

Love Me Or Leave Me

#Chapter 201 - Read Love Me Or Leave Me Chapter 201

CHAPTER 201

There were many attractions in the amusement park. When Loretta woke up after a nap, she couldn't wait to take Lillian and Kevin outside for fun.

The amusement park was full of staff dressed in doll costumes. Lillian and Kevin couldn't take their eyes off these cute "dolls, staring at them curiously.

Seeing how much they enjoyed it, Loretta made a phone call and asked the housekeeper to bring three sets of doll costumes. Half an hour later, there were three cute doll characters in the amusement park.

Many children were drawn to these adorable dolls and looked at them curiously, wanting to take photos with them.

Loretta was very generous. She agreed with her younger brother and sister, so in the afternoon, Lillian and Kevin became part of the amusement park staff and took pictures with tourists for half the day.

Marissa was speechless. She approached to rescue Lillian and Kevin, but the two kids seemed to be having too much fun together. They enjoyed wearing the doll outfits and basking in the attention of many children.

"Let them play. Stacey said with a smile. "The important thing is that the kids are happy. They're having a great time."

Hearing this, Marissa smiled back. She secretly glanced at Stacey for a long time, causing Stacey to feel a bit shy.

Marissa said, "Becky, my brother likes you. You know that?"

Stacey was silent.

Marissa then looked at the three kids playing and said seriously, Becky, don't let Queenie affect you. She doesn't really care about Hayden at all, and she doesn't have genuine feelings for Jeremy. Most mothers are wonderful and love their children, but a few lack that love. I think Queenie is one of those people. When she was seven months pregnant, the baby had already formed, and yet she didn't hesitate to say she wanted an abortion. That shows she didn't care for her child at all and was more concerned about herself."

"After the baby was born, she didn't come back to see him even once. That proves she has no feelings for Jeremy and wasn't missing him. I'm worried that the reason she's pestering Hayden now is that Elden abandoned her. She feels resentful, so she wants to reconnect with Hayden to make Elden regret it. She just wants to show Elden that she can find a better man and lead a better life after their breakup. By the way, do you know who Elden is?" Marissa said, turning to look at Stacey and blinking-

Stacey was confused and shook her head.

Marissa smiled and said, "He was the man Queenie loved so much before. He insisted on her having an abortion and then divorced her to be with someone else. He's Queenie's ex-boyfriend now."

Stacey still remained silent.

Marissa looked at the three children not far away and said, "Queenie will make excuses that she's Jeremy's biological mother. She'll say the kid can only be happy with his biological mother. But Becky... Marissa stopped, gazing intently into Stacey's eyes and smiling. "How about we make a bet? I bet Queenie can't give Jeremy more love and care than you can."

Stacey didn't expect Marissa to say this, leaving her momentarily speechless.

"Anyway, Queenie is Jeremy's biological mother, Stacey said, her feelings mixed.

"But a mother who can give up her child at any moment and use him as a tool for her own selfish desires? In my opinion, it's

better to not have such a mother, Marissa replied seriously.

"Mom!" While Stacey was deep in thought, Kevin suddenly ran over, dressed as a baby dinosaur.

"What's wrong?" Stacey held him and asked with concern.

"I want to pee. Kevin whispered.

Stacey and Marissa were taken aback. Then Marissa suggested, let's go to the office building. I have a private bathroom there that's much cleaner and doesn't distinguish between men and women."

Stacey nodded in agreement. "Okay."

"I want to go too!" Lillian, dressed in a baby duck costume, exclaimed as she ran over.

The group left together as Loretta rushed over. They all stood up and prepared to head to the bathroom.

The three little ones in their cute furry outfits were quite the sight as they walked down the path. Many children noticed them along the way and were drawn to Lillian and Kevin. Some even asked their parents to buy them the same doll

costumes.

Lillian and Kevin had spent the entire day playing, especially enjoying the afternoon in their doll clothes. All the children passing by loved playing with them, which made Kevin even happier. After their bathroom break, Lillian's face still beamed with joy, making Kevin want to rush back to play again.

Noticing the time, Debra realized it was getting late. She crouched down and patiently reasoned with Kevin. Eventually, she convinced them to take off their costumes and change into their regular clothes before heading to the amusement park beach to play in the sand.

Both Lillian and Kevin loved playing with sand. Upon seeing it, they immediately forgot the joy they had in their doll costumes and ran happily to finish making sand castles. After playing for a while, Lillian suddenly ran back and asked. "Mom, where's Jeremy?"

Stacey didn't expect Christopher to think of Jeremy so suddenly, Confused, she replied, "What about Jeremy? Why are you looking for him all of a sudden?"

Lillian pointed at the castle and said earnestly, "I... I don't know how to build castles. Jeremy taught me last time, but I forgot."

"I can help!" Loretta shouted as she ran over. She took Lillian's hand and said excitedly, "I can build castles too! I'll teach you!"

Marissa was surprised. "Lillian and Jeremy know each other?"

Stacey smiled and nodded. "Yes, Jeremy is a cute kid. He was at my house a few days ago. He gets along well with Lillian and

Kevin

Marissa smiled as she watched her daughter happily play with the two little ones. "Kids are much happier when they're together," she observed.

Stacey agreed wholeheartedly. "Yes, they really are."

"Mom, I want to see your photo," Loretta called out moments later, addressing Marissa in an authoritative tone.

Marissa looked at her daughter, curious, "Which photo?"

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"The castle my father built when we went to the beach last time Loretta clarified.

Marissa was momentarily speechless. "That's something your father made. You can't expect to make it that complicated!"

"I can learn!" Loretta insisted, not backing down.

"What kind of castle is it?" Lillian asked curiously as she came over.

"Is it beautiful?" Kevin chimed in, eyes wide with expectation.

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Loretta suddenly had the idea to recreate the castle her father had built before, and soon everyone was curious, Stacey couldn't help but look at it a few more times and felt amazed herself. However, this complicated castle was definitely not something that ordinary children could easily build.

Seeing the curious eyes of Lillian and Kevin, Stacey walked over. She decided to try building a castle herself. Eventually, even the tidy Debra joined in, and Loretta unintentionally got involved as well. They shared ideas and worked hard together. The three children surrounded them, watching curiously as their parents tackled the big castle.

Time flew by while they were building, and before they knew it, evening had arrived. It was dark, and suppertime was approaching. Their castle was only partially finished, but with strong encouragement from Lillian and Kevin, Stacey took a photo of them with the castle.

After the photos were taken, Stacey took the two kids to wash their hands in the nearby pool. It was time for dinner after they cleaned up.

"How about coming to my house for dinner tonight?" Marissa suggested with a smile.

Stacey was taken aback.

Debra smiled and replied, "Okay. Thank you for the invitation."

Marissa continued happily. "It's no trouble. My husband is cooking anyway." Her family was well-off, but they didn't hire servants because her husband enjoyed cooking for her, and she loved the meals he prepared. They all found joy in this daily

life

"Your husband does it himself?" Debra asked, surprised.

