

Blind Date 251

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A Welcome Gift

Wyatt's remark showed two things. One was that Dexter treated his younger brother well.

And that Wyatt's 'wifey' did not have a positive connotation to it.

Dexter held Josie's hand tightly. The smile on his lips did not reach his eyes. "Now that I've seen you, I'll have to make spot checks on your results."

Wyatt scrunched his face. "You're annoying."

The room was filled with laughter.

Wyatt laughed and suddenly changed the topic. "Josie, I heard you graduated from Wavery University?"

"That's true."

"So, you're my senior." His canine teeth gleamed through his smile. I'm a fourth year there. We can often

meet from now on."

At a loss for words, Josie smiled.

After all, smiling as a response was a safe bet most of the time.

Yanis interrupted the conversation and instructed the display cases to be opened. A stunning array of bracelets were placed within..

They were made of emerald.

Wyatt remarked, "Dad ordered this collection from Colombia and had them shipped it here within one day."

"Huh?"

Yanis explained. "It's Josie's first time here. I can't let you leave empty-handed. Choose whichever you like. There's no need to be shy."

Josie was unfamiliar with the gemstone but could see they were costly. "I didn't bring any gifts with me. How can I accept these?"

Her gaze drifted toward Dexter. He rose from his seat and held her hand. He scanned through the display case with a sharp look. "This is a small token of a gift from Uncle Yanis. Just accept it."

He picked out a beautiful bracelet and put it on her wrist.

For one moment, a look of disdain gleamed from his eyes.

With his action, all in the room saw the brightening glare from the jade bracelet on her wrist.

Some were astonished.

It finally sank in that the eldest son in the family had married.

After that, Josie met numerous other elders in the family. They had distinguishing features, but none left at deep impression as Yanis did.

The bracelet felt heavy.

The others smiled at her, but all she felt was the dead weight. Dexter's words kept reappearing in her mind. Tread lightly. Do not trust anyone.

Suddenly, she realized that with Dexter's guidance, she easily managed to converse with the family members.

As Yanis and Dexter chatted about the matters within the family, he occasionally brought up topics about business unreservedly. Dexter was amiable through it all, unlike his actual emotions.

When all the family members had arrived, after a flurry of small talk, they lined up and headed toward the family estate energetically.

Dexter was at the front with a nervous Josie next to him.

Years ago, the family had shares in Russell Group until Dexter came on the scene and took it all back. Many of them were unwaged. Now that the company was doing well, they were eyeing and hoping to get a

share.

Even with all of the flattery in the world, none of them could compete with Wyatt, who threw out a request carelessly. "Dexter, I need to look for a place for my internship. Can you get me into Russell Group?"

Dexter did not refuse and teased him. "You haven't shown me your results for this semester."

Wyatt smiled. "I'll bring it to you right away."

"Sure," Dexter replied.

The family estate was large with cumbersome rituals. Josie imitated them blindly and managed to keep up. As she bowed with everyone else, she finally felt that she was a part of the family. One that would not be easily removed from the family.

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You Must Leave

The ceremony had come to an end, and Josie's phone had been buzzing incessantly in her pocket. However, given the solemn ambiance, she opted to ignore the pesky buzzing.

Noticing her uneasiness when nobody was looking. Dexter seized the opportunity and signaled for the servant to accompany Josie out. Then, he whispered, "Can you handle it on your own?"

Nodding her head, Josie muttered. Isn't he the one who insisted on taking charge no matter how impossible the situation may be?

Upon leaving the door, Josie wasted no time checking her phone.

To her surprise, all the messages were from Arnold. She dialed his number and asked, "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

The voice on the other end sounded stern. "Did you follow Dexter and return to the Russell family estate?"

Josie was caught off guard by the question, "How did you know? Did you bug me or something?"

However, Arnold wasn't in a playful mood and said authoritatively. "You must leave there today. I'm not joking.

Arnold's sudden instruction left Josie puzzled, "Why? What's wrong?"

In fact, Dexter had already assured her earlier that once the ceremony was over, they would leave and go home to have dinner with Henry.

Why did Arnold suddenly insist she leaves the Russell family estate?

