

Penny did not struggle in his arms. It was as if she had lost her will to fight.

The only sign of defiance was the tears that spilled over the corners of her eyes.

She had lived her life in the past five years like a zombie, benumbing herself to the relentless insults and humiliation targeted at her. She had thought of ending her life several times to escape from the pain and misery, but each time, her daughter's face would surface in her mind. With her daughter as her sole anchor, Penny gritted her teeth and forged onward.

It was all because of this devil who had torn her life apart!

Nathan was the one who had brought the relentless

misery and despair upon her and her daughter.

She swore that she would strive to work hard and stay single for the rest of her life. Her only purpose was to make up for her daughter's sufferings by giving her a blissful and promising future.

Little did she know that the man who had started the tragedy five years ago and brought upon the most torturous times of her life was now back to haunt her. It was like rubbing salt in her wound. Upon his reappearance, all the poignant memories which had been long buried came back to life, flashing across her mind like indelible ghosts.

How she yearned for a break. She prayed to God for a little salvation, earnestly begging the heavens to stop piling up on her hardships.

The sight of Penny's piteous state was unbearable to

Nathan. He gently put her down and let her stand on her feet.

“Can you give me a chance to make up to you and our daughter, please?” A stony-hearted creature like him was a complete stranger to tenderness, but he begged for the first time in the gentlest manner he could muster.

“For the sake of our daughter, and for you as well, please give me a chance,” he pleaded.

Penny quivered uncontrollably when he uttered 'our daughter'.

It gifted her with a glint of hope as she slowly lifted her eyes.

“Trust me, I know what kind of hell you both have gone through over the years,” Nathan continued to

plead in his soft voice, “I know that you loathe me too, but please give me a chance to make amends.”

“Children from single-parent families are more prone to suffer from personality disorders, which may affect their overall well-being.”

“Please give me a chance, Penny.”

Penny's eyes reflected a whirlwind of emotions as she ruminated on his words. Queenie was growing up fast and getting more sensible by the day.

A family without a father could never be complete, let alone offer a sense of normalcy and oneness to the child.

It broke her heart whenever she saw the pitiful look on Queenie's face when she asked for her papa.

Yet, she could only turn away and wipe her tears as she had no answer for her dear daughter.

Yes, Queenie needs a father!

The determination in Nathan's eyes only fueled her conviction.

It took her a long time to decide, but she finally agreed, "Alright, I'll give you a chance to reunite with your daughter."

"I'm giving you the chance because she needs a papa in her life. But let me give you a stern warning - do nothing that might upset her."

"And just to be clear, the fact that Queenie calls you papa does not mean you are my husband, do you get it?"

“Yes!” Nathan nodded his affirmation.

Nathan knew well that Penny was giving him the opportunity to reunite with Queenie because she wanted the young girl to have a bright future.

It would take a lifetime for her to forgive him for the pain he had inflicted on her, let alone take him as her husband.

Those years of suffering in silence had spun an invisible web within her, creating a deadly mess of entangled knots. He knew that it would take time to untwine and unravel those knots of pain and grievances.

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Meanwhile, inside the elementary classroom of

Golden Apple Kindergarten, the teacher was nowhere to be seen!

A pudgy boy decked in designer wear was gloating with delight, pulling on a rope.

The other end of the rope was tied to the neck of a little girl who was being towed along like a puppy.

The fat boy tugged on the makeshift leash impatiently and shouted at her, “Don't you know you're my dog, Queenie? Dogs are supposed to bark, do it now!”

The victim crawled on her limbs like a puppy, her grubby face stained with chalk dust. She was a little girl around the age of four.

Underneath the grime and dust was a well-defined face with the winsome features of a pretty, innocent young girl.

The fat boy kept tugging at the rope around her neck, which left her gasping for air.

Unsatisfied with her inaction, the fat boy pestered her again, “Queenie, I'm warning you, bark, or I'll get everyone to wallop you. You're a stupid b\*\*\*\*\* who doesn't even have a father...”