Loretta chimed in, "My dad cooks every day. He can make lots of different dishes, and they look great! Sometimes they : flowers, sometimes animals. They're super cute!"

"Wow, your father is amazing!" Kevin praised.

"I want a dad like that too. Can you let your dad be my dad?" Lillian asked Loretta excitedly. Loretta looked confused. Stacey, overhearing the conversation, felt speechless. She quickly reminded Lillian. "You can't just call anyone dad." Marissa burst into laughter, holding her belly as she stepped aside.

Stacey felt embarrassed, but Kevin added, "Why not?"

Marissa glanced over and quickly took out her phone to message Hayden. [Hayden, if you don't come to my house for dinner tonight, Becky's kids will call Joey "Dad"!

On the golf course, Hayden had just finished his business social activities for the day when he received Marissa's message. He was confused and sent back a question mark

Seeing the question mark in Hayden's message, Marissa quickly explained what Loretta, Kevin, and Lillian just said.

Hayden paused, silent for a moment, before he walked out decisively.

Marissa waited a long time for Hayden to reply, but he didn't. She wasn't worried, though; she was sure he had seen the message. The thought of what his expression would be made her want to laugh. She was so happy.

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Stacey explained for a long time, but Lillian and Kevin didn't understand why Loretta's father couldn't be their father. After all, Jeremy's father could be their father.

Stacey felt a bit weak in her reasoning and had to turn around to apologize to Marissa first.

Marissa's facial muscles twitched with laughter. She was so happy today. Hearing Becky's explanation, she quickly reassured her, "It's okay. It's just a small matter. Kids are like this when they're young: they don't fully understand yet. I get it"

Ten minutes later, Marissa took Stacey and the others back to her house. Twenty minutes after that, Hayden arrived.

In the yard, Lillian and Kevin were stunned to see "Daddy" coming. They ran toward him excitedly, shouting in surprise, "Dad!" They both hugged his legs.

Loretta was shocked, wondering why her uncle became the father of Lillian and Kevin. She didn't know about this before..

Stacey felt a bit embarrassed.

"We also have a dad!" Lillian said proudly.

"Yes, Jeremy said that his dad can also be our dad!" Kevin added.

Marissa and her husband Joey chuckled at the kids' excitement.

Hayden naturally bent down to pick up Lillian and Kevin.

Stacey was startled and rushed over, worried that the children might fall.

Feeling awkward, she hesitated for a moment and finally managed to explain, "L... actually, I want Lillian and Kevin to accept you as their godfather and for Jeremy to accept me as his godmother if it feels right. Then our kids will have more parental figures."

"What are you doing, Becky? I've heard Hayden has a good character and comes from a nice family. You two were engaged when you were little. I think you're a perfect match. If you like him, we can plan a wedding anytime, so why do you need to do this?"

"Lillian, Kevin, are you both okay with that?" Marissa then turned to the twins and joked.

"Marissa!" Hayden exclaimed, feeling speechless.

Joey quickly interjected, "Marissa, stop teasing them! Hayden hasn't even caught up with Becky yet"

Stacey was at a loss for words.

They eventually all went into the kitchen together. Marissa made sure to serve everyone a lot of delicious food while Joey continued cooking

Stacey sat in the dining area for a while. Seeing Hayden holding Lillian and Kevin, who seemed to like him very much, left her unsure of what to do. Finally, she stood up and walked towards the kitchen to help with the cooking.

Seeing Stacey head to the kitchen, Marissa immediately followed her. A moment later, Hayden entered with the two kids. When Lillian and Kevin saw Joey cooking, their curiosity peaked but they were too short to see what was happening.

"I can do that too," Hayden said suddenly. In the kitchen, everyone stopped and stared at him, including Joey, who was preparing dinner.

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But Hayden took off his coat and began to roll up his sleeves. "Yiju guys go relax today. I'll handle dinner," he declared.

Joey looked confused.

Marissa was shocked but quickly pieced things together. She looked from Hayden to Becky and nodded in agreement, "Yeah! I know how to cook. Hayden is just as good as Joey!"

Marissa went to the dining area, grabbed her husband Joey, and said, "Didn't you say the other day that the tree in the garden needed pruning? Let's go trim that tree and leave the kitchen to Hayden."

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Seeing this, Debra couldn't help but snicker. She immediately went to pull Lillian and Kevin, saying happily, "Lillian, Kevin, let's watch them trim the tree together!"

Lillian and Kevin had never seen a tree being pruned before. When they heard about something new, they became curious and ran off happily with their grandma. Only Hayden and Stacey were left in the kitchen.

Stacey felt a bit embarrassed. After a moment of hesitation, she asked, "What are you going to do? Would you like me to help you? I... I can also cook some food"

"But it's just ordinary food," Stacey added quickly.

Hayden glanced at her with a faint, affectionate smile. He handed her a handful of vegetables and said, "Help me chop these

up

Stacey hurriedly agreed. "Sure!" She went to chop the vegetables, but couldn't help wondering why a man like Hayden could

cook.

Hayden, busy at work, suddenly explained, "When Jeremy was in his mother's womb, his body was harmed by an abortive drug. After he was born, his health was much worse than that of ordinary children, so he needed extra care.

"So you learned how to cook?" Stacey asked, unable to hold back her curiosity.

Hayden nodded and said. "Yes." He hesitated for a moment before adding, "Jeremy was very insecure when he was young. He didn't trust food prepared or cooked by anyone else."

Hearing this, Stacey felt sympathy for Hayden, It must have been tiring to care for such a child. But now Jeremy seemed healthy. Aside from being unable to speak, he showed no other differences compared to ordinary children, which indicated that the Hoggard family took good care of him.

"You are a good father," Stacey thought to herself. After saying this, she added, "I will work hard to be a better mother in the future."

Hayden smiled and said, "You've done well." The Carter family hired a maternity nurse, but Stacey had always taken on many responsibilities herself, which he had noticed.

"What are you planning to make tonight?" Stacey couldn't help but ask out of curiosity.

Hayden glanced at the ingredients and then turned to her, asking. "Is there anything in particular you want?"

"If you need more ingredients, just let me know," he added.

Stacey quickly shook her head, saying, "No need. These... Looking at the ingredients, she realized most of them were her favorites. "These are my favorite dishes, she remarked.

After saying that, Stacey felt a bit puzzled again. "Did your cousin buy all these dishes?" she wondered. Their preferences seemed very similar.

Hayden paused and nodded, "Yes." He had asked Catherine to buy these dishes for her.

Hayden was indeed skilled at cooking, and the dishes looked beautiful with exquisite shapes.

Stacey was stunned. Thinking of what Loretta had said, she couldn't help but ask, "Is this how you guys cook?"

"What?" Hayden looked confused.

Stacey pointed to a plate of vegetables artistically carved into a forest theme on the table. These aren't even regular

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vegetables, are they? The vegetables were arranged to resemble forest, complete with a deer-like shape made of meat. The entire dish looked like a scene from a dreamy forest.

