was accurate to milliseconds, and the tension was growing in the spaceship; even the deadpan crew members were starting to look serious. “This is the longest three minutes I’ve ever experienced,” Heather blurted. Only a minute and a half had passed, but it already felt like forever.

“Patience. It’ll be over in a minute,” he calmed her down.

As if stopped by something, the crew put down their work and stood at their stations, staring at the screen. The robot started creaking, and Heather looked at it. Is it getting rusty? Why'd it creak?

“System error. Rebooting.” The robot malfunctioned right before they landed, and it was just beside Heather.

Heather thought it was weird, then the spaceship shook violently, as if it had crashed into something. The screen blacked out, and the lights kept flashing. Heather arched her eyebrow, while Matthias held his forehead. An inevitable crisis was descending upon them.

Obviously, a landing was impossible. So much for that, Matthias thought. Time to get back to reality, I guess. Modern tech was still insufficient to simulate a landing on another planet, so they threw in a crisis at the last moment.

They started getting nervous; even though they had seen the trope countless times in movies, getting plunged right into the chaos was still heart pounding for them.

“Captain! We crashed into an unidentified object. The ship sustained heavy damage,” a crew member said shrilly. That was not good news.

However, the captain was still calm and collected. “Activate the backup plan.” He was too calm, as if the crisis was nothing to be scared off.

Heather and Matthias were slowly getting into the feel of it. The plot was smooth, and the suspense was thrown in at the right time. They thought they were in a Hollywood set, but they were just in a museum. The crisis was enough to make them nervous and fill them with adrenaline though.

The whole crew had descended into chaos, but the captain was still as calm as ever. Matthias and Heather were also starting to feel the despair surrounding everyone. As the story went on, the ship was sucked into a black hole, which gobbled it up, making it disappear into nothingness.

Everyone was trying to escape the black hole, though Matthias was still holding Heather's hand tightly. It was a good thing none of them were claustrophobic, or they would have had a panic attack right there and then. Even though they were in a crisis, they were still calm.

The crew was starting to spit out jargon, and they listened closely. Simply put, the ship was badly damaged, and the black hole would destroy it. Some of the crew members were starting to write down their last will and testament, but it offered little comfort, since they had lost contact with Earth.

The robot had rebooted some time earlier, and he went up to Matthias and Heather. "The ship will be destroyed soon. If you have any last words, I can send it back to Earth."

Even the robot was starting to get sentimental. Matthias and Heather looked at each other, but they could see nothing in the darkness. All that was left in the final moments was to come up with their 'last words'.

"Dying with someone I love is one hell of a way to go. I have no regrets," Matthias said.

For a moment there, Heather felt touched. Even though she knew it was all fake, it didn't stop her from feeling the love in it though, and she got into character as well.

"What about you, Miss Langston?" the robot asked her.

Thanks to Matthias, Heather actually had something worthwhile to say. "My only regret is that I've never truly been myself. My life is nothing but a façade."

She blurted it out. It was something she would only think about, but she never expected herself to say it out loud. Heather felt like she had gone overboard for a bit. For some reason, she thought that she wasn't herself, then she realized it was because of Matthias.

Matthias' mood was simply infectious, so she wanted to be herself that day. She would get tired of wearing the mask, so she needed to take a breather every now and then.

The darkness went on for a long, long time, threatening to devour the very souls of everything caught in it. Everything around them was spinning, and time went on for eternity. After what seemed like forever, a bright light broke through, and Heather covered her eyes.

For a moment, the light felt painful to look at, then they heard the captain heave a sigh of relief. The captain, with all his wisdom, had managed to lead the crew members across the black hole for a chance of survival. The guests,

Matthias and Heather, had a chance at a new life. Everyone was enjoying the sunlight, breathing in the fresh air. It was a great feeling after going through the black hole with barely any air to breathe.

The experience was a challenge, and those with bad health should never attempt it. A large part of the ride demanded decent physical ability, which meant the guests should be healthy and disease-free at the very least. It was more like a life-and-death simulation than a super realistic ride, but a meaningful ride nonetheless; one that made its guests honest to themselves.

Once they came out of the spaceship, Heather smirked. "Happy ending, huh?" She sounded sad though when she said that.

"Yeah, it's a happy ending. Don't you like it?" Matthias asked.

She shook her head. "Life is always cruel. It's always better to have multiple endings." She got out of character because everyone survived in the end.

"Oh, I should have chosen the bad ending if I had known about it." He looked at her and grinned.

"I see, so you can choose the endings." Realization struck her when she heard that. Looks like he knows more than I thought.

"The voucher mentioned it." He then took out a voucher. Heather looked at it, but she didn't pay much attention to it, though she suspected he might have more vouchers in store. "We can experience it again if you don't like the ending," he suggested.

"No. The ending's the only thing different, not the plot. I don't want to go through the same thing twice," she said in refusal. Since they chose the happy ending at first, there was no need for a second trip, even if the ending was a bad one. It would be pointless.

"But business is usually repetitive and boring. How do you go through it then?" Matthias asked in reflex. Whenever he was with her, he'd always try to debate.

She gave him a weird look, wondering why he would always try to argue with her. Why can't he just talk like a normal guy? Is debating with me that fun? "It's my job. Not like I can choose what I like, unlike my personal life," she

answered him, though she was annoyed about how he could ruin the atmosphere so easily.

Because of his question, she felt like ignoring him again. However, she was also frustrated that she couldn't talk to him normally. Every time she was with him, they'd end up arguing, and both sides would refuse to back off. That was especially true for Matthias, who could ruin the atmosphere single-handedly. She didn't know how she should handle him.

Matthias held back the urge to argue, since Evan had told him to change that habit no matter what. Matthias had been paying attention to that the whole time, but he'd still unconsciously argue with her. He couldn't do anything about his reflex, which was really frustrating. A moment later, Matthias started some small talk. "Are you hungry?"

Heather nodded. Thanks to Matthias, she didn't eat much that morning, and after that whole ride, she needed to refuel, so she needed to eat.

"This place is nice. Let's go." Matthias wanted to please her by showing her some good place to eat.

In response, she narrowed her eyes. Matthias was being too out of character, so she wasn't used to it. Since she was used to their constant arguments, it was hard to adapt to a nice Matthias. "I don't want local food." Heather started being unreasonable to see how Matthias would react to it.