Arnold didn't explain, "Just do as I say, Josie. Remember, before becoming Dexter's wife, you were yourself first."

Josie couldn't comprehend Arnold's arbitrary behavior. Before she could delve deeper, he hung up the phone.

The servant led Josie to a secluded yet beautifully decorated courtyard.

Politely dismissing the servant, Josie took a seat on a stone bench in front of the courtyard, taking a moment to collect herself.

Today marked Josie's first official meet-and-greet with the Russell family. Despite the friendly and kind treatment she received, she couldn't shake off the feeling of being an outsider deep down.

Perhaps growing up in a regular family made her feel unworthy of being Dexter's partner and a member of the esteemed Russell family.

Josie tried her best to emulate the poise of Dexter and Wyatt, but somehow, she still came across as reserved. To put it bluntly, she was inexperienced and unpolished.

A passage from Eileen Chang's 'Love in a Fallen City' sprang to her mind, 'A woman who grew up in the slums, stumbling upon a few more books, naively believed she could stand on equal footing with others. But life is always a relay race, and we foolishly treated it as a 100-meter sprint. Both you and I are mere mortals, and very few can break free from the shackles of their social class, especially women. Love pales in significance when faced with marriage.'

Josie hadn't quite grasped its significance before this. But now, she fully understood as she saw herself living out the story in the book.

Josie let out a sigh, feeling lost.

Shortly after, Dexter returned to see Josie boiling water in the kitchen.

Dexter placed a stack of papers on the table. Josie figured it must be the report card Wyatt had given Dexter.

Wyatt had made a joke, but it appeared that Dexter had taken it seriously. His determination to join the Russell Group was unmistakable.

“Don’t you think you might be getting yourself into more than you bargained for?” Josie asked, raising an eyebrow.

As she held a glass, preparing to fill it up with hot water, the man gently took it from her, pouring and blowing on it to cool it down before bringing it near her lips.

“Well, if that’s the case, I’m pretty confident I can handle it too,” Dexter finally revealed a tender expression, showing a softer side that went beyond his usual no-nonsense demeanor.

Josie was taken aback by his unexpected tenderness. She had a flurry of questions she wanted to ask but didn’t know where to begin.

Dexter brought the cup to her lips as the hot water had cooled a bit, feeding her slowly as if feeding a child.

He said, “Some people would delude themselves into thinking they have complete control when they get a taste of power.”

“It’s not until they stumble that they truly learn their lesson.”

Dexter wiped the water from the corner of her lips and removed a bangle from her wrist, leaving only the one Henry had given her.

In an indifferent tone, he said, “This bangle is worth a million.”

Josie was shocked by his revelation.

He casually tossed the million-dollar bangle onto the table, saying, “Well, none of us wear it anyway.” “What would you like to eat?” It was lunchtime, and Dexter opened the pantry while asking.

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Didn’t You Say You’re Hungry?

Josie found herself enveloped in his arms, her head resting against his impeccably chiseled jawline. His warm breath encircled her, offering comfort in this foreign place.

Dexter’s embrace radiated a sense of authority, as if silently assuring her he would be her protector. She need not worry about anything.

The pantry was stocked with an array of food. Josie nibbled on her lip as she contemplated her options.

“How about Bolognese meatballs?” As she was tiptoeing to fetch something from the shelves, she proposed while setting a can of Bolognese sauce on the pristine white marble countertop.

Dexter grabbed a few more ingredients, ran them under the water, and mischievously tapped her bosom. “Alright, you can go now. I’ll be finished soon.”

Uh, this guy...

Josie glared at him, her cheeks flushed with annoyance and abashment.

He winked and teased. “Wait for me.”

Amused by his cheeky response, Josie muttered, “Rascal!”

She left the kitchen and noticed the papers

“Mhm.”

the table. She asked, “Mind if I take a peek?”

It was just an ordinary resume, with Wyatt’s ID photo attached. The Russell family certainly had good genes; they managed to look good even in the typically awkward ID photos. Josie placed it back on the table as there wasn’t much informative content in the resume.