Hayden glanced at the dish and said, "Most kids would like this.

Stacey was speechless, thinking, 'So, Hayden prepared this for Jeremy?' "Did you learn to do this for Jeremy?" she asked, unable to hide her admiration. Hayden was truly impressive.

Hayden nodded, replying, "Yes." They used to create such dishes to coax Jeremy, but now they could do the same for Lillian and Kevin, hoping the two kids wouldn't end up fathers at such a young age. So, it was indeed useful for men to learn how to

cook!

The food was delicious and beautiful, but the only downside was that it took a long time to prepare.

Meanwhile, Lillian and Kevin, along with Debra and Marissa's family, were visiting the little garden. Captivated by the exotic plants, Lillian, Kevin, and Debra completely forgot about the two people

working in the kitchen.

Lillian and Kevin's curiosity peaked further when Loretta pulled them along, and they exclaimed "Wow!" at the sight of another flower.

Hearing this, Loretta racked her brain to share everything she knew about those flowers.

Debra, a flower lover, cultivated many flowers at Hivalis' family home as well as in her hometown of Alagua City. Due to regional differences, the plants grown in each place

varied. She adored many flowers from Daprein's hometown, so she couldn't resist taking pictures and sending them to her husband, who was still in his hometown.

When Patrick received the photos from his wife, he examined them closely, studying the varieties, language, growth habits, and blooming characteristics of each flower. He knew that his wife would want to discuss her experiences when she returned. If he couldn't engage in the conversation, he would surely be in trouble!

While he admired the flowers, Adrian received a message from friend. Adrian had previously asked him to investigate Jenny's case. Although there was no conclusive evidence yet, he had a vague sense that something was off.

It seemed likely that Jenny was not the only one involved; her mother might be significant too.

His friend had sent Adrian several documents detailing findings from private detectives. According to the records, Edwin's current wife, Dorothy, and Jenny's adoptive mother, was actually her biological mother. Jenny was born to Dorothy while she was in college and dating her ex-boyfriend. Due to their student status at the time, the baby was abandoned shortly after birth.

After graduation, Dorothy moved to Menterra and became a secretary for Edwin.

However, the story behind was less than glamorous. Dorothy became Edwin's secret lover, aware that he was married. Their relationship was a well-kept secret known only to a few. When Edwin and his wife eventually divorced, Dorothy became his legitimate spouse.

It was notable that Edwin and his ex-wife had a son and a daughter, but tragically, both children died in a car accident a year after Dorothy and Edwin married. Losing his children deeply affected Edwin, causing him immense grief. Throughout this time, Dorothy remained patient with him, and eventually, she suggested that they adopt a child, leading to the arrival of Jenny

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Is there any clear evidence that Edwin's ex-wife's two children were killed by Dorothy? And I asked you to look into the cause of death of Jenny's ex-husband's daughter and find solid proof. After reading the message, Adrian sent a reply to his

friend.

The person on the other side was silent for a while, and then finally spoke up, feeling it was somewhat difficult. [I had someone investigate it for a long time and found some vague information, but it's almost impossible to get exact evidence since so many years have passed.]

[I can pay more.] Adrian replied without hesitation.

Then I'll talk to them again. His friend replied.

[Thank you.] Adrian replied. As soon as he sent the message, the door to his room creaked open slightly, and a small, fluffy head peeked in from behind the door.

Hearing the sound, Adrian turned around and saw the little boy's face, which looked almost identical to his own—just in

miniature form. He immediately softened. "Damian Adrian stood up and walked toward the little boy.

When he reached the door, Adrian squatted down, one hand gently resting on the boy's shoulder while he pushed the door open with the other. "What's wrong?"

"I want to eat ice cream!" the little boy said, his voice bright and cheerful.

Adrian took a breath and hesitated for a moment. Then he responded, "But your mother doesn't allow you to have any."

"I want ice cream!" the little boy insisted.

After a moment of thought, Adrian picked him up. "Are you thirsty? Daddy will get you some water."

Adrian carried the little boy into the living room, carefully placing him on the sofa before turning to pour water. He poured a glass of water for the child and deliberately used two cups to cool the water before turning back and handing it to the boy.

Isabella taught him this method. Isabella is the mother of his son.

Six months ago, he had a strange encounter when he found a lost child on his way home. The child was only three years and standing alone in the street.

Inexplicably, he thought of Becky's two

children, and somehow he felt compelled to walk out of the store and bring the child back from the street before taking him to the police station. When he arrived at the police station, he explained that this was a lost child.

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However, he was met with suspicion from the police. They all stared at him and the child's face repeatedly. Ultimately, they educated both him and the child about safety, making sure not to scare such young kids.

Adrian felt confused at that moment. It took him a while to realize that the little boy looked almost exactly like him.

The police then coaxed him to answer many questions. Only after listening to his story did they understand that he had been with his mother since childhood and had never known his father. One policeman held back for a long time before suggesting that they do a paternity test because the resemblance was too striking. To convince Adrian, the man even took pictures of them standing next to each other.

Looking at the photo, Adrian felt a rush of realization. This child looked so much like him.

The police asked the child's age, and when he replied "three years old," they inquired if Adrian had done anything significant three years ago:

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Initially, Adrian wanted to say no—he had never been in a relationship. But just as the words were about to escape his lips, a sudden memory flashed in his mind. Three years ago, while gathering evidence for a case, something unexpected had happened.

"Could that child be from that night?" Adrian's heart raced at the thought.

Now in his thirties, his parents had been pushing him to get married and start a family.

He had always thought it didn't matter—living alone was fine for him. But when he saw his child standing there in front of him, he felt an overwhelming mix of happiness and surprise.

The child was too young to remember his mother's contact information, making it hard to find her right away. So, Adrian decided to take a sample of the child's hair and do a paternity test. He asked his friend for help, and soon the results came back: the child was his biological son. This child, who had suddenly appeared in his life, was truly his own.

The police quickly learned the news and everyone was shocked, though it felt like a normal outcome since the father and son looked so much alike.

Adrian's mother must have been very worried about the missing child. In the days that followed, he kept a close watch on the situation at the police station, eager to learn more about the child's mother.

They waited all day until midnight, and finally, she arrived at the station in a panic. The mother had been searching for her child for a long time without success; he had been missing for over twenty– four hours.

After Isabella reported her missing child, she broke down and sobbed in the police station. This was the anguish of a mother who had lost her child. She was scared and desperate, not knowing what to do. Every part of her was trembling—her voice, her hands, her feet. She was terrified because her baby was gone

“Mom!” The child, still by Adrian's side at that moment, spotted the woman and immediately ran over.

Seeing her lost child, Isabella was taken aback. She clutched him tightly, almost squeezing him in her embrace.

Later, Adrian pestered them. Now that they had a child, he believed it was his responsibility to work hard and provide for them a complete family. But when he first saw Isabella again, memories of that night flooded back, and he realized he didn't care as less about love as he thought he did.

