

A Man with Nerves of Steel

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“Nat, go get some sleep,” Bernard commanded, before looking directly at Joseph “Joseph, come with me to the study. I need to have a word with you.”

Bernard could tell right away that Natalie was trying to talk her way out of things. A hint of displeasure crossed his face, but he didn’t say anything.

Once inside the study, Joseph let out a yawn. “It’s almost dawn and I haven’t slept a wink, so I’ll just cut to the chase.

“Natalie said she followed Cora to a club. She was trying to track down the guy Cora had been sneaking around-the one who might be her biological father.

“After she was discovered, she was taken to the precinct. Since she didn’t contact any of you and left my contact information instead, they had no choice but to call me.

“When it gets light out, talk to Cora. Tell her to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother. That’s the whole story. If you don’t need anything else, I’m leaving.”

“Hold on, Joseph,” Bernard called out, stopping him in his tracks. “I’ve got a question. Is that paternity test real?”

Joseph let out a dry scoff. “Cora can fool herself all she wants, but surely you’re not irrational enough to question science? I’ll be straight with you. Even if the world ended tomorrow, those results would still be real.

“Natalie is not, and never could be, my biological daughter. To me, Natalie is nothing more than some bastard kid Cora had with another man!”

Bernard frowned for a moment upon hearing the word “bastard”, his expression darkening. This matter was enough to bring shame to him and the entire Lowell family.

Trying to keep a clear head, Joseph rubbed his temples, adding, “As Cora’s father, you ought to know everything about her. Are you seriously telling me you didn’t know about the man she is seeing on the side?”

“I refuse to believe that Cora is that kind of woman,” Bernard huffed, though he didn’t sound too confident, especially not with that paternity test staring him in the face.

“You’re her father-of course you’re taking her side! Regardless, I might as well be real with you. I only slept with Cora after we got married, but Natalie was conceived before that.

“In short, I got played for a fool. I ended up raising some other guy’s kid. I bet you guys planned to take advantage of an honest man like me from the start!”

“I didn’t know anything about this, and I would never plot against you. What do you even have that’s worth plotting for? I will ask Cora about this. If she really were with another man, she wouldn’t have hidden it from me...”

“Who in their right mind would willingly admit to doing something so scandalous?” Joseph sneered. “Even though the test results are already out, Cora still hasn’t admitted to it, so what makes you think she’d come clean? You’re just deluding yourself. Do you have anything else to say?”

Joseph didn’t believe Cora would confess for a second. If anything, he figured she’d only continue hiding the truth and take it to her grave.

Bernard questioned, “What made you think of getting a paternity test at a time like this anyway? Are you after my family’s wealth? I only have a daughter, and she gave birth to three daughters.

“Did you see the absence of a male heir in my lineage as a chance to get your hands on my family’s fortune?”

“I can’t believe you’d think that I’m some selfish opportunist trying to claim what isn’t mine...”

“One can’t judge a book by its cover. You may have been diligent and subservient for more than a decade, but who’s to say it wasn’t just an act? Now that there’s an opportunity, you can’t help but finally show your true colors! Am I wrong?”

Chapter

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Then would you even give me the opportunity?” Joseph countered.

“In your dreams! What isn’t meant for you will never be yours. I would sooner die than hand you even a penny! I’ll make sure a schemer like you ends up with absolutely nothing! And I always keep my word!”

“So this was your true intention all along. Since that’s the case, then there’s nothing left to say! If you don’t want me eyeing your money, then hurry up and get Cora to agree to the divorce!”

Joseph was done wasting his breath on him.

“Joseph, once morning comes, I’ll have my lawyer get you to sign an agreement stating that you have no plans to go after the Lowell family fortune,” Bernard dictated. “That’s the only way I’ll trust you. If you refuse, I’ll have no choice but to make the first move and drive you out of Jenton!”

“You want to drive me out of Jenton?” Joseph shot back, his voice rising in disbelief.
“What right do you have?”

“I have the right because I’m a Lowell! The Lowell family spent generations building our influence in Jenton. As such, I can rally people with a single call. I won’t allow an outsider to harm my family’s empire! You’d better not forget that I’m a man of my word!”