"There's a Southeast Asian place there. It's great, and I think you'd like it." Matthias was still gentle toward her, but it wasn't like him. Usually he was sharp, snarky, and annoying.

"I don't like sweet stuff." Heather went a step further, obviously having a little plan going on in her head.

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Matthias was getting really confused after getting played around by Heather. He never realized Heather was a picky eater until that point.

"What about Thai then?" he asked.

"Isn't that Southeast Asian too?" she shot back.

Oh d*mn. He was feeling awkward. I was in too much of a hurry. "What about spicy food?" he asked patiently.

Heather only smiled, and it sent a chill down Matthias' spine, for he had a feeling that he had done something wrong. A while later, Heather said, "You've eaten with me a few times before, but you don't seem to notice my preferences." She wanted to see how patient he would be with her, and if he would accept her unreasonable actions.

He gazed at her with a look of resignation, since he never did notice the details. Thus, Matthias tried to think back on the times he shared a meal with her, but it didn't help. All he could recall was that the first time they had a meal date was at a Western restaurant.

Since that was his only lead, he decided to bet on it. "So, Western then?" He hoped she'd say yes, so he stared at her closely, trying to get an answer from her expression.

"I don't really like to have Western food for lunch." She refused him with a flimsy excuse, apparently being as picky as she could.

Matthias was frowning now. Wow, women are hard to handle when it comes to meals. No wonder they're always called fussy. If it weren't because she was the woman he liked, he would rather spend his time with his boys. After all, women were frustrating to handle. "What about some light food then?" Matthias was running out of ideas, and he was wondering why Heather was being so picky.

She rolled her eyes. "That's not filling at all." Heather was laughing in secret when she noticed how confused Matthias was getting.

Matthias was still trying to come up with an idea, so he didn't realize she was setting him up on purpose. Love could turn anyone into a fool, so the usually sharp Matthias was looking a bit dumb at that moment. "Do you have any ideas then?" Matthias didn't want to give any suggestions anymore, since Heather would refuse it and insult him.

Heather shook her head, pretending to be as lost as Matthias was. "I have no idea. Why don't you make the choice?" She kicked the ball back to his court again. Heather had decided that it would be his fault no matter what.

In response, Matthias stared at her hand, and he remembered how he held her hand back at the spaceship. The sensation riled his urge up, and he wanted to hold her hand in public too. A moment later, he went through with that idea, much to her surprise. He felt nervous holding her hand, but he pretended to be calm. In the beginning, Heather struggled, but she calmed down after that, letting him hold her hand.

“Since you have no idea what we should eat, then hotpot it is.” Matthias had made the decision directly. There was no time to waste, and he wasn’t accepting no for an answer. The sky was overcast, and the air was cold, so it was the perfect time for hotpots.

“I don’t like hotpots,” Heather said in refusal. She didn’t like the smell of hotpots, so she refused to go to a hotpot restaurant.

“But I do,” Matthias said aggressively, then he took her away.

In the meantime, Heather stared at her hand, feeling dismal. She never expected herself to end up like that. Matthias didn’t get mad with her, nor did he keep throwing out ideas until Heather said yes. Instead, he went straight for a hotpot, much to her chagrin and amusement. That wasn’t in her plan though.

The hotpot restaurant’s air was filled with the smell of seasonings and boiling soup. Heather never liked hotpot restaurants, since she didn’t want the smell to linger on her. No matter how classy a hotpot restaurant was, the smell would still linger in the air, and having that kind of smell wafting off a lady like her was unbecoming.

After they found a seat, Heather sat down across from Matthias. He was going to sit with her, but she chased him to the opposite side. “You actually like hotpots?” she asked in disbelief. Heather thought Matthias was just joking, since she thought there was no way he actually liked hotpots.

“Is that a problem?” Matthias then proceeded to order the side dishes without any hesitation, while Heather watched him.

“Don’t you think hotpots smell weird?” Heather asked. She could feel the smell starting to stick on her, and she had decided to dump the shirt she was wearing.

Matthias smiled. "My mother was a Clysedalean, so she brought me to hotpot restaurants all the time when I was a kid. I like spicy food." That was the first time Matthias brought his late mother up, and Heather couldn't say anything to that. She knew that his mother had passed a long time ago, so Matthias might see hotpots as a way to pay tribute to his mother. No wonder he likes hotpots.

"The Lockes forbade me from having any hotpots and forced me to acquire table manners. They wanted me to be a gentleman, and they saw hotpots as nothing but a pleasure for the lowly men. They think Western food is classier, but I beg to differ. Taste is a subjective thing," he said seriously, and he had a good point. Thanks to that, Heather's distaste for hotpots lessened, even though only by a bit.

"Well, preferences should be respected, but I'm not really interested in hotpots." Instead of 'dislike', Heather was now 'uninterested'.

"What would you like then?" Matthias was holding the menu while staring at her seriously, expecting her to come up with an idea of what she liked.

However, Heather didn't have any idea, and she was getting nervous from being stared at. Furthermore, she was feeling guilty for playing him like a fiddle earlier. "Hotpot it is then," she answered gently, since there was no need to argue with him.

At that, he smiled victoriously while asking, "Would you like it to be slightly spicy or moderately spicy?"

To his surprise, she answered, "I want it to be super spicy." Heather put on a steely look, though her obstinance was part of her charm.

Matthias was surprised, so he tried to confirm with her once more. "Are you sure you want that?" He liked spicy food, and the hotpot was made in authentic Clysedale style, so it was really spicy. Thus, he was worried she wouldn't be able to take it.

"Yeah. I can take spicy food," she answered adamantly.

He nodded. "Sure. Super spicy it is then." She can be a kid sometimes. Well, let's see how she likes it then.

Their hotpot was served a short while later. In true Clysedale style, it was separated into nine parts. The soup was dark in color, and the smell was as

spicy as it got, which made Heather sneeze. The smell was spicy enough, but Heather still tried to make herself look unfazed.

At the same time, Matthias was staring at her, waiting for the moment she would take her first bite, but Heather simply smiled at him nonchalantly. Then, she stared at the hotpot; she couldn't handle spicy food.

Heather couldn't understand why she would try to one up Matthias every time. Every time they met, she'd act like a child, losing her usual cool. Because of that, she set herself up for a torture session this time.

Also, Heather was averse toward mutton, for she hated the strong scent, so Matthias only dunked the mutton in one space, leaving the others clean. "This place's mutton is nice though." He spoke as he munched on the mutton.