Unfortunately, winning over a girl isn't easy, especially one whose heart has been broken. But he was determined. After spending more than half a year getting to know Isabella, she began to trust him more and more. Sometimes, when life got busy, she would let him take care of the child, even teaching him some parenting tips, like how to cool baby water.

At the start, he was inexperienced and made plenty of mistakes. But now he felt much more confident.

Christopher took the water Adrian handed him, drank a few sips, and then made his way back to his room.

In the past six months, Adrian had adjusted to this routine, but he still followed him in. He took out some Lego and began to play with Damian.

Isabella had always been the sole caretaker of the child. With her busy work schedule, she barely had time to play with him.

During these months, Adrian noticed signs that Damian might be struggling psychologically, appearing quite withdrawn. Aside from eating, drinking, and using the bathroom, he spent most of his time alone in his room, avoiding conversation and ignoring anyone who tried to engage with him.

After discussing his concerns with Isabella, they decided to take Damian to the hospital together. The doctor reassured them that the issues weren't too severe but recommended that adults needed to pay more attention to the kid. Spending quality time with him would help his personality slowly develop in a positive way.

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In Daprein. Stacey and Hayden had been busy in the kitchen for long time before dinner was finally ready.

Lillian and Kevin were called in for dinner. Seeing the delicious dishes on the table, their eyes lit up with excitement. Even Loretta was shocked. 'Is this really cooked by my uncle? Wow! It looks delicious too! It looks even better than what Dad made she thought.

At that moment, Loretta suddenly felt a little bit jealous. She glanced at Lillian and Kevin and then couldn't help but look at her uncle. 'Could L... make Uncle Hayden my dad?' she thought.

However, this thought quickly passed through Loretta's mind. She shook her head and pushed that dangerous idea away. No. I'd better not. Although Daddy's cooking isn't as good as Uncle Hayden's, she makes cakes for me and Mom every day. Besides, Daddy builds beautiful castles and takes me and Mom on trips every year. Daddy is also very nice, and I don't need to have a new one! she thought.

Debra was also amazed. When Hayden said he could cook, she was actually a bit shocked, but at that time, she thought Hayden would just make ordinary home-cooked dishes—nothing too surprising. Even people from wealthy families sometimes liked to cook for themselves. But Debra didn't expect that the dishes Hayden could make were anything but simple home-cooked meals; they were simply amazing.

"Hay, these dishes... thank you," Debra said. Being a smart person, she quickly realized that Hayden was trying to impress Becky with all this.

Hayden looked at Debra and smiled, "Becky helped too. We made this together."

Debra laughed broadly and nodded repeatedly. "Okay!"

"Let's sit down and eat together." Hayden invited them with a smile.

Marissa and Joey were still staring at Hayden, the couple was also amazed by the spread. They knew that Hayden wanted to show off in front of Becky and her two kids, but they didn't expect him to have such skills.

"Daddy, I want to eat that bird!" After sitting down, Kevin said excitedly while pointing at a dish.

Hayden smiled and agreed, "Okay"

"Daddy, I want to eat that flower! The red one is so beautiful!" Lillian exclaimed, looking at the red flowers decorated on another plate.

Hayden looked at Lillian and nodded with a smile, "Okay!"

Loretta felt anxious as she watched her younger brother and sister make their choices. She looked around the table and finally spotted the deer dish. She quickly shouted, "Uncle, I want that deer!"

Hayden responded as usual, "Okay." He then started serving the three children their chosen dishes: Kevin wanted the bird, Lillian wanted the red flower, and Loretta wanted the deer.

"Wait a minute!" Just as Hayden's spoon was about to go down, Debra rushed to stop him.

Hayden halted and looked up at Debra..

Debra quickly grabbed her phone, saying anxiously, "Wait a minute! I need to take a photo first!"

Everyone laughed at this. Hayden couldn't help but chuckle, and Stacey also took out her phone, secretly snapping many photos of the beautifully arranged dishes on the table.

While cooking in the kitchen, she had already taken several photos because the dishes looked stunning. She didn't dare to

believe that such beautiful meals could be made with those familiar ingredients..

She wanted to capture all the dishes so she could practice at home. Cooking such cute and beautiful food should help with getting children to eat, especially Jeremy.

Since Lillian and Kevin grew up, she hadn't noticed that the two kids were picky eaters. They almost ate whatever was served. But Hayden had put in the effort because Jeremy was a picky eater.

When Jeremy was at her house, he was very well-behaved. He would eat whatever was presented to him and never caused a fuss. However, this kind of obedience made Stacey feel a bit distressed now.

Jeremy is also a child who should be as carefree as Lillian and Kevin. There's no need for him to be so obedient and sensible in front of other people. He doesn't have to please others; he could be favored!' She thought.

After taking photos, everyone began to eat dinner. Hayden first served all the dishes that the three children had requested into their bowls, and then the adults joined in.

But facing such a beautiful spread, Stacey didn't know how to start. Every dish was perfect; it felt like a shame to eat it.

"Don't you like it?" Hayden's voice suddenly came from beside her.

Stacey was startled. Her body reacted faster than her brain, and she immediately shook her head.

"Then why aren't you eating?" Hayden frowned slightly, worried that she didn't like the food he had prepared.

Stacey was speechless.

Everyone was secretly observing Stacey's expression. Marissa felt excited to see Hayden in a relationship up close, while Joey was also curious about the situation.

Debra was a bit intrigued, thinking. This table of dishes really reflects his feelings. Becky is not someone who lacks senses: she should be able to discern good food from bad, right?

Just... I think these dishes are so beautiful that it would be a pity to eat them," Stacey admitted, noting that everyone was watching her. Her ears turned red with embarrassment.

Hearing this, Hayden smiled. He picked up the serving fork and placed a dish he knew Stacey liked into her bowl. "Enjoy it

Marissa held her bowl and felt a twinge of envy. She thought, 'A Hayden is so good at this. Why didn't I see it before?

Joey watched as Marissa stared at Hayden and felt a little sad in his heart. Though he knew Hayden was just his wife's cousin, seeing their connection stirred something in him. He picked up his fork and said to Marissa, "Let's eat."

Stacey noticed the interaction between Joey and Marissa, which made her feel less embarrassed. She sighed with relief.

"Everyone, come on. You don't have to pick up food for me. I... can serve myself, Stacey mumbled.

But Hayden didn't seem to hear her; he kept serving dishes for Stacey throughout dinner. When she finished one dish, he'd offer her another.

Marissa also had her husband serve her food. Although Lillian and Kevin were young, they had developed the habit of serving each other at home. From time to time, they would pass food not only to each other but also to Loretta.

Seeing her younger siblings picking food for one another made Loretta proactive too. She grabbed her small fork and carefully picked up food for them.

As a result, Debra found herself alone at the table. Fortunately, even though Lillian and Kevin were busy serving each other, they occasionally remembered their grandma and turned to pick some food for her. Debra finally felt included; she felt her love for the kids paid off.