Then she turned around and saw Dexter cuttin at ease as if he belonged there.

tomatoes. The tall man stood in the kitchen, completely

Actually, Dexter had always been skilled in cooking. Although it was a rare occurrence, he had cooked for her multiple times in the past.

But now, back at Russell family estate... If his family or servants discovered that the young master was cooking for her, would they hold it against her?

Josie’s eyes flickered with conflicted emotions, and she approached him, skillfully cracking an egg into a bowl.

Dexter glanced at her and playfully fed her a taste of the bolognese sauce, asking. “Want to lend a hand?”

Josie enjoyed the sweet and savory taste. She casually digressed, “What about Wyatt... Has he ever seen me before?”

Dexter arched an eyebrow and fed her another spoonful, replying, “Perhaps not. Our family is quite traditional. He had minimal interaction with the outside world before graduating college.”

It dawned on Josie that Wyatt had been sheltered in an ivory tower, utterly oblivious to the outside world.

She couldn’t fathom how the Russell family could be so strict and rigid with their sons. Unable to contain her impression, she blurted out, “Gosh. How backward and primitive the thinking!”

“Primitive?” Dexter smirked, lightly tapping her delicate nose. “You’re so innocent.”

Tracing his finger along her lips, he paused for a moment.

There was a stain of Bolognese sauce on her lip, its vibrant red color inviting him to taste it, and her lips... Josie was unaware of the intense and desperate flicker in the man's eyes. She was distracted by the pot of Bolognese sauce left on the countertop. Quietly, she reached out her hand, attempting to sneak a...

But, caught in the act! Josie's wrist was swiftly seized against her back while Dexter's lips descended upon

hers.

It wasn't a fiery and passionate kiss. But a teasing, fleeting, and tender peck that made Josie burst into laughter as she tried to evade his playful advances, "Hey! I'm hungry!"

Unbeknownst to Josie, her innocent remark about hunger triggered a chain reaction she wasn't unprepared for.

In her mind, it was an explicit statement on her empty stomach, not about sexual intimacy. But in an instant, Josie found herself caught in a passionate exchange of kisses as she couldn't resist the temptation. With a dominating, heart-stopping deep kiss, Dexter explored every nook and cranny of her mouth, their tongues entwined in a tight embrace.

Josie was swept away by the intensity of his breath, enveloping her with a powerful presence.

As Dexter gently sucked the remnants of pasta sauce from around her lips, he couldn't help but agree that it had a delightful blend of sweetness and savory flavors.

A chuckle escaped him, causing the vibrations in his chest to reverberate through Josie's body, leaving her trembling in his arms.

A sense of impending chaos overwhelmed Josie as she realized things were spiraling beyond her control. It was evident that Dexter had no intentions of holding back. Without hesitation, he hoisted her up by the waist and gently settled her onto the sofa outside.

The midday sun blazed above; it was lunchtime.

Dexter's audacious behavior caught Josie off guard. She never anticipated such audacity in this setting...

Although she wanted to decline, there was an intense longing in his eyes. Dexter teased, "Didn't you say you were hungry?"

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Her Tearful Eyes

Josie couldn't believe his audacity...

She never expected Dexter to be so audacious and shameless. With no choice, she reluctantly allowed him to have his way. And that was her second blunder. By the time they finally untangled, dusk was upon

them.

Exhausted, Josie let him assist in cleaning up and getting dressed. Finally, she nestled into his arms, feeling drowsy and no longer concerned about her hunger, "I want some water."

Then, a glass of cool water was brought to her lips in no time, quenching her dry throat and providing much-needed relief.

She heard the spirited man ask in a low voice, "Are you still hungry?"

In her groggy state, Josie weakly declined, "No, let me rest for a while, okay?"

"Alright, we'll head home after you've had some rest." Dexter chuckled, satisfied with her response. In a better mood, he carried her back to bed. Both of them were weary from the day's events, so they simply tidied up and drifted off to sleep together.

The room temperature was comfortable, but Josie, feeling a bit warm, kicked off the blanket. Dexter frowned. After a while, she began to feel cold and instinctively snuggled closer to the source of warmth, wrapping her arms around him.