"No. I hate the smell and its texture." She stood her ground. There was a line she wouldn't cross, so she wouldn't even give any mutton a chance.

"Oh, have more beef then." Matthias then put the beef in another space. He wanted Heather to have more meat, but she waved him down.

"I don't want any meat. I'll just have the greens," she replied. Even though Matthias was enjoying the meat, Heather thought it was viscerally disgusting to see him eat. The smell alone was spicy enough to make her stomach hurt, so she couldn't even work up an appetite. Quietly, she dunked some greens into the hotpot, thinking that it wouldn't be too spicy.

Matthias smirked. She's cute when she's not honest with herself. Heather was eating her greens bit by bit, while Matthias was already working up a sweat, so he took his sweater off.

As the spiciness started bursting in her mouth, Heather was struck by an urge to cry, but she stayed calm. D*mn. I shouldn't have pushed myself if I knew this was going to happen. That's it. No hotpots from now on.

They only ordered the side dishes, so there were no drinks around. "Alcohol or juice?" Matthias asked after noticing that Heather's face had turned scarlet from the spiciness.

He used to think she was too fair, so she was cute when she turned scarlet, not to mention alluring. By now, Heather looked like a ripe peach ready for the picking, and Matthias wanted to pick it.

Having alcohol would just make it worse, and Heather didn't want to torture herself further, so this time, she chose to be honest. "Lemon water, please." Some sour drinks should lessen the spiciness, she thought.

Matthias tried his hardest not to laugh at her. She was just too adorable, and he wanted to record her, but she might think it was rude and get upset.

After the waiter came with the warm lemon water, Heather gulped one big glass down in an instant. The warmth was soothing, though it only alleviated the spiciness by a bit. The hotpot was too hot for her to go on, and she had forgotten all about her hunger.

Since all she did was drink, Matthias took some beef for her, which made her shoot him a glare. "I told you I'm not having any meat." So why are you still giving me meat? I thought I told you I don't want them. Her face turned redder, though part of it was because of Matthias.

"All you had was some veggies. That's not enough. You need your protein," Matthias said, insisting on her having the meat. He couldn't understand why some people choose to be vegetarians, though he knew Heather wasn't one. Heather finished a whole steak the last time they had Western food.

"No. I don't feel like eating." She frowned, feeling something burning in her stomach, and she knew her condition would blow up if she kept it up.

That was when Matthias put his cutlery down. "Right, I'm stopping now then." He grinned at her, much to her confusion.

What is he thinking?

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A waiter came over to clear the table after a while, and the hotpot was turned off before getting taken away. Heather looked at him in confusion, since clearing the table while the guests were still there was inappropriate.

Before she could say anything, he answered, "They'll change it into a mandarin pot later." He could guess what she had in mind based on what she was doing.

However, that didn't cheer her up the slightest. She didn't want to have any more hotpots, even if it was a mandarin pot, which would have one side of the

pot with soup that wasn't spicy. By now, she couldn't work up an appetite, and she lost all interest in hotpots after the earlier experience. The spiciness still lingered in her mouth, and her stomach was still churning.

"I have some important business to settle, so I might have to leave." She tried to say goodbye in a roundabout manner as much as she could, but still, she was actually busy recently, for she needed to work on her company.

Matthias wasn't surprised about it, so he wiped his hands calmly. D*mn, I ruined the date again. "I'll send you off then," he offered, though it was hard to say goodbye. Matthias kept failing in the pursuit of Heather, and it was slowly eating away at his confidence.

"It's fine," she said. "You go ahead. I can go back by myself." She was going to see Leon, so she didn't want Matthias to bump into him, since Matthias didn't like Leon.

Matthias wanted to send her off, but he couldn't come up with an excuse. Soon, she stood up, obviously trying to leave. Matthias hesitated for a moment, then he followed her.

In response, she looked at him awkwardly. "Why'd you follow me?" She had tried her best to be gentle in order to get along with him, so the atmosphere between them was getting more awkward by the minute.

They used to argue and fight, showing their worst sides to each other. However, now that they were toning down so they could show their best sides to each other, the change came as a bit of a shock. Being nice and getting a reward in return was unusual for them, so they couldn't get used to it.

Dating was supposed to be all about honesty, not just a feel-good illusion, but the inexperienced wouldn't know that. Should a pair of inexperienced people date each other, the result would be a disaster.

After they left the restaurant, Matthias was still following Heather. He had spent too much time on her recently, neglecting his work. Thus, Nikolai had been calling him nonstop that day, but he ignored all the calls, even powering off his phone halfway through. However, Nikolai didn't give up, and he called Heather.

Heather received a call from an unknown number when she was waiting for her ride, while Matthias stayed behind her; even though she had refused his

offer, he insisted on sending her off. When Heather picked up the call, she was surprised to hear Nikolai's voice, then she was even more surprised to hear him sounding so panicked. "Miss Langston, I need Mr. Locke to take my call. This is urgent. He's turned his phone off."

Matthias didn't know Nikolai had called Heather, so he was still looking at her silently. Then, Heather turned around before she ended the call. Once she hung up, she looked at him sternly. Instantly, Matthias felt a chill running down his spine, and he knew something bad was happening. Then, Heather questioned, "Why did you turn off your phone?"

Oh, so that's what happened. "I don't want to be disturbed," he answered seriously. He never expected Nikolai to reach him through Heather.

"Go back to your company right now. I have my own matters to settle, and that seems to be the case for you too. Stop wasting our time," she demanded. Heather disliked how frivolous Matthias was being, since she was someone who prioritized work. No matter what, their private lives shouldn't get in the way of their work, so she was angry at Matthias. It was a sign of his immaturity, and the more she knew him, the worse her disappointment became.

At that point, she couldn't even tell if her meeting with Matthias in Italy was real or a dream. Back then, Matthias looked like a god when he spoke on stage. His speech encouraged her, and that was when she fell for him. She respected him because she didn't know him well, and it was then she knew she liked him.

But now, the more she knew about him, the more disappointed she was about the real him. He was a far cry from the perfect match she imagined. She didn't like how immature and random he was, for she wanted to control everything. She wanted everything to happen like how she imagined.

Even after getting into the car, she was still thinking about her relationship with him. The more she thought about it, the more she realized it was impossible for her to accept the real Matthias. Everyone was telling her to date Matthias, so she wondered if they were actually a perfect match in their eyes. The more she thought about it that way, the more she couldn't understand how she felt about Matthias. At the same time, Bradford City was undergoing an overhaul, so the plan was thrown out the window.