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As Hayden kept scooping food onto her plate, Stacey ate much faster. Quickly, she felt full and put down the silverware, thinking, "If I put down the silverware, surely Hayden won't put food on my plate again, and I wouldn't feel so embarrassed and awkward. However, when she was done eating, she realized that others still weren't done. Thus, she sat there awkwardly. not knowing what to do.

Hayden gave Stacey a knowing look, causing her to feel her hair and on end. Despite that, she maintained her composure and stayed calm.

After a while, Lillian and Kevin were finally full Kevin put down the silverware and turned to Stacey. "Mommy, I'm full. I want to wash my hands now."

Lillian and Kevin had the habit of washing their hands after eating Hearing Kevin's words, Stacey hurriedly stood up and took them to wash their hands. First, she brought Kevin, followed by Lillian.

Once everyone was done eating. Joey helped to clean up the table before Stacey could. Once again, she was at a loss.

After a while, Stacey and Hayden went to the yard together. He smiled and reassured her, "Don't be so jittery. Marissa and Joey aren't outsiders."

Stacey's mouth opened and closed again. She wanted to say something but didn't know what to say.

I've asked someone to gather some information on Mr. Fraley. It's already been sent to your mailbox. You can have a look at it after you get back to the hotel. We'll visit him tomorrow," Hayden added at the next moment,

Stacey was surprised. "You gathered information?" Then, she quickly returned to her senses and thanked him, "Thank you

At Stacey's gratitude, Hayden glanced at her, making her apprehensive. "Why? What's wrong?"

Hayden suddenly laughed and shook his head. "Nothing. I just wanted to tell you that I won't force you, so don't be too

nervous."

Stacey's mind went blank. It took her a while to realize what he meant by not pushing her, and her ears reddened instantly

With the information Hayden provided on Eugene, Stacey felt like she couldn't wait any longer. She couldn't stay at Marissa's home anymore. She wanted to return to the hotel as soon as possible, open those documents, and study them thoroughly. After careful consideration, she finally said goodbye to Marissa.

Marissa didn't seem surprised at Stacey's goodbye. She and Joey even happily offered to send Stacey, Lillian, and Kevin back to the hotel. Not knowing how to refuse their kindness, Stacey had no choice but to accept it.

There were still two cars. Marissa drove one car which Debra, Gwen, and Marie rode in. Meanwhile, Joey drove another car which Stacey, Hayden, Lillian, and Kevin got on.

In the narrow space, Stacey and Hayden sat very close to one another again. They were so close they could catch whiffs of each other's scents whenever they took a breath.

Fortunately, Lillian and Kevin were also in the car, so Stacey didn't feel as awkward since she had to take care of them.

The cars soon arrived at the hotel and stopped at the entrance.

Debra exited the car with Gwen and Marie. Subsequently, after the car was parked, Stacey also brought Lillian and Kevin out of the car with her. Then, Hayden also got out and stood with them.

Marissa and Joey smiled, said their goodbyes, and then left.

Stacey sighed in relief after watching them leave. However, when she looked back, she found Hayden watching her. She

inexplicably became skittish again. "What?"

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Hayden hesitated momentarily and then questioned, "Are you is nervous when facing clients at work too?"

Stacey was confused, while Debra stood beside her, watching their conversation unfold quietly.

Hayden said seriously, "If you are that nervous in front of clients too."

"Till try my best to get used to it," Stacey quickly promised.

Hayden chuckled. "It's hard to get used to that alone. How about practice with you if you don't mind?"

Hearing this, Debra's eyes lit up as she watched them silently. However, Stacey was befuddled. "How do we practice?"

Lillian and Kevin were also curious. They looked up at Hayden, who they already took as their father, and Stacey. When they were just about to ask more, Debra fortunately reacted instantaneously. She immediately covered their mouths before they could. "When adults are talking, children shouldn't simply interrupt. Yes, indeed, that's right," she thought.

Hayden peered at Stacey with a smile and didn't answer her immediately.

Debra then spoke to Stacey. "Becky, why don't you talk with Hayalone? Gwen, Marie, and I will bring the kids back first.

Without waiting for a response from Stacey, Debra immediately called Gwen and Marie to take Lillian and Kevin away.

They left so speedily that Stacey couldn't even react in time. Hmm... I really want to know what kind of practice method Hayden was talking about though. He's right. I don't have much work experience, so I get nervous easily, which is a big taboo in the business world,' she analyzed mentally. "You... Do you have a way to practice this?" Stacey couldn't help but ask.

Hayden smiled and reached out to hold her hands, but Stacey immediately grew shy and tried withdrawing them. Despite that, he didn't let go. "Becky, look into my eyes"

Stunned, she looked up blankly into his eyes.

Hayden continued insisting, "Look at me. Don't think about anything. Just look at me like this"

Stacey froze in a stupor. After a while, she tried doing as he said and gazed at him with her mind left blank,

Hayden also watched her but stayed still and waited for her to adapt gradually. After a long while, Hayden asked, "Do you still feel as nervous as before?"

Stacey was speechless.

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Hayden looked at her and said seriously, "Becky, start with me. I practice with you. What do you think? If you can be comfortable around me and not feel nervous, I believe you'll also be much more relaxed and less nervous when facing other people.

She remained speechless.

Hayden smiled but added, "We're going to meet Mr. Fraley tomorrow. If you can't control your emotions and act nervous, do you think you can persuade him to join Carter's Jewel?"

.. Stacey hesitated.

"It's not just Mr. Fraley. You'll have to face a lot of people in the future, Becky. If you really want to inherit Mr. Carter's company, you must first gain courage and confidence, Hayden advised.

Stacey still hesitated. "But it's not good for us to mingle like this

Hayden lifted their hands. Earlier, they were only holding hands but right then, he deliberately interlocked their fingers

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together. "I don't think there's anything bad about this. We're both unmarried and single. Additionally, our children like each other very much. I think it's best if we are together."

'Here he goes again, Stacey thought as her cheeks flushed red, and her ears burned up with warmth.

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CHAPTER 207

Hayden looked at Stacey's red ears and smiled. He gently lowered his head, kissed her on the lips, and asked, "Trust me, okay!"

Her heart was pounding. Stacey could hardly look at him anymore. She wanted to break free, but her hands and feet wouldn't budge, as if they were controlled by something.

"We'll be very happy together, as well as Lillian and Kevin, Jeremy, and the other children," Hayden promised.

Stacey finally broke free from his grasp. She turned around and ran away quickly.

Hayden was stunned for a while before holding his hands together, a smile curling at his lips.

Stacey didn't reject him.

Thus, his efforts these days hadn't been in vain.

At least, she wouldn't have directly told him they were incompatible like before.

At that, Hayden decided to work hard,

While thinking that, a person suddenly appeared from the corner. It was Queenie.

Hayden frowned instantly, turning around and walking in the direction Stacey left.

Queenie ran over anxiously and tried to grab Hayden's arm, but Hayden turned around and avoided her.

"Queenie, you're an adult now. You should be more mature," Hayden said indifferently.

Queenie paled, croaking, "H-Hayden.... Do you really like Becky?"