Her eyes red-rimmed, Queenie sobbed pitifully, “No, don't call me a b\*\*\*\*\*, I'm not...”

“Listen, I am the king of this place and when I say you're a b\*\*\*\*\*, you'd better act like one. Now, do as I say and bark like a dog!” The fat boy was relentlessly cruel and demanding.

The rest of the kids laughed at what they saw, as if they were watching a comical cartoon.

Nathan and Penny had just reached the entrance of the classroom.

The sight of her daughter being leashed like a puppy threw Penny into a state of shock. She rushed forward and lifted Queenie into her arms.

She untied the rope from Queenie's neck and tossed it away as if it were a repulsive snake. “What happened to you, Queenie?” She asked worriedly, her eyes burning with anger.

Queenie could not withhold her tears any longer upon seeing her mother. Like a dam that had exploded, she sobbed until her little body trembled, “Mama, Max Zahn has said that I'm a b\*\*\*\*\* and that he wants me to bark like a dog, otherwise, he would get everybody in the class to beat me up...”

What?

Gripped with rage, fury coursed through Penny's veins, making her quiver.

She was well aware of this fat bully named Max Zahn. He always picked on Queenie as his target.



It stunned her when she saw the inhumane treatment that Queenie was receiving from him.

Penny held Queenie dearly as she consoled her, “You

have a papa, Queenie. They're wrong to call you a b\*\*\*\*\*."

Queenie sobbed and replied through hiccups, "No, Queenie has no papa..."

"No, Queenie, you have a papa. I'm your papa!" exclaimed Nathan, whose heart was ripped apart when he heard Queenie's heart-wrenching cries.

Queenie stopped sobbing as she turned quizzically to her mother. "Mama, is he really my papa?"

"Yes, he's your papa, Queenie. He just retired from the army." Penny nodded fervently.

"Papa..."

Queenie was overwhelmed with joy as she raced towards Nathan, who picked her up into his arms as

his heart filled with incandescent love.

With her little arms wrapped around his neck, Queenie was consumed with such intense happiness that she could not stop calling him, “Papa, papa.”

Nathan was equally swamped with tenderness and love as he responded to her whimpers with passion and affection.

Penny observed the interaction between the pair, full of giggles and chuckles, from the sideline. She shuddered with joy as it all seemed so warm and cozy, yet it was unbelievably real.

This was the first time Queenie felt the warmth and love of a father.

Still huddled close to her father, Queenie repeatedly called him “papa” till her voice became hoarse.

His appearance filled her small world with such jubilation, giving her a sense of pride that she had never experienced before in her young life.

She turned around and smirked at the fat boy, “Look here, I'm not a b\*\*\*\*\*, I have a papa too.”

The fat boy rebutted sarcastically, “He isn't your papa. My mummy says that you're a b\*\*\*\*\* because your mother is a loose woman who sleeps around with men. She got herself pregnant, and that's how you came along. That's why you have no papa.”

A shadow slipped across Nathan's face when he heard those words.

Penny could not hold back any longer. She cautioned the fat boy in a stern tone, “Hey, little fellow, watch your words. If you keep being mean and disrespectful,

I'm going to tell your teacher about it and make sure that you receive a good lecture from her.”

Wah! The fat boy squalled with fear when he heard what Penny had said.

“What happened to you, my sweetie? Did someone bully you?”

Just then, a high-pitched, penetrating voice pierced the air like the shrills of a witch.

A plump woman scurried into the classroom; her fury so apparent that one could imagine steam spurting out of her ears. She looked to be middle-aged and was clad head-to-toe in designer clothing. Lavish jewellery and diamonds weighed down her stubby fingers, making her appear ostentatious.

The tacky woman was the mother of the fat boy. She

was here to pick him up after school.

The moment he saw his mother, the fat boy pointed at Penny and cried, "It's her, mummy. She's bullied me and hit me!"

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