Matthias resumed his cold persona once he came back to the company. Just like what Heather said, it was Matthias' fault for not prioritizing work, and he knew he couldn't blame Nikolai for his actions.

On the other hand, Nikolai wanted to disappear right away when he saw Matthias. He wanted to be as insignificant as possible, but Matthias never shifted his gaze away. Nikolai was terrified, even though Matthias wasn't angry at all.

"Give me the file." Finally, Matthias shifted his gaze away, since he knew how Nikolai must feel.

Matthias had been going overboard lately. Even though Regan was keeping an eye on him, Matthias still skipped out on work all the time. Regan thought Matthias was doing it all for a woman, and since it was good news for him, Regan didn't stop Matthias. He was waiting for Matthias to make a huge mistake because of that woman, and that was the reason he stayed in Locke Group.

Then, the perfect chance presented itself when Matthias kept skipping out on work, so he orchestrated a financial overlook with his lackey in the company. Matthias didn't give Regan full power over the company's finances, so any transaction that exceeded a certain amount had to be approved by Matthias before it was handed to Regan.

Since Matthias wouldn't grant him full power, Regan would use that to launch an assault on Matthias. He had been waiting for a long time, and Matthias finally made a misstep. Not long ago, Matthias approved a huge expense, but that expense was just a smokescreen created by Regan's lackey.

His lackey had swindled the money and escaped overseas. Regan knew that had happened, so he would use that chance to confront Matthias. The perfect chance presented itself again when Matthias went on a date with Heather. He was late for more than three hours, giving Regan enough time to call the whole board of directors to hold a meeting.

Regan sacrificed a trusted lackey all so he could deal a heavy blow against Matthias. The board of directors were getting disgruntled about Matthias' recent actions, and coupling that up with the fiasco Regan orchestrated, it would spell disaster for Matthias. However, Regan never thought about the fact that his conspiracy had already dealt a blow against the company.

Meanwhile, Nikolai wasn't worried just because of Matthias' actions. He was also worried about his future, for Regan's assault came all too suddenly. On the other hand, Matthias was reading through the file calmly. Regan went through all this just to topple me?

The more he read, the colder his smile became. Nikolai had seen how disastrous a storm Matthias could stir up, so he was feeling nervous about what was to come.

"When's the meeting going to start?" Matthias looked at the time.

"Two in the afternoon." Nikolai was worried for Matthias, but the latter didn't look concerned in the slightest.

"Half an hour away, huh? Well, this file is useless then." He then tossed it into the trash can.

"This is going to be hard to handle, Matthias. Do you have a plan?" Nikolai called Matthias by his name, obviously because he was overwhelmed by his nerves.

Matthias smiled confidently. "No, because I don't need a plan to reveal this lie."

Nikolai stared at him, looking confused. But this happened for real. You only considered this for like half a day before giving it your approval. Nikolai knew something was going to happen, and eventually, trouble came knocking. However, Matthias looked unfazed, much to his confusion.

After that, he got up from the chair and took his suit off. "I'll take a shower right now. Get me my clothes." He couldn't go to the conference smelling like hotpots.

You're going to shower? Nikolai stared at him in disbelief, but he was in no position to speak up. Maybe he does have a plan. Thus, Nikolai went to search for Matthias' clothes, while Matthias went to the bathroom.

The CEO's office was absurdly large, and the bathroom alone took up thirty square meters. He wasn't worried about what would happen, since he knew what Regan had in mind all along. Regan might be a scheming one, but he was still too inexperienced in the business world. His imagination was limited, and all his tactics were child's play for Matthias.

How should I humiliate him, hmm? Matthias allowed Regan free rein, but apparently, all that power had gone to his head, so he thought it was time to teach Regan a lesson. He started training his lackeys right after he came to work. Laughable.

Matthias enjoyed the bath and the feeling of water cleansing every inch of his body, taking away his fatigue. When he was done, the whole bathroom was filled with the scent of his body shampoo. He liked that brand for its fragrance and long-lasting scent. Matthias could relax while he was showering, but when he was done, it was time to hunt.

He had been lying in wait for that very moment.

Outside, Nikolai had already prepared all the clothes for him, then he opened the door quietly and put them on a dry spot.

Matthias' hair was wet, and his eyes were closed. Once Nikolai was done, he quietly came back out and closed the door. He knew that the worse the situation was, the more relaxed Matthias was. I guess he's going to the conference right after he dries his hair.

Standing before Love Chapter 549

The board of directors were engaged in hushed conversations as they waited for Matthias' arrival. Regan was all smiles, confident that Matthias would be struck down from his sudden attack. There was a hint of smugness in his smile when he imagined how gloomy Matthias must look, but when Matthias came in, Regan realized he was smiling confidently, as if unfazed by the recent events.

Matthias sat in his spot, silencing everyone with a glance, then he threw a mocking grin at Regan. Oh, looking confident, huh, Matthias? No matter. You'll be the butt of the joke soon. Regan had distributed the file for everyone present, and the board of directors had finished reading the document that recorded all the mistakes Matthias did recently.

The biggest mistake recorded in it was about the eastern suburbs' project manager swindling a huge sum of money from the company. A scandal like that would have been censored, but Regan made it known publicly.

However, that was a huge mistake on Regan's part. He was only doing it to topple Matthias, but he forgot one thing—his tactics were just child's play for Matthias, who had seen worse in the business world.

"What's the main agenda of the meeting?" Matthias asked casually. He had to, since nobody would talk. At the side, Regan was smirking, while everyone was whispering, but Matthias was smiling mirthlessly.

"No answer?" Matthias asked again, but sternly this time. He was going to get serious.

In the end, Regan answered, "Have you finished the file I gave you, President?" He looked around him.

The windows were closed, and the lamps hanging above were radiating a warm light, shining on Matthias' face. His every move was magnified, and one frown was enough to silence the board of directors. "I did. Nonsense. All of it." He made that statement in a straightforward manner, and he stopped smiling. Instead, he started radiating a dangerous aura.

Regan was feeling awkward, and the directors didn't say anything. They knew how terrifying Matthias was, so nobody helped Regan out.

"If that is what you think, then may I ask you to explain yourself?" Regan was still courteous, since he couldn't just fight in the open. He still needed to be polite, even though it wasn't genuine.