His bad mood suddenly brightened when he heard her question. He smiled and nodded. "Yes"

Queenie suddenly felt a sharp pain in her heart. She demanded, "What about Jeremy? If we get back together, Jeremy can have a complete family. We're his parents.

The smile on Hayden's face slowly disappeared. He looked at Queenie and sneered. "You keep repeating the same thing. Is that the only thing you know? Who taught you to say that! Your mom or your dad?"

Queenie's face darkened even more as Hayden continued.

Hayden stood straight before Queenie. He gave off a domineering air as he was a head taller than her. "Queenie, let me repeat. We have divorced, so stop pestering me. If you refuse to listen, I don't mind asking your grandfather to discipline you."

“Your” Queenie gasped, staring at Hayden with a gloomy face.

Hayden turned around and left expressionlessly.

Queenie anxiously wanted to catch up with Hayden. However, she paused after recalling his words. She couldn’t keep pestering him anymore.

By how afraid his grandfather was of the Hoggard family, he would stop her from pestering Hayden if the latter complained to him.

The most important thing was the family’s shares. Queenie’s grandfather was more biased toward her cousins, so he might end up giving all the company’s shares to them.

Debra took the children back to their room and asked the maid to take them to bathe.

After playing outside for a whole day, their body was covered in sweat and sand. It felt sticky and uncomfortable.

Stacey headed back before they finished their shower.

As the door was locked, Stacey rang the doorbell several times. Seeing there was no response, she felt a little confused.

After waiting for a long time, Debra came out of the shower and vaguely heard the doorbell. Thus, she hurried out and opened the door.

“Why are you back?” Debra was surprised.

Stacey was rendered speechless. Not wanting to explain to Debra, Stacey went in without answering.

Looking at her daughter’s red ears, Debra soon understood and smiled meaningfully. Debra closed the door after seeing that Hayden wasn’t outside. “Lily and Kev are taking a shower, Debra explained to Stacey after returning to the room.

The hotel room they booked was similar to a suite. There were several rooms in it, each with an attached bathroom, so everyone could take a shower at the same time just now,

Stacey paused for a moment before nodding. “Okay, Stacey quickly entered the room and closed the door. Her heart was still thumping when she recalled Hayden’s words. She took several deep

breaths before heading to the shower with a set of clothes.

After taking a shower, she decided she wasn't in the mood to think about what happened. Thus, she took out her computer and opened her mailbox.

As expected, Hayden sent her a new email. It was information about Eugene.

Stacey quickly scanned through the information and tried to memorize it. However, she couldn't help but think about Hayden's words when looking at the information.

Stacey felt nervous. It was easy for her to get nervous when faced with an unfamiliar client.

This was unless she could treat her life like a television show.

Acting was what she was good at. Thinking of this, she came to the mirror and tried to adjust her expression.

When she suppressed her emotions and tried to control herself to act like a confident businesswoman, it seemed to be working.

However, life wasn't like what they acted in dramas.

She couldn't overexpress herself. If she did that, it would give others a bad feeling.

Thinking about that, Stacey looked at herself in the mirror and tried to readjust her expression. She tried hard for a time. It took her half an hour to feel good in her skin. However, Stacey wasn't sure if she could pull it off.

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Stacey pulled up Eugene's profile and read through it twice. After that, she returned to the mirror to train her expression.

Someone suddenly knocked on the door, and Lillian's childish voice sounded. "Mommy! Mommy!"

"Open the door, Mommy!" Kevin also shouted outside.

Stacey returned to her senses at once. She hurried over and opened the door.

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When the door opened, Lillian and Kevin immediately poked their heads into the room curiously.

Stacey was confused by their actions and couldn't help asking, "What are you guys looking at?"

Kevin turned to look at Stacey and asked in a childish voice, "Where's Daddy?"

Lillian was also confused. "Yeah. Where did Daddy go? Didn't he return with you?"

Stacey was speechless.

"I guess he had already returned home," Stacey answered carefully. Her ears reddened when she thought about how she had dumped him and left.

"Why doesn't Daddy live with us?" Lillian asked a difficult question again.

Kevin said seriously, "Loretta's parents live together!"

Lillian nodded firmly. "That's right!"

Stacey was frightened and hurriedly covered their mouths. She was glad that Hayden wasn't here. Otherwise, she would be embarrassed to death!

Pondering about it, Stacey squatted down and decided to explain to them, "Lillian, Kevin, my relationship with Hayden is different from Loretta's parents. We're not married, so we can't live together. In the future, don't say such things before Mr. Hoggard... Hayden. Okay?"

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Hearing their mother's words, Lillian and Kevin were confused. Why aren't you husband and wife?" Lillian asked.

Stacey didn't know how to answer. She remained silent for a while and finally seriously told Lillian, "We're just... not yet"

"Then when?" Kevin asked.

Stacey was speechless. "It's getting late. Can I tell you a bedtime story? Stacey changed the subject. Lillian and Kevin were still children, after all. They've always liked listening to their mother's stories. So when they heard that her mother was going to tell a story, they immediately forgot about their questions just now and agreed happily.

"Okay!" Lillian agreed.

"Yeah, I want to hear the story of the pigs!" Kevin said excitedly.

"I want to hear the story of dragons!" Lillian shouted.

Lillian and Kevin quarreled about which story to pick

After carrying the two children to the bed, Stacey sat with them. Then, she took out a storybook and started telling them a

story.

In Hivalis, Adrian cared for Damian alone in their small house for the whole day. It was dark, and Isabella hadn't returned yet, so he was worried. "Damian, do you miss Mommy?" Adrian asked

carefully, looking at the miniature version of himself before him.

Three-year-old Damian raised his head slightly and stared at Adrian without saying anything. Adrian weighed his words and said, "It's late now. Your mother hasn't come back yet. I'm a little worried about her safety. Shall we pick her up together?" When Damian heard that Adrian would pick up his mother, his eyes lit up. He immediately nodded and took the initiative to stretch out his little hand toward his father to be carried. Adrian was moved and immediately picked up Damian, as the latter usually wouldn't let Adrian hold him!

Damian put his arms around Adrian's neck, making Adrian happy. He walked to the door with Damian in his arms, changed his shoes, and went out directly.

They arrived downstairs and approached a somewhat old Volkswagen. Adrian opened the car door, placed Damian inside, fastened the seatbelt for the child, and then circled to the driver's seat. After starting the car, they departed. Some time ago, he had specifically asked a friend to buy this car at a second-hand car market. The reason was simple. Isabella deeply resented rich second-generation scions due to her sister's experience.

Isabella's sister, Carly Graham, originally had a happy family with a loving husband and adorable children. However, an accident forever shattered this happiness.

One evening five years ago, while Carly was accompanying clients to negotiate contracts, a despicable scion drugged her and assaulted her. After being violated, she was undoubtedly in pain and filled with resentment—Isabelle accompanied her sister, and they went to sue that scion.

