

Chapter 5

For the next few days, Jayde Rosario stayed in her room. She didn't leave from morning until night. Brendan Maynard took Chloe Ellis out early every day and came back late, and sometimes they didn't come home at all. Their lives no longer seemed to intersect.

Sunday arrived. Ten days before she was set to leave. It was also the day of her high school reunion.

At a bar by the sea, as soon as Jayde walked into the private room, a few of her close friends handed her a drink.

"You're eighteen now. Let's say goodbye to being kids and legally have our first drink."

Jayde paused for a moment. People said alcohol could drown your sorrows, and she wanted to relax. This drink was a farewell to her friends, a final toast.

After one drink, she felt a little dizzy. She went out to the corridor to get some fresh air. As she passed an open private room, she unexpectedly saw Brendan. He was surrounded by a group of men and women, laughing and talking.

Her heart skipped a beat. She forced herself to look away, but the conversation from inside the room made her stop.

"Brendan, you're about to get engaged to Chloe. What about your sister, Jayde Rosario? She used to follow you everywhere."

"She's an adult now. She's not my responsibility anymore."

The clear, familiar voice reached her ears, and it sobered her up a little. She stood at the doorway, her eyes lowered, not moving for a long moment.

After what felt like a long time, she murmured to herself and continued walking down the corridor.

"Yes, she's an adult. She's sensible. From now on, my world won't have you in it, either."

Jayde went to the window at the end of the corridor to get some air. Then she went to the restroom and splashed cold water on her face. When she came out, she ran right into Brendan. He seemed to have had a few drinks himself.

Their eyes met.

Jayde was about to speak, but Chloe Ellis's voice came from behind him. "Brendan."

She called out his name sweetly, then threw herself into his arms. "I drank too much. I can barely walk."

Brendan kissed her on the forehead, his voice doting. "Then I'll carry you."

With that, he scooped Chloe up into his arms in a princess carry and walked away, as if Jayde wasn't even there.

Their intimate display left Jayde frozen in place for a long time.

"Jayde, why are you crying?" Her friend, Brielle Steele, asked, pulling her back to reality.

Jayde froze, then forced a faint smile. "It's just an eyelash in my eye. It's nothing."

Brielle nodded, then pointed in the direction Brendan had gone. "Is that your brother? He actually has a girlfriend now. We all thought he'd never date. We thought he'd always stay with you, because he used to dote on you so much."

Hearing this, Jayde felt a slight bitterness in her heart. "He and I both have our own lives. We won't be tied together forever."

Brielle's face showed a hint of regret. "Actually, we all used to think he was your boyfriend. You two looked so good together. It's just a shame he's your brother..."

Jayde's heart felt heavy and damp. She used to think it was a shame, too. But now she felt that the bonds between people were just fate. She and Brendan used to be siblings. From now on, they would have no relationship at all.

The reunion ended at one in the morning. Jayde said goodbye to her friends and walked out of the bar. She saw Brendan and Chloe standing by the revolving door, looking like they were waiting for her.

"You're an adult now, and you're still out past midnight. You're getting

more and more out of control. What if something happens?"

The reprimand froze her in place.

Chloie glanced at Brendan reproachfully. "Jayde has you to protect her now, and later she'll have her boyfriend to protect her. What could possibly happen?"

"Let's go home together," Chloie said, taking Brendan's hand and walking out. She motioned for Jayde to follow.

Jayde followed behind them, her eyes on the ground. Only when they stepped outside did she realize it was drizzling again.

Brendan opened his umbrella and walked forward with Chloie, not looking back. The large umbrella was tilted to the right, shielding Chloie completely from the rain, while half of his own shirt was dark with water.

Jayde watched them in a daze. She suddenly remembered how Brendan used to hold his umbrella for her. He always tilted it towards her.

"Jayde is my delicate rose," he used to say. "Roses can't get wet. I'll always protect you."

A gust of wind blew, and the slanted raindrops fell onto Jayde's white dress, bringing a chill with them.

Jayde came back to her senses and slowly walked out into the rain alone.

Roses can't get wet, but I want to be my own sunflower. Always facing the sun, always bright.

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