In response, Matthias looked at him. "You're suspecting me of mismanagement and called a board meeting all on your own. Are you trying to force a resignation?" he asked calmly, but Regan was still terrified nonetheless.

Meanwhile, Nikolai was just beside him, and he felt like clapping for Matthias. He managed to shoot that question calmly. Nice one.

Regan smiled. "This is my job. It's my duty as the Chief Financial Officer to question anything regarding the finances once a problem rears its head." He was trying to calm himself down. Don't get scared, Regan. Stay calm.

"What about the board meeting then? Usually I'd be the one to call it, so what is the meaning of this? Can I interpret it as insubordination?" Matthias wanted Regan to explain himself no matter what.

Regan was really feeling the heat at that point, and his smile started to freeze up. He never expected Matthias to be so insistent, but then he realized Matthias was just distracting everyone and delaying the inevitable. "President, an employee has swindled a huge sum of money, impacting the company gravely. Everyone here has the right to know about this." Regan calmed himself down and explained himself.

"That is no reason for you to call a board meeting on your own." Matthias still wouldn't let it go, since he wanted to see what kind of tricks Regan had up his sleeve.

"President, we need an explanation about Harper's swindling. You approved the deal." Regan didn't want to argue anything unrelated, since he noticed that the board was starting to chicken out. I have to get this back on track.

"I approved it, so? Do you need an explanation? Does everyone need an explanation? Anyone?" He looked at the board of directors and scoffed when none of them met his eye.

"I checked the papers, and there's a lot of problems there. You shouldn't have approved the deal so easily. A board meeting should have been called for a big deal like that. Besides, you've approved a huge sum of expense for the eastern suburbs' project. Harper's list for the expenses was just a trap. You're the boss, but still Harper managed to play you like a fiddle." Regan was still acting polite, but he was already starting to attack Matthias, obviously trying to dump the blame on him.

Matthias looked at Regan nonchalantly. "Ah, so that's what you're getting at. You think this is all my fault, and you want me to get the money back huh?" Matthias' collected demeanor despite the crisis was scaring everyone there. This family feud is really... thrilling.

"You haven't been coming to work a lot lately, President. I heard you were visiting the Langstons a lot, presumably because you're courting Miss Heather?" Regan grinned and brought up Matthias' recent activities so the board could see that Matthias had wasted his time on a woman.

Matthias' face fell the moment Heather was brought up. He glared at Regan, gnashing his teeth. "We're in a meeting, so don't bring my personal life into it. That is disrespectful, Mr. Locke." He didn't like Regan dragging Heather into this.

Regan was delighted to see Matthias getting riled up, because that was what he was aiming for from the start. The angrier Matthias was, the easier he'd slip up. Regan wanted to expose Matthias' true colors to the whole board of directors. "But that's related to work, so I have a duty to point it out. Your recent actions have been disappointing, President. It is never wise to bring personal matters into work," Regan shot back. Now that he had gotten the chance, he wouldn't let Matthias gloss it over.

"So you believe that my recent actions are affecting the company." Matthias put on a calm composure again. Since Heather was already brought up, he thought there was no problem admitting to it.

"Yes. You have always been a shrewd businessman, President. You seldom make mistakes, but you have been making nothing but mistakes recently. Minor slip ups won't hurt the company, but this is a big case. I don't think calling a board meeting to demand an explanation is too much, eh?" Regan was fashioning himself out to be a defender of the company so he could force Matthias to explain himself.

"According to your logic, people like us should abandon our emotions and become nothing but heartless machines then? After all, our judgment will be affected, and we'll inevitably slip up if we're human after all. According to your logic, being human will affect work." Matthias refused to get back on track, only talking about irrelevant matters. Regan would start to get frustrated as time went on, eventually exposing his true colors.

"Please get back on track, President. Not everyone will make mistakes just because they have emotions. The point is that people like you should never let their emotions get in the way of work. You can't make mistakes at work just because your love life isn't going well." Regan was mocking Matthias' failure. He had been observing Matthias closely, so he knew it wasn't going well with Heather.

Then, the directors looked at each other in confusion. They were wondering why the Locke brothers were talking about something irrelevant. I don't think they need to bring this up during a meeting.

"This case is top secret. I see no need to give any explanation," Matthias answered adamantly.

Regan didn't see that coming, and the directors' face darkened. They thought Regan was just making a mountain out of a molehill in the first place, but after

seeing how arrogant Matthias was, they thought Matthias had to explain himself.

Even though everyone was forcing him to explain himself, Matthias still looked as calm as ever. Then, Regan asked, “So three hundred million is nothing to you, huh, President? Harper ran away with three hundred million in cash, and you’re telling me you won’t explain yourself just because it’s top secret? That is disappointing.” Regan was representing the whole board of directors, though he himself was angered by Matthias’ attitude.

“Do you even know Harper as a person? According to this file, Harper is now uncontactable, so how can you be so sure he’s the one who ran off with our money? That’s unfair to him,” Matthias retorted.

Regan stared at him in disbelief. He didn’t expect Matthias to counter the attack with that point, but he scoffed. “President, I’m not the first to notice Harper’s crime. It was Travis, Harper’s old friend. If you have any questions about the matter, I can get Travis here to explain everything.” Regan found Matthias’ question laughable. I orchestrated this whole thing. As if you can get past me that easily. Laughable.

“Ah, no need for that.” Matthias waved him down and took his phone out. He scrolled down until he found Harper’s number, then Matthias called him on the spot. The speakerphone was turned on, so everyone heard the beeps. They waited with bated breaths, wondering if Harper would pick it up. Regan didn’t think he would, since he knew Harper would have changed his SIM card at this point.

As expected, the call didn’t get through, and Regan heaved a sigh of relief. Hah, what a farce. He then shot a look of disdain at Matthias. Let’s see what you have left up your sleeve.

Matthias smiled. “Harper should have landed in France by now. He must have changed his number. Silly me.” After saying that, he dialed Harper’s other number.

What? Harper has another number? Regan never knew that. His face darkened, and his heart started to pound. If this call gets through, then that means...

Standing before Love Chapter 550

The most nervous person in the room was Regan, who thought, in retrospect, that everything had gone unexpectedly smooth from start to end. Even though Harper was the person he wanted to rope in as his henchman when he first joined the company, he didn't know much about him, and he now felt that he was being set up as he listened to the things Matthias had just said.