But the scion was rich and easily bribed all the witnesses, getting them to change their testimonies. In court, not only did the witnesses fail to clarify the truth, but they also slandered Carly, daiming she seduced the rich scion and accused her of being a hooker. They even falsely claimed that Carly and Isabelle were involved in fraudulent activities to extort money. Even the surveillance evidence Carly and Isabelle had carefully stored was secretly replaced without their knowledge.

When they were asked to present the evidence in court, the video that played was not what they intended. It was a shameless adult film instead!

That trial caused immense psychological damage to the sisters of the Graham family. As a result of this ordeal, Isabelle

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developed a deep-seated resentment toward wealthy people, especially rich second-generation scions.

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Because of this, Adrian hadn't dared to reveal his true identity to Isabelle yet. He continued to pretend to be just an ordinary worker, living modestly and appearing somewhat poor. In front of Isabelle, he dressed, ate, and used things according to ordinary standards. He dared not use anything bought from home before, fearing Isabelle might discover it and kick him

out!

He was also fortunate that he had been low profile in the past and not as famous on the internet as his siblings. Otherwise, if Isabelle had casually checked, she would have known his identity, and he would have been finished. He wouldn't have stood a chance of getting her as his wife for the rest of his life.

Carly's life now was very difficult. After the incident, her husband, Connor Zane, who used to love her dearly, completely changed. He couldn't accept that his beloved wife had been violated by someone else. He felt she was no longer pure and often verbally abused her and subjected her to various forms of emotional abuse and sometimes even physical violence.

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This situation could have been resolved with a divorce, but the two of them kept arguing about it for years without bringing up. Even when they argued and talked about divorce, it was limited to verbal disputes. They never actually went to the Courthouse to get a divorce. Human emotions were complex. Even Isabelle couldn't force her way into her sister's feelings and marriage, let alone Adrian.

Early this morning, Carly's son, Ronald Zane, called Isabelle, saying his father hadn't come home all night. His mother waited in the living room all night without sleeping. In the morning, she didn't speak and accidentally cut her hand while cooking, causing it to bleed. Ronald asked Isabelle to check on his mother. Concerned, Isabelle hurried to her sister's house upon receiving this call. Adrian wanted to go with her, but Isabelle refused, leaving Damian with him. Adrian obediently stayed home to take care of the child.

But a whole day passed by, and Isabelle still hadn't returned. Adrian became increasingly worried. Finally, he comforted Damian and decided to go to Carly's house together to check on the situation.

He drove for about 20 minutes until he finally arrived at the residential area where Carly lived. After parking the car, Damian recognized the familiar surroundings. His little hands immediately tried to unbuckle the seatbelt, eager to get of the car. Adrian quickly went over and unbuckled Damian's seatbelt, then carried him out of the car.

Once on the ground, Damian's little short legs immediately started running into the building and quickly up the stairs. Worried about losing the child, Adrian hurried after him. They ran up quickly and soon arrived at the fifth floor, where Carly's apartment was. Damian was already familiar with Carly's home, and upon seeing the familiar door, he raised his little hand and knocked. Adrian followed closely behind, standing beside Damian.

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Inside the house, Isabelle and Carly sat on the couch. The two sisters had been talking all day. Isabelle was hesitating whether to go home when suddenly, there was a knock on the door. The two of them were stunned and looked at the door almost at the same time. They wondered who it was and whether Connor had come home.

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Carly's son, Ronald, immediately jumped off the couch on his short legs and ran to the door. He tiptoed, grabbed the doorknob, tried to pull it down, and the door was opened.

Damian immediately ran inside. Seeing his mother, the child instantly ran over, hugged her mother, and shouted in a baby voice, "Mommy..."

Isabella hurriedly reached out and picked Damian up. She had taken care of her son since he was a baby, so she rarely separated from him. They had been separated for a whole day by then. As soon as they met, Isabella could feel how much Damian missed her.

Carly also noticed Adrian coming in. A trace of disappointment flashed across her amber eyes, but soon she smiled again. "Adrian, it's you. Come in and have a seat." Carly hurriedly stood up and went to make coffee for Adrian.

Isabella held Damian in her arms, frowned at Adrian, and asked, "Why are you here?"

Adrian felt a little guilty, but he still replied honestly, "You've stayed at Carly's house for a day: ... Damian and I are worried about you."

Carly picked up the kettle and felt relieved after hearing Adrian's words.

Half a year ago, Adrian, looking almost identical to Damian, showed up at Isabella's house. Thereafter, he followed Isabella and Damian around every day. Carly was really worried that Adrian would be a bad person and that Isabella and Damian would get hurt.

At that time, Carly was afraid that Adrian harm Isabella and Damian, so she deliberately moved into Isabella's house for a period of time and stayed with Isabella.

They had known each other for more than half a year, and she finally got to know Adrian a little better.

Adrian was a good person.

Carly thought that if Isabella was willing, it would be good to marry this man. Isabella would be happy, and Damian would have a complete family with his mother and father who loved him.

However, Carly couldn't help but wonder what Adrian's family was like.

They had known each for more than half a year now, yet they knew nothing about Adrian's family.

If Isabella wanted to get together with Adrian, Carly reckoned they had to find out the situation of his family first. She had to make sure that Isabella wouldn't be troubled by complicated family matters or relationships.

"Carly, it's getting late. Damian and Lare going home now. Don't worry about your husband. He is an adult and will know how to take care of himself," Isabella comforted her sister.

Carly nodded. "Okay."

Adrian didn't say anything and just watched them talk.

Carly saw them out, but when they arrived at the door, she finally couldn't help saying, "Isabella, don't worry about me all the time. You really should... Carly looked at Adrian and added, solve your own problems first."

Adrian felt nervous and said in a hurry, "Carly, I will be good to sabella and Damian."

Carly nodded. She looked at Adrian, hesitated for a moment, and then said, "We've known each other for more than half a year, so we know about your character, but your family background..."

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“My family is very simple. They are ordinary working–class people. Adrian hurriedly said.

Carly nodded and said, “Okay.”

Adrian breathed a sigh of relief. Fortunately, he had prepared himself in advance.

Carly looked at Adrian and said. “Adrian, if you have time, could you arrange for us to meet up with your family later on?”

Adrian was stunned, but he quickly reacted and nodded. “Of course.”

Carly smiled and nodded. “Great”

They left the house and went downstairs together. Carly asked again, “Is your family a native of Hivalis?”

Adrian shook his head and said, “No. Our hometown is in Alagua City, but we have always lived in Hivalis. Our family has a house in Hivalis. It’s a school district house. It’ll be good for Danian later when he goes to school, but that house was bought any years ago, and it is now very shabby. The price of the house in Hivalis used to be very low, so our family could afford it. If it’s now, we certainly won’t be able to afford it. Lucky that we bought it years ago.”

Hearing Adrian’s words, Carly and Isabella were shocked that Adrian’s family had a house in Hivalis. But when they heard Adrian explain that the house was bought many years ago, they were

not so shocked. The previous house price was indeed not as horrendous as it was now. Adrian’s family was really lucky

“So are you going to live with your parents after getting married Carly asked.