Eventually, Josie drifted into a deep slumber.

As Dexter observed her series of actions, his furrowed brows finally relaxed. He tenderly studied her rosy cheeks and long lashes in the soft glow of the bedside lamp. The more he looked, the stronger the fluttering in his heart became. He glanced at the rings adorning their fingers and felt a subtle buzz in his chest.

He felt a sense of belonging and security.

That night, Dexter had a dream that was a reality he had lived before. He and Josie had crossed paths in the past. In the year he had just taken over Russell Group, he had a group of loyal employees who worked tirelessly alongside him.

After years of hard work, Calvin and some of the employees insisted on throwing a celebration for him. However, they all got drunk, and Dexter had to arrange transport for them and make sure they got home. safely.

After sending them back to their place, he leaned against the car and lit a cigarette, gazing at the stars. It was the first time in his life that he felt a sense of disorientation.

He had always considered himself rational with clear goals, but now he felt lost... Dexter's grandfather had always steered him towards his future path but never once asked if there was anything he truly wanted for himself.

The sight of the ever-changing city filled him with a growing weariness. It was a night unlike any other when he found himself grappling with uncertainty and questioning the very path he had chosen to tread.

Not far away, a girl stood at a telephone booth, making a call. She was in tears, trying to speak loudly to overpower her sobs. Every word she uttered resonated in his ears.

Through her words, Dexter learned of her father's illness and the family's financial struggles. Her predicament mirrored the mundane challenges of everyday life, similar to the struggles that weighed on every individual, seemingly insurmountable at times.

Her tear-stained face and the fallen receiver on the ground revealed the depth of her sorrow. She made a valiant effort to compose herself, attempting to pick up the receiver but struggling to rise from her crouched position.

In that poignant moment, Dexter was overcome with an intense desire to reach out and offer solace, even if it was just a few comforting words. The sight of her anguish stirred a profound concern within him as if he feared she might suffocate and fade away in the very next breath.

Witnessing her anguish made him realize the insignificance of his own momentary confusion.

Drawing closer to her, he suddenly halted in his tracks. It struck him that she was actually an employee at the Russell Group, making this encounter outside their usual workplace quite unexpected.

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Fast forward to the present. Ever since their marriage, Dexter had developed a habit of studying her intently. Josie's eyes possessed remarkable clarity and purity. In that very instant, a realization washed over him he never wanted to witness her tears again.

eyes

Josie had barely drifted off when she opened her eyes to find Dexter lost in thought, his her. Startled, she inquired, "When did you wake up?"

gaze

fixed upon

"Did you get enough rest?" Dexter straightened her clothes. "Let's head back now. Grandpa called and said dinner's ready."

"Okay."

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My Mother Died Early

Josie unconsciously curled her toes, feeling exposed under the woman's penetrating gaze.

"We should go now. Grandpa's waiting for us at home," Dexter said with indifference. He took hold of Josie's hand and guided her towards the car.

Just as he was about to step inside, Xanthe said, "Dexter, I just got back. Will you join me in paying respects to your father?"

A hush fell over the crowd.

Dexter, one foot already in the car, paused and straightened his posture. He responded with a detached tone, "Who are you?"

Xanthe's pupils dilated, the creases around her eyes deepening. "I'm your mother."

"Mother? My mother passed away long ago, he retorted.

His remark left some people gasping in shock.

Josie held her breath, witnessing their intense confrontation.

Suddenly, Xanthe raised her hand and slapped Dexter across the face.

A sharp sound filled the air as his head turned from the impact. Startled, Josie quickly rushed out of the car and shielded him, admonishing Xanthe, "What have you done?"

Xanthe's furious gaze shifted to her. "Who do you think you are? It's not your place to interfere while I'm teaching my son a lesson."

Josie's legs trembled in front of the authoritative Xanthe. Summoning her courage, she wanted to protect Dexter. "Didn't you hear him say that his mother had passed away long ago?!"

Xanthe let out a furious chuckle. Her frail figure made her seem delicate, as if a gust of wind could knock her down. She glanced at the wedding rings on their fingers. "Ah, so you're the girl he had chosen to marry."