This time, the call really went through, and Harper's voice sounded from the other end, making Regan's heart gallop in anxiety. All of a sudden, it dawned on him that this was such an ironic situation; he had carefully planned to set up Matthias, but he was the one being set up in the end.

"Hello, President Locke," Harper answered politely.

"Are you in France now, Mr. Lewis?" Matthias asked while looking at Regan, deliberately asking the question so he could hear it.

"Yes, President Locke," he answered. At the moment, he was at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, France, and he would be carrying out an important task in France.

"Director Regan Locke told me that you couldn't be reached and he thought that you had run away with a huge amount of money," Matthias said nonchalantly, but Regan's forehead was already breaking out in cold sweat.

On the other end, Harper was silent for a while before finally answering, "I'm sorry, but the signal isn't good in the airport. If Director Locke has any suspicions about me, I can confront him once I return."

It was as though Harper was a changed person, and Regan finally understood that it was a trap laid out by Matthias and Harper. This meeting with the board of directors on this day was meant to snare him, and now, he had made a fool of himself in front of all the directors and suffered a complete defeat.

After hanging up the call, Matthias gazed at him and said solemnly, "Director Locke, can you offer me an explanation now?" Upon hearing the conversation over the call earlier, the other directors all stood on Matthias' side immediately.

Regan's forehead creased deeply from his tightly knitted brows as he had no words to say. Now that things had developed to this stage, there was nothing

else he could say to defend himself. “President Locke, I’m sorry that I didn’t investigate the matter properly and made the wrong judgement,” he said, pretending to be composed.

In the same room, Nikolai tried his best to suppress his smirk. Who would have thought that Matthias had been planning this? he thought. So it turned out that Harper didn’t betray the company, and this was merely a ploy used against Regan.

“Director Locke, you should understand that there are consequences when an adult makes a mistake. This isn’t something you can just brush off by saying that you made the wrong judgement.” The tables were turned now; Regan was constantly finding ways to throw him off his position, so naturally, Matthias wouldn’t be soft-hearted against him either.

Speechless, Regan thought frantically, Does it mean that I have to resign to be held accountable for this huge mess? There’s no way that I will go along with his idea. I don’t mind any other punishment as long as I get to keep my position in front of the directors.

“I’ll be responsible for this matter, but it was the truth that Harper took away three hundred million. As the Chief Financial Officer, I have the right to know where this huge amount of money has gone,” Regan argued, making his desperate attempt to question Matthias and to emphasize that this was the reason why he asked for this meeting in the first place. That way, he could reduce his own punishment.

“I’ve told you that it’s a company secret. Besides me and Harper, there’s no need for another person to know about it.” Matthias purposely kept it a secret from Regan. Besides, it was true that Harper was on a secret mission now, so he had a reason to keep mum about it.

The other directors agreed with him because the Locke Group would have a few secret missions in a year that were not announced to the public, and only the person carrying out the task and the president would know it.

Tongue-tied, Regan realized that he had lost the battle as all the directors were now on Matthias’ side, and all he could do now was secure his position as a director. “I’m sorry, President Locke. I shouldn’t have suspected you.” At this point, he couldn’t stubbornly insist that he was right, so he had to lower himself to Matthias.

On the other hand, Matthias wasn't interested in listening to his fake apology because he knew that he was trying to keep his position. "Do you remember what was my first working position when I joined Locke Group, Director Locke?"

Although he wasn't sure what Matthias was up to, he had to play along with him now and answer his question appropriately. "A regular staff in the sales department," he replied.

Matthias nodded. For him to get to his current position wasn't easy at all, and he had done it step by step. "Exactly. People from the Locke Family had always started from scratch, and there are very few people like you who started with a high post. Personally, I don't agree with giving such an important position to a newbie, and it was proven that you're not suited for this position. Maybe you should train for some time from the basic level, Director Locke." Finally, he had made his intentions clear. After beating about the bush, his aim was to throw Regan off his position. How could he possibly allow him to keep his post as the Chief Financial Officer?

Meanwhile, the board of directors were quiet—nobody opposed or agreed to it, let alone put in a good word for Regan. Even though they didn't say a thing, they basically gave their silent consent as Matthias shot Regan a provocative look. Recently, Regan had really been such a hindrance that he had to do something against him.

"You're right, President Locke. I do have to train myself for some time at the basic level." Besides accepting the judgement, Regan had no other way out. If Matthias brought this matter back home, he would have to return with his tail between his legs.

Just when he finally made it into Locke Group, Regan vowed that he wouldn't rest until he had thrown Matthias off his post, and even if it meant that he had to start from the bottom, he didn't want to leave the company.

"Looks like you have sincerely repented, Director Locke. I'm sorry but you'll have to work from the basic level, so you'll be starting in the same position as I was before—a regular employee in the sales department!" As he had experience in the sales department before, Matthias knew about the pressure and difficulties in that position, and it wouldn't be a breezy task for Regan, who had always been pampered.

I'll be waiting for the day when he calls it quits, Matthias thought. Since he's here in Locke Group, then I have to play along with him accordingly as well.

When the whole fiasco ended, the board of directors all saw it for what it was—a fight between brothers. Despite the fact that Regan was not a likeable person, Matthias' recent performance hadn't been exactly satisfactory either, and it was clear that the directors were unhappy with him in the meeting.

After the meeting, Matthias returned to his own office with Nikolai gloating happily over Regan's situation next to him. Engrossed in his work, Matthias ignored him and didn't give him any reaction even though Nikolai had said so much. In the end, he had to shut his mouth.

"You don't seem so happy, Matt," Nikolai said tentatively.

Upon lifting his head from the document he was reading, Matthias said, "There has been a huge backlog of work recently, and there are many things I have to attend to. I don't have the time to be gloating over another person's misfortune."

In order to create an opportunity for Regan, Matthias had done a lot of background work, resulting in his backlog of work. It was a fact that he had neglected his work, and of course, part of the reason was because of his own personal relationship. Thus, it wasn't entirely unreasonable for Regan to question him at the meeting earlier.

"The reason why you've been acting abnormally recently is because you've been waiting for this day, Matt?" Nikolai asked sheepishly. Finally, he was able to vanquish the resentment in his heart, so he was over the moon right now.

"You can either go out or keep quiet," Matthias said without lifting his head while skimming through the document in his hand. There was still tons of work awaiting him.