Hearing this, Adrian was cautious. After thinking for a while, he replied, “Probably not. My parents have retired now. They prefer to go back to their hometown and live there. I don’t think they will stay in Hivalis.”

“So your mother won’t help you take care of the baby?” Carly asked.

Adrian found himself at a loss for a moment. After thinking for a while, he said cautiously, “Damian is more than three years old and can go to school. I can send Damian to school in the morning and take him to the company after school. When I get off work, I will take Damian home with me. At other times, I can take care of Damian and Isabella at home without my mother.”

Hearing this, Isabella was surprised. “Your company actually allows you to bring children along?”

Hearing this, Adrian nodded and explained, “Yes. My boss is a nice person. I asked him before, and he said it’s okay.” Hearing this, Carly and Isabella looked at him with envy. They were envious that he had such an understanding boss.

Carly nodded. “That works.”

Most importantly, she felt that Isabella’s life would be more comfortable without the participation of her mother-in-law. After all, it was usually difficult for in-laws to get along.

Then again, Carly thought of another point.

“Why can’t your mother take care of the baby? Does she have a bad temper?” Carly asked tentatively.

Although Adrian had a good personality and could take care of the child, what if his mother was difficult to get along with? Would she deliberately make things difficult for Isabella in the future? Carly was worried.

Hearing this, Adrian shook his head and said, “No. My mother is very nice. She’s. My father and my mother got married for love. They’ve loved each other all their lives. My father has always spoiled my mother and never asked her to do any housework, so she doesn’t know how to take care of children.”

Hearing this, Carly and Isabella were surprised again. Then, they became envious of Adrian’s mother,

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Carly was even more pleased with Adrian after hearing that. Since Adrian’s father was so kind to his mother, his family should be good. If Adrian’s personality was similar to that of his father, he would also be nice to Isabella and Damian in the

future.

CHAPTER 210

“I’ll have a word with them and arrange a suitable time for us all to get together, Adrian declared.

Upon hearing this, Carly nodded in satisfaction. "Good, let us know once you've arranged it."

Adrian acknowledged her request with a nod, "Sure."

As they continued their conversation, they unknowingly arrived at the ground floor of the building. Upon reaching the lobby, Adrian promptly moved ahead to open the car's door, elegantly helping Isabella and Damian into the vehicle. Carly, observing Adrian's courteous actions from a short distance, found herself admiring him. Despite his undeniable charm and striking looks that naturally drew people's attention, she harbored reservations about his loyalty to Isabella. Nevertheless, she firmly decided that should he ever betray Isabella, she would confront him directly. "You should head out now. Drive carefully, and remember, no running through red lights," Carly instructed Adrian with a cautious tone.

"I've got it, Carly. No running red lights," Adrian assured her. With a nod, Carly stepped aside. Then, Adrian started the car and they headed home with Isabella and Damian.

After a short drive, Damian, nestled next to Isabella, lamented, "Mommy, Daddy's cooking is horrible. Despite his usual reticence and reserve around others, Damian felt at ease expressing himself around Isabella, which initially masked any underlying issues for her.

Adrian, feeling a bit anxious from the driver's seat, quickly responded, "I'm working on it. Believe me, the cooking has gotten better and it's not dangerous anymore." Isabella, sitting in the back, gave Adrian a look that made him even more nervous. He quickly added, "I promise it'll be tasty from now on

"Were you frightened staying at home alone today?" Isabella inquired softly, turning toward Damian. He initially nodded, then rethought and shook his head. Puzzled by his mixed signals, Isabella pressed, "What's with the nod first and then the shake?"

Damian took a moment to organize his thoughts before explaining. "I missed you when you were gone and felt scared when I couldn't find you. But then Daddy came home and we played games together, which made me feel much better." Isabella gave his tiny hand a comforting squeeze.

With Carly having started her own family, Isabella found she could no longer rely on her as she had in the past. At times, she felt a profound loneliness and uncertainty about her place in the world. However, everything transformed when she unexpectedly became pregnant with Damian, who then became her new focus and anchor in life. Together, she felt they could make any place feel like home.

away from Adrian's entry into their life had been unexpected and initially, Isabella feared he might attempt to take Damian from her. Over time, however, her fears subsided as Adrian proved his intentions were genuine. He didn't try to separate Damian from her; instead,

he expressed a desire to marry her and build a regular, wholesome family; it was a prospect Isabella had once thought impossible, particularly as she was unaware of who Damian's biological father was. His birth had been a result of an unplanned event.

After living together for six months, Isabella realized she did not love Adrian, but neither did she dislike him. Maybe she was simply guarded emotionally, but she acknowledged that if Adrian was committed to helping raise Damian and forging a life together, it was an opportunity worth considering. This realization led her to consent to Carly's suggestion of arranging a meeting with his parents,

However, despite her pragmatic approach, the notion of spending her life with Adrian, sharing a bed night after night, still unnerved her. "I don't love you," she stated bluntly to Adrian. "But if you remain

faithful, avoid relationships with other women, and concentrate on our family and Damian, I'll consider marrying you. Let's raise him together," she proposed calmly.

Through the rearview mirror, Adrian nodded, "You don't need to worry. Besides my mom and Stacey, there aren't any other women in my life," he assured her earnestly, Isabella, skeptical of his claim, wondered how a man as good-looking as Adrian had no other admirers. "I've been too busy with work to get involved with anyone," Adrian explained further, hoping to ease her worries.

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Isabella's face hardened as she warned, "You better not be lying can't stand being deceived. Adrian remained silent, taking a moment to fully absorb the gravity of her words. "Remember, I may only have Carly, but I'm not someone you can dismiss lightly. If you ever hurt me, don't think I'll just sit back and accept it, she continued, her tone firm and resolute,

As Adrian glanced at Isabella through the rearview mirror, despite her evident anger, he found her expression, with cheeks puffed like a pufferfish, strangely endearing. A small smile crept across his face. "All right, if I ever deceive you...." he began, his tone lightening. However, his voice trailed off abruptly. The truth was, although he had never been romantically involved with anyone else, he had omitted to tell her a significant detail about his life – his family background. Isabella's piercing gaze sent a shiver down his spine. Realizing his hesitation might have betrayed him, he quickly added in a rush, "If I ever deceive you, I promise I'll take care of you for life."

Isabella, now visibly upset and suspicious, pressed him further, "How many women have you been involved with before?" Realizing the potential implication of her question, she quickly rephrased, "I

mean, are you currently seeing someone else?" Her suspicion intensified, casting doubt on his suitability as a lifelong partner. Overwhelmed with frustration, she abruptly

declared, "Forget it. It seems we won't be getting married after all. I'm capable of raising Damian on my own. Stop the car. I'll get a taxi home with Damian."

Adrian's mind reeled. 'Why is her intuition so spot-on? I only hesitated for a mere second! Desperate to clarify the misunderstanding, he pleaded, "I swear, I'm not involved with any other women. If I were unfaithful to you or ever caused you harm, may lightning strike me down?"