Josie wanted to say something, but the words failed to escape her lips.

"Just as expected, a boring peasant."

Xanthe's intense gaze remained fixed on Dexter as she challenged, "Are you really just going to stand there and let this woman fight your battles?"

Licking the blood at the corner of his lips, he exuded intense aggression. Once again, he pulled Josie protectively behind him. "Go ahead and get in the car."

Josie hesitated, anxious about what might unfold.

Dexter called for his bodyguards. Josie had no choice but to enter the car reluctantly. The door closed, and the driver locked it. She was confined inside, only able to catch glimpses of Dexter reentering the Russell family estate, closely followed by Xanthe.

They exchanged words, but their voices were drowned out.

Josie could feel her heart pounding in her chest.

Why did Xanthe choose this moment to come back? What does she want? Why did Dexter seem trapped, refuse to face her, yet unable to confront her?

Is it because of me? Josie couldn't help wondering.

After waiting for about half an hour, with no sign of Dexter and the others coming out from the family estate, just as Josie was about to persuade the driver to let her out, a servant approached the car and relayed a message to the driver.

“Mrs. Russell, Mr. Russell instructed me to take you back to Mason Garden first,” the driver informed as he started the car engine.

“No... why? What about him?” Josie’s words came out jumbled, but she couldn’t contain her confusion.

The driver had no answer to her questions.

On New Year’s Eve, the city streets were filled with cars adorned with lights and the joy of festivities in every household, including Mason Garden. But without Henry by her side, the special New Year’s atmosphere seemed incomplete, and its charm faded somehow.

Henry seemed to sense her distress and gestured for Josie to sit. “Come, let’s eat first. Marilyn and Julie have been busy preparing your favorite dishes all day.”

Josie forced a smile, not wanting to show her dejection in front of Henry, but her mind was elsewhere. Looking at Henry, she could also see the worry etched on his face.

Facing the empty dining table, she couldn’t resist asking. “Grandpa, what happened?”

Henry let out a sigh, filled with regret. “I had hoped we could have a proper family dinner, but it seems that won’t be happening...”

Witnessing his disappointment, Josie felt a sense of unease and called for the servants. “Please put away the dishes for now. We’ll reheat them when Mr. Russell returns, and we can all eat together later.”

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His Mother’s Past

Knowing Dexter, Josie was confident he would come rushing back no matter what.

But Henry waved his hand, saying, “Jo, come and keep me company in the courtyard.”

Josie obliged with a pleasant smile.

The ground was littered with scraps of firecracker paper, remnants of the festive celebrations. The red debris of spent firecrackers seemed strangely forlorn at that moment.

Henry settled into his armchair, and Josie was concerned he might feel cold, so she placed a thick blanket on his lap. She poured herself some Earl Grey tea and set it before her. “Did you see Dex’s mother today?”

Xanthe’s face floated into Josie’s mind at Henry’s prompt. “Um... she doesn’t seem easy to get along with.”

He smiled and took a sip of his tea. “The last time I saw her was when Dex was seven years old.”

Josie was taken aback. “Hasn’t she come back all these years?”

Henry shook his head. “She can’t stand the sight of the son she brought into the world simply because she blames the Russell family for ruining her life. After Dex’s father died, the Russell family endured a tumultuous phase. Without her restoring stability, we might not have the Dex we know today. That’s why I’ve chosen to ignore all the decisions she’s made.”

Josie probed cautiously, “Why does she hate...?”

Grant Russell, Dexter’s father, was the youngest son of his father’s second wife. Despite that, Grant was groomed extensively from a young age and displayed immense potential. He battled his way through the obstacles presented by his half-siblings, leaving everyone else filled with envy and resentment.

In that particular year, Grant entered into a marriage alliance with Xanthe, the daughter of the prominent Quorn family. It wasn’t just some business arrangement; Grant bore romantic feelings for her. Unfortunately, Xanthe’s heart belonged to someone else. Consumed by obsession, Grant went to extreme lengths to drive Xanthe’s lover out of Wavery, plunging their marriage into despair and confinement.