Lowering his head with an innocent expression, Nikolai thought that Matthias was terrifying when he was working seriously, and he didn't dare to disturb him further. Although it was obvious that Matthias wasn't in the mood for chitchat, he had an unfathomable look on his face. Instead of rejoicing over his victory, he looked a little depressed.

After Nikolai sneaked out of the room, he went to Lara, who was rather free at the moment and was flipping through a book casually. On both theory and actual practice, Lara had been enriching herself recently, and she wanted to read more books.

Silently, he crept up behind her and gave her a scare when he asked, "What are you reading, Lara?"

Lara rolled her eyes at him and returned to her book. Seeing that she ignored himself, Nikolai then plopped himself next to her.

Sensing something amiss with him, Lara nudged him with her hand. "Who bullied you? You look so pitiful," she remarked with a bright smile on her face, gloating over his unhappiness.

"The president has been really weird recently. I can't understand what he's thinking about anymore," he explained in a defeated tone. It was true that he didn't understand what plans Matthias had in his mind.

He didn't even discuss it with him beforehand regarding the plan this time against Regan, and it looked like he had a growing interest to plan things by himself. This made Nikolai suspect if there was a gap between them; otherwise, he would have always discussed everything with him. Regardless, he had to look at himself in retrospect because of Matthias' abnormal actions.

"Why do you have to figure out what the president is thinking about? We're his subordinates and aides, not his brain," she said, pointing a finger at her own head. After all this while, her principle at work was carrying out Matthias' instructions, unlike Nikolai, who had so many thoughts in his mind.

"Let's drop this matter." In the end, he decided to let this matter go because what Lara said kind of made sense as well.

While she turned back to her book, he leaned in closer out of curiosity, which made her shove his head aside with her own head in annoyance.

"Buy another one yourself if you wish to read. I don't like to share a book with someone else," she grumbled.

Rubbing the spot on his head where she just hit him, Nikolai thought, Her head is so tough that it's a weapon of mass destruction!

On the other hand, in his office, Matthias went through the main points in some files again regarding his recent exchanges with Hart Group. The last time Locke Group attacked them directly, Tony was actually able to remotely control Hart Group from abroad, and Locke Group was not able to benefit from it at all. It was tough to go against Tony, but Matthias received some valuable materials after the huge confrontation previously.

In fact, he had been hiding something the whole time—it wasn't his personal goal to defeat the Hart Group. Despite the directors' disapproval to continue fighting with Hart Group, it was impossible to call everything off halfway when the war was already declared.

Recently, he was wavering in dealing with Hart Group, and he tried his best to avoid any direct confrontation with them; he was planning to stay still instead. However, this is no longer a matter I can decide, he thought as he opened a folder which was airtailed to him from the Locke Family.

There was no way to withdraw the arrow that had been shot. As he read the document in black and white, a sense of helplessness welled up in him. He was merely the front man of the Locke Group; many things were actually beyond his control!

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Looks like someone is already impatient, Matthias thought, placing the document back into the folder. After thinking about it again and again, he took out the document once more from its folder. Then, he stood up and strode to the paper shredder. It's better that no one else sees this, he decided, putting the document into the shredder.

Before he moved here, that person already instructed him to defeat Hart Group, and not only did that person want Locke Group to take over Hart Group's position in the business scene of Bradford, but he even wanted to occupy the Hart Group.

Back then, Matthias was devoted to his promise, but he was wavering now because he admired Tony and didn't want to destroy the Hart Group. At least, he didn't want to play the role of the villain as there were too many complicated relationships involved.

In addition, he now had plans to be with Heather, so he really didn't want to harm Hart Group. Compared to destroying Hart Group, he wanted to destroy Locke Group even more.

Amidst this turmoil, Matthias knew his place very well, and he was caught in a dilemma. So for now, he could only pretend to comply. He used to be a sharp blade of the Locke Family, assisting them to expand their territory, but this sharp blade had gained its own consciousness.

Currently, he already had his own plan, and it was to live a simple life with Heather. To achieve this purpose, he was willing to take the risk.

While the conspiracy was beginning to take shape, Heather was busy with starting up her company to fulfill her dream. In the meantime, she had to be alert to any possible crisis that might arise anytime.

Leaning on her side leisurely on a couch in Leon's apartment, Heather watched as he sat in a small stool across herself with her laptop on his lap, wearing a frustrated look on his face.

"I'm not interested in the fight between your families," Leon declared in annoyance as he glanced at her, feeling incredibly unfortunate that she was using him as free labor again.

Without raising her head, Heather continued to peel the mandarin in her hands as though she hadn't heard anything, which made him even more annoyed, and his face crumpled into a frown, showing his protest against her tyrannical behavior.

"Heather, you can't keep forcing me back to my old profession," he said righteously, condemning her actions.

Only then did she lift her head slowly and swept her eyes at him nonchalantly. What a pretty boy. He looks so cute even when he's mad.

"It's a given for a junior to help out his senior, no?" she said with a smirk. Finally, she finished peeling the mandarin and would be able to enjoy it soon.

Resentment crawled all over his face; all that was on his mind now were ways to woo Paige, and he was not the least interested to be involved with this mess Heather was presenting him.

“Here, I’ll share my mandarin with you, at the most.” Breaking the mandarin into two halves, she then handed one of it to him.

Despite his disgruntlement, Leon accepted the mandarin without second thoughts. Heather’s attitude today seemed odd to him, and even the way she spoke was weird.

Then, he looked at her warily until she popped a piece of the mandarin into her mouth. Only then did he stuff the entire half of the mandarin into his own mouth.

He’s such a slob when he’s eating, Heather thought with a frown. “Are you eating the mandarin to savor its sweet juices or just to fill your stomach?” she asked, changing the topic to a menial issue.

“The mandarin is so tiny that I can eat one in one mouthful, and I feel so anxious when I watch you eat it piece by piece. It’s just a waste of time,” he said, expressing his point of view. It seemed that he was easily distracted by Heather. Just a second ago, he was still complaining about her making him as her free labor, and now, he had become a debater.

“Only by eating piece by piece can you taste the essence of the mandarin. It’s a form of enjoyment. It’s unrefined of you to gobble it in one mouthful. You won’t be able to savor the mandarin from all aspects,” Heather argued as she grabbed another mandarin and shook it in front of him.

“I don’t want to argue over this with you,” he uttered, completely uninterested to discuss how to eat mandarins.