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Since the conversation was going nowhere, Joseph simply left without another word. On his way back, his mood was dark. However, Bernard’s words had forced him to see reality with absolute clarity.

“I’m just a nobody of a doctor!”

Joseph let out a self-deprecating laugh. Once he accepted his own mediocrity, he actually felt a lot lighter.

He hurried back to get some rest, but before 8:00 am, a phone call woke him up. It was the ICU head nurse telling him to get to work as soon as possible-Gregory Barlow, the department's deputy director, had finally found an excuse to come after him.

"I've got no beef with him. He never gave me a hard time before, so why is he targeting me today?"

Joseph felt helpless. After washing up, he hurried to the ICU.

"Oh, Dr. Hart, you're finally here. Dr. Barlow marked you as late. You're on the morning shift now after he adjusted the schedule. Did you forget to check the shift changes last night?"

The head nurse, Paige Yates, knew Joseph had only gotten off work after midnight, so she understood he needed to catch up on sleep.

"Yeah, I got back too late and had some stuff to deal with. I just didn't have the time."

Joseph glanced at the attendance sheet and saw he had indeed been marked late. Since there was nothing he could do about it, he threw on his white coat and headed to the morning case discussion meeting.

Little did he expect to be called out the second he walked in. Gregory barked, "From now on, anyone who shows up late like Joseph can skip the morning meeting altogether!"

“A doctor who can’t even be on time and has zero concept of time has no business working in the ICU. They can seek greener pastures elsewhere.”

As their eyes met, Joseph could tell that Gregory seemed displeased with him, which only confused him further. Gregory was already the deputy director of their department. Was there really a need to get ahead at his expense?

Joseph said, “I’m sorry for being late. I’m reflecting on it, and I’m ready to hear any criticism you have.”

“Then why don’t you tell us why you were late?”

“My alarm clock just happened to break, so I didn’t wake up on time. I’ve already sent it flying into the trash so that it can find greener pastures elsewhere.”

Joseph shot a glance at Gregory, found a seat, and started flipping through the case files.

The other doctors chuckled, but when they saw Gregory’s face harden into a dark scowl, they quickly shut their mouths.

Joseph could sense Gregory’s animosity. He was annoyed too, but since he was indeed late, he didn’t snap back at Gregory directly.

After the meeting, Joseph went to check on the patient who had woken up after last night's surgery. Their condition was taking a turn for the better.

However, a female family member of theirs wanted to transfer the patient to a top-tier hospital in one of the major cities for further rehabilitation treatment.

Joseph respected their decision, but he refused to be the doctor in charge of escorting them for the transfer.

During a lull, Paige noticed no one was around and whispered to Joseph, "I just found out why Dr. Barlow has a problem with you. Apparently, Dr. Tate rejected the person Dr. Barlow recommended and put your name on the list instead."

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What list? Dr. Tate never mentioned anything like that to me."

"For the deputy director position! Dr. Hart, I'm congratulating you in advance. it becomes official, you'll have to treat me to dinner," Paige explained with a smile.

The more she looked at Joseph, the more she adinired him. There was just something unique about him.

“With how many talented people there are in this hospital, it’s unlikely that I’d get the position. Still, thanks for the kind words. If I really do get promoted, I’ll definitely buy everyone dinner.”

Joseph had always kept a low profile. With his years of experience and medical expertise, he had every reason to expect a promotion and a raise.

However, recent events had left him unwilling to hope for it, especially since Cora still had leverage over him. Even if she had been the one behind it, exposing it would still be enough to destroy him.

Outside, the lawyer Bernard had sent over found Joseph and gave him a document. It wasn’t Fiona, but some other old lawyer

with a combover.

Joseph looked at the content. It was an agreement requiring him to give up any inheritance rights to the Lowell family’s assets and forbidding him from doing all sorts of things, which was extremely unreasonable and heavy-handed.

After reading it, Joseph shook his head. “I’m not illiterate. The terms of this agreement are unfair, so I can’t sign it. Go tell Bernard that if he wants my signature, he needs to meet my demands first.”