“I always knew she wasn’t meant to be a part of the Russell family. So, I took Dex with me and let her go. Maybe they crossed paths a few times as Dex grew up, but I never saw her again.”

Josie nodded, her understanding becoming clearer. She had been grappling with conflicting emotions and countless questions, but all she managed to say was, “Grandpa, was Dexter not happy when he was a child?”

Henry looked at her with a smile tinged with relief and chuckled, “He wasn’t just unhappy; he was downright miserable. But thankfully, there was a girl who was there for him during those years, and she made it bearable.”

The girl... Josie remembered. “Is that... girl named Leanne?”

The girl who meant so much to Dexter.

“Yes, without her, we wouldn’t have the Dexter we know today.”

No wonder Dexter held such a profound attachment to her. There was a bond between them. That girl had saved him....

Lost in thought, Josie felt a gentle pat on her hand, marked by the passage of time, “And I believe that you’re the pinnacle of Dex’s life, both now and in the future.”

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Getting a Bit Too Involved

Josie was taken aback and touched by the magnitude of trust placed upon her. With a shake of her head, she replied, “Grandpa, I’m honored that you think so highly of me.”

Henry responded with a chuckle, refraining from boasting about his role in raising Dexter or prolonging the discussion.

With the information gleaned from Henry, Josie now had a deeper understanding of Xanthe’s background.

She searched the Quorn family in Wavery on her phone and was taken aback by what she found. Despite the decline of this century-old family, they still wielded significant influence in Wavery. It made

sense why the Russell family was wary of Xanthe's maternal family. Could this be the reason behind Dexter's recent compromise?

Josie sat curled up on the sofa, her gaze fixed on the clock ticking towards eleven o'clock. Dexter had yet to return, leaving her in a state of uncertainty.

After contemplating for some time, she dialed Arnold's number. After half a minute of ringing, he answered in a breathless and irritated tone. "What's up?"

Josie's brow furrowed as she questioned him, "What are you up to?"

It seemed like Arnold was in the company of a woman. Josie overheard him asking the woman to leave as he moved to a quieter corner. With amusement and irritation, he quipped, "I'm a lonely bachelor. What else am I supposed to do on New Year's Eve? Josie, why do you always ruin my good times?"

Being an adult, Josie instantly understood his meaning. Lowering her voice, Josie couldn't help but feel a tinge of guilt, "Well, then... I'll call you once you're done?"

"Just get outta my hair!"

Josie chuckled sheepishly. "I just wanted to know why you called me today."

There was a brief pause on the other end as if he had already figured something out, and he responded already run into her, haven't you?" nonchalantly. "Well, it doesn't matter now. You

Unable to refute his keen insight, Josie admired his perceptiveness. "Why don't you tell me then?"

"I'm always the one who gets the inside scoop whenever there's any action happening among the influential families or people."

"So, do you know why Xanthe came back?" Josie inquired.

Arnold didn't answer her question but warned, "Josie, it seems like you're getting a little too involved now."

Arnold's reminder jolted Josie awake, causing her to sputter, "She... she gave me an ultimatum today. I'm just curious and thinking of finding out more about her since we're bound to run into each other again.

after this."

"You're overthinking it. She couldn't care less about Dexter or who he ends up with," Arnold said, his voice laced with playful teasing. "you should marry me instead. My mother is kind and decent."

Getting a Bit Too Involved

"F*ck off!" Josie couldn't help but curse.

Arnold chuckled lightly, diverting the conversation. "So, have you guys had a family dinner yet?"

"Hmm. Not really," Josie replied.

Silence followed, creating a slightly strange atmosphere over the phone.

Before ending the call, Arnold said, "I've said it before, and I'll say it again, you're just an outsider. But if you run into any problem, you can always count on me for help."

Clutching the phone, Josie wrestled with Arnold's hidden meaning. Lost in thought, she was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a car outside. Derter is back!

Dexter lingered in the car, unhurried to go into the house. Meanwhile, Josie was thrilled to see him return. She dashed towards his car, gasping for breath, extending her hand, and...

'Knock! Knock! Knock!'

Then, the car window glided down slowly. Dexter looked fatigued, and there was a hint of numbness in his gaze as he saw her.