“How’s it going with your research?” she asked while she continued to peel another mandarin, thinking that it was a rather pleasing thing to do.

Helpless, Leon pouted his lips and answered, “I’m a hacker, not a seer. I can’t make up a story for you if it’s not existent on the internet.”

Despite her disappointment, she already thought of such an outcome before this. Computers weren’t such a common thing back then, so many things wouldn’t be uploaded on the internet. Looks like it would be impossible to make a breakthrough from the internet, she thought.

“Never mind. Let’s stop here for today.” Hopping off the couch, she knew that Leon had tried his best and had already given her all the information he could find. Really, there was no way he could find out anything anymore.

After closing the laptop in his hands, he hesitated before deciding to tell her something. “Perhaps the only place where you can get more information is from the military and police departments.” He was a law-abiding citizen, after all, and had yet to hack into the military and police departments because he still had a certain taboo against the government.

With a wave of her hand, Heather brushed off the idea, saying, “It’s alright. There’s no need to do anything illegal.” Then, she flashed him a sweet smile. Today, she was being a little sweet, which was so unlike her. “Here’s a mandarin for you,” she offered, handing him an entire mandarin she had just peeled. When she dropped it into his palm, she instructed, “Eat it piece by piece.”

Leon peered at the mandarin on his palm, shrugged his shoulders, and popped the entire thing into his mouth, which made Heather turn around and cast him an annoyed look as he gobbled it hastily. This guy’s stubbornness is comparable to mine, she thought.

“I’m bored, Heather. Should we go out together?” Recently, Leon had been staying home, and he felt that his head was about to explode from looking at the piles of documents every day.

“Where would you like to go?” Coincidentally, Heather was in the mood to go out as well, and she felt at ease hanging out with Leon now because there was nothing she had to be worried about.

“Somewhere Paige will be,” he answered with a sly grin. His mind was filled with Paige recently, but he couldn’t find a good excuse to look for her.

However, since Heather was with him today, it seemed appropriate if he went looking for Paige with her. While he rejoiced by himself, Heather could see from the wily look in his eyes that he had completely let go of her for real this time.

This was a good thing, but unfortunately, he had fallen for Paige, who was an incredibly tough person to woo. It wouldn’t be a breeze to woo her without going through some difficulties.

“Have you forgotten everything I told you the last time?” she asked sternly, distressed that he didn’t seem to remember any of her words at all.

With the past that Paige had been through, the only way to get to her would be integrating into her life bit by bit instead of wooing her openly and directly. Patience was needed in order to get to her heart, and Heather was concerned about the difficult path he would have to go through as she watched how impatient he was.

“Yes, yes. I remember it,” he answered helplessly. He couldn’t sympathize with Paige, so he didn’t understand her wary attitude toward relationships.

“The company will be operating soon, and you’ll be colleagues with her from then on, as well as her superior. So there will be tons of opportunities for you to meet her,” she assured. Seeing how serious he seemed, she thought that it might do good for his relationship with Paige.

“Alright, alright. I got it.” He nodded hurriedly. Guess I won’t be seeing Paige today, he thought with a sullen expression. Just a minute ago, he was still in high spirits, but he lost all of that energy now.

“Shall we go shopping instead?” Heather suggested. It’s been a while since I last went shopping anyway. And maybe it’ll help lift his mood.

“Sure,” Leon agreed, thinking that it sounded like a good idea because he could watch pretty girls while shopping.

For that, he dressed himself up meticulously. Already beautiful to begin with, he kept attracting the eyes of girls passing by after he dressed up so smartly. His charm was unmatched; not only were the young girls attracted to him, but even some middle-aged women couldn’t resist stealing a peek at him. Of course, amongst them, there were quite a few men who took a sly look at him, making Heather seem a little dull standing next to him.

Heather had a soft spot for furniture stores, especially those high-end, custom stores. While she insisted on dragging Leon into a store with her, he didn’t want to go to a gathering spot for middle-aged people, and she had to use brute force to drag him in.

“There are no pretty girls here, Heather,” he said in a huff, thinking that Heather was obviously setting him up.

“The salesgirl is pretty,” she replied, pointing to a salesgirl.

Unsure whether he should laugh or cry, Leo didn't think that the salesgirl was that attractive, and just as he expected, the people walking around the store were all much older. My plan to watch some pretty girls has gone up in flames, he thought, turning to Heather to admire her beauty as that was his only choice left.

Happily, Heather tugged him into a bedding store. Thinking that they were a couple, the salesgirl kept showing them bedding items for couples.

When Heather didn't want to listen to the salesgirl speak anymore, Leon was very interested instead, probably because she was the slightly prettier girl he had seen today.

I'll let him continue to chitchat happily with her, then, she decided because she wanted to shop for bedding items by herself quietly. She had a weird habit—after a certain period of time, she couldn't wait to change all the things in her bedroom to new ones, and now was that time again.

Engrossed in her own shopping, she didn't even realize that someone was calling her name. If it wasn't Leon who came to her specially to tell her, she would probably still be warped up in her own little world.

“Don't bother me when I'm shopping,” she said in annoyance. As she loved to spend time on picking out the items by herself quietly, she hated it the most when someone disturbed her.

“Someone's calling you,” Leon said, pointing in a direction not far off.

Looking into the direction he was pointing at, Heather saw that the person he meant was Myra. Subconsciously, she blinked a couple of times, thinking that it was such a coincidence to run into her in a bedding store by chance!

Despite that, she actually didn't want to meet her during these times. Whenever she thought of the things Myra told her before, a throbbing pain would start in her head. She just hoped that Myra would get through the next few months safely and deliver the baby smoothly without any other complications.

“Heather!” Myra called out to her while walking over, pleasantly surprised to see her shopping in a bedding store with a handsome man.

Is he her new romance? she wondered as it had been a while since Heather last contacted her, and she happened to bump into this scene today. They look rather compatible together. It was the first time Myra saw someone more good-looking than Tony.

“Myra,” Heather greeted, going over to meet her.

A brilliant smile appeared on Leon’s face. Finally, he saw the person he had only heard about, and his eyes were filled with interest as he gave Myra a once-over.

Meanwhile, Heather nudged him with her elbow as a reminder for him to watch his actions, and Myra caught sight of that small movement. They seem rather close. Feeling happy for Heather, she couldn’t wait to know more about this handsome man in front of her eyes.