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That afternoon, Travis Tate, the director of the ICU department, called Joseph in. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he handed Joseph a document.

It was about Joseph’s promotion to associate chief physician and his appointment as deputy director of the ICU department.

Joseph didn’t have any objections, but before signing, he had to ask Travis, “There are plenty of doctors who are better than me or have more solid résumés in our department. How did an opportunity like this end up with me?”

“Dr. Loughlin said that, considering your many years here and your exceptional medical expertise, you were long overdue for a promotion.

“Your promotion within the medical title system has already been approved. We’re still waiting for the actual certificate, but in effect, you’re already an associate chief physician.

“Do you know what score you got on the theory test organized by the hospital last time? You’re the only one who got a perfect score! Dr. Loughlin made that test a prerequisite for the position.

“Since you ranked first, they couldn’t possibly pass you over for a promotion under fair conditions.

“Your performance these past few days has shown everyone just how capable you are. You deserve this without question. If you have no objections, we’ll proceed with the official announcement.”

Travis actually had his own candidate in mind, but since Walt chose Joseph, he naturally supported the decision.

After hearing what Travis had to say, Joseph realized Walt was grooming him. Promoting him was a means to give him greater responsibilities and pressure.

With the higher-ups already signing off on it, that meant that this conversation with Travis was just a formality.

The fact that there was zero warning beforehand meant Joseph had jumped the line and taken the place of someone from Gregory’s faction.

Still, his conscience was clear. Given his ability and experience, under normal circumstances, he should already be leading a department.

The promotion itself didn't make Joseph particularly excited. He didn't really have anyone to share it with anyway.

Besides, during the public review period, he could still be removed if he made any mistakes. Hence, nothing was guaranteed yet.

After finishing up some work in the department, he went back to his dorm to work on his PhD.

When he got to the department the next day, many of his colleagues greeted him respectfully, which made him feel a little awkward.

At first, he tried to explain he was still in the review phase, but that just made them flatter him even harder. In the end, he had no choice but to carry himself with some authority.

When Joseph crossed paths with Gregory, he found Gregory's smile forced and painfully fake. Still, rather than confronting him directly, Joseph chose to yield a little.

A few days later, Joseph had just managed to save a critical patient and hadn't even had time for a sip of water when he was summoned to Travis' office.

Travis closed the door, rubbing his hands anxiously. “Dr. Hart, how could you possibly make such a blatant mistake at such an important time? All the effort Dr. Loughlin and the rest of us put in for you has gone to waste!”

Sure enough, the other shoe dropped. Joseph frowned. He was mentally prepared for this, so he wasn’t flustered at all. “Dr. Tate, tell me what happened first. If it’s really my mistake, then I’ll accept whatever blame comes my way.”

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Travis pulled an envelope from his drawer and handed it to Joseph.

There were quite a few things inside the envelope, including photos and written statements.

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The photos were pretty damning One showed a curvaceous woman in a revealing outfit and sunglasses arriving at Joseph’s dorm room late at night. The others showed her engaging in unspeakable acts with Joseph irrside before leaving two hours later.

As for the written statements, they were mostly accusing him of getting wasted at bars. Included was a stack of hotel check-in records, ultimately portraying Joseph as a womanizer.

The photos and written allegations painted Joseph as someone who was morally compromised and undeserving of his position.

Joseph, who had been calm as still water, could no longer maintain his composure. Artd that was because Cora had backstabbed

him.

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Joseph denied it outright. These are all fabricated accusations, nothing more than dirty tricks to keep me from becoming deputy director.”

Travis had expected Joseph to panic, but to his surprise, Joseph didn’t even flinch. Instead, he was frighteningly calm. He couldn’t help but think that the person Walt picked was really something else.

“This situation completely caught me off guard. I need to check with Dr. Loughlin and see where he stands. I haven’t been able to get a hold of him yet, so I can’t just sweep this under the rug for you right now.”

“Even if Dr. Loughlin does rush back, I doubt he can fix this in time.”

Joseph had a feeling that the Lowell family still had connections within the hospital. Since Cora wanted to bring him down, she wouldn’t let