Yet, Josie's gentle and breathy voice instinctively eased his tension. "Why did you come out? It's freezing out here."

Like a flickering flame in the wintry night, her voice warmed his frigid soul. "Hey, is everything alright?"

Dexter smirked and opened the car door. "What could possibly go wrong? Want to hop in?"

Since he had no intention of getting out of the car, he invited Josie to join him inside. The heater was cranked up, creating a warm and cozy atmosphere within the vehicle.

The driver promptly stepped out, granting them their privacy.

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Feeling Sorry for Him

Josie settled beside Dexter, and oddly enough, a wave of nostalgia washed over her after being away from him for such a short time. She couldn't help but feel bashful under his eager and intense gaze.

"Did... did your mom give you a hard time?" Josie blushed.

Dexter pursed his lips. "Even if she did, it wouldn't bother me. Don't worry." He reached out to gently smooth her hair. "She wants to meet you one of these days."

Josie's eyes widened in surprise.

He chuckled, pulling her closer and kissing her chin tenderly. Her rosy cheeks flushed even more profoundly.

Dexter's smile broadened as he playfully squeezed her cheeks. "Feeling sorry for me, huh?"

Knowing he was teasing, Josie found his smile both exhilarating and heartwarming. She instinctively lowered her voice. "Why haven't you gone inside the house?"

Dexter nuzzled his face against her neck and answered honestly, "Just tired and not in the mood to move."

Even at this late hour, there were still lively sounds outside. Josie gazed at his face and fell into a momentary silence. Outsiders would never guess that the usually composed and cool Dexter also had these melancholy moments, like a child who had just lost a beloved candy.

As her gaze settled on him, her mind began to wander, imagining the passage of another year. The invincible man before her would eventually age, his hair turning gray, his steps faltering. How would he be in his old age? Would he end up a lonely bachelor?

Absorbed in her thoughts, Josie refrained from picturing herself in Dexter's future as an old man, aware that she might not be a part of his life at that point.

So... what would he become?

"What are you looking at?" Dexter felt her gaze and lightly brushed her earlobe with his fingertip.

Josie responded, "You've been working hard."

Josie's genuine concern left Dexter momentarily speechless.

He reached out, gently grasping her chin, and leaned in for a deep, passionate kiss.

Josie's attempts to push him away only fueled his desire, making the kiss even more intense. Her body melted into his, while his sturdy back provided unwavering support.

As the clock struck midnight, the sky erupted with the explosive sounds of fireworks, their reverberations reaching even through the car window.

As the old year came to an end and made way for the new, Josie's confidence in Dexter's abilities remained unwavering.

She had never doubted his capability since they first met; she knew he was an unstoppable force.

However, a nagging question gnawed at her, if circumstances stripped him of his wealth and left him with nothing, would he still be the same person she knew?

Josie pondered while simultaneously fearing the potential repulsion that could arise.

Caught in this dilemma, she reached out and held him tightly, returning the passionate kiss.

Dexter couldn't fathom Josie's thoughts, but her reciprocation brought him joy. As things heated up, he pressed her against the steering wheel. Their eyes locked, both aware that the time and place weren't suitable for intimacy. If they continued, it would ignite an unstoppable flame.

Dexter swiftly retracted his hand, regaining control. He chose to wait out the desire. Opening the car door, he held Josie's hand as they made their way to Mason Garden. A thought struck him along the journey, and he took something out of his suit pocket, offering it to her, "Happy New Year."

Josie raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"It's a New Year's gift, Mrs. Russell." He curved his lips, exuding a gentle demeanor.

She graciously accepted it and smiled, tilting her head. "Happy New Year to you too, Mr. Russell."

This was their first New Year together.

After returning to Mason Garden, Dexter kissed her forehead tenderly. His voice was husky, resulting from staying up late, "Go and get a good night's sleep. I still have some things to take care of."

Tiptoeing to avoid making noise, Josie made her way back to their bedroom. As she closed the door, her heart thumped loudly in her chest.

As she leaned against the door, she couldn't help but notice that her mind was unburdened and at ease on this particular night. It was free from the intricate entanglements of relationships and complex personalities.

Closing her eyes, she reflected that regardless of what the future had in store, the purity of the emotions experienced on this night would remain untarnished.

[Chapter 260](#)

What Qualifications Do You Have?

On New Year's Day, an unexpected visitor appeared. Josie received a text message from an unknown sender saying, "Meet me at the nearby park."

Her heart skipped a beat as she tried to guess the purpose of the meeting. Dexter couldn't accompany her as he was occupied with social obligations.

And it turned out to be Xanthe, who wanted to have a conversation with Josie in the park.

Xanthe lit a cigarette and stood in the wintry solitude, feeling lonely and cold. Her gaze was filled with disdain as she stared at Josie.

"Hi, Ms. Quorn. In case you didn't know, my name is Josie," she forced a smile.

Xanthe glanced at her from head to toe, extinguished her cigarette, and said, "Come take a walk with me."

Though their relationship was strained, there was no pretense. Xanthe didn't act superior or condescending, and their words and actions were on equal ground.

Xanthe asked about Josie's family, and she answered truthfully, "I'm an orphan. My stepmother works as a sanitation worker, my father is a vegetative patient in the hospital, and I have a younger brother who does odd jobs for a living."

Josie didn't hide or lie about her family. Maybe her background was worlds apart from the Russell family, but so what? Different circumstances shouldn't give anyone the right to look down on others.

Xanthe let out a mocking laugh. "Very well."

"Do you think you're deserving of Dexter?"

"... It's clear that I don't, but since things have come to this point. I will strive to become worthy of him."

Xanthe smiled, revealing an elusive meaning that Josie couldn't decipher. "Then a divorce is just a matter

of time.”

Josie remained silent.

This park was an extension of Mason Garden, with fruit trees planted and nurtured by devoted gardeners. The sky had turned a deep shade, and the grapes dangling from the vines sparkled with absolute clarity.

With such devoted cultivation, they were bound to be incredibly sweet.

Xanthe stretched out her hand and plucked two grapes, her ring delicately grazing the fruit without leaving a trace of blemish.

Josie was startled. She had seen a ring similar to that on Dexter’s finger before. He had explained that the ring served as a means of testing substances for potential poisoning, be it from smoking, drinking, or eating.

It was a self-defense tool passed down through generations of the Russell family, signifying their formidable heritage. Xanthe was worried that the grapes might have been sprayed with pesticides by the caretakers, hence the test.

But the unblemished ring proved the fruits to be non-toxic and safe to be consumed. So, she handed one to Josie. “Grapes at this time of year should taste very sweet.”

Josie gingerly accepted the grape. Her chest was trembling with mixed emotions.

Regardless of the weight of the past, Josie harbored a peculiar admiration for the woman standing before

her.

Without delay, Xanthe delved into prying about Josie and Dexter’s relationship.

“Dexter is still young and naive. He may have obligations to you and the other girl. But that’s how life works, isn’t it? We all have to make sacrifices and compromises along the way. I hope that when the time comes, you’ll be the one to play the role of the villain in this relationship.”

Essentially, Xanthe wanted Josie to be the one to propose a divorce.

Taking a deep breath, Josie retorted, “Ms. Quorn, I know you’re not fond of me, and I’m aware that most of the Russell family shares the sentiment. But I don’t care. I know Dexter loves me, and that’s all that matters. Do you think you can dictate Dexter?”

Xanthe sneered. “Seems like Henry is quite fond of you and has told you everything about me.”

Despite being exposed, Josie maintained her composure. She straightened her posture and replied, “It’s not about me refusing to let go, but there’s something I need to ask you for Dexter’s sake. You’ve never bothered to care about Dexter all these years, so what makes you think you can stick your nose in his marriage and judge the woman he’s chosen?”

Xanthe’s expression shifted.

“Listen, Ms. Quorn, it’s all about knowing your place. If I were in your shoes and had decided to stay out of it, I wouldn’t return and make things difficult for him.”

Josie spoke without hesitation or reservation. She had no intention of showing respect to this woman, even if she was Dexter’s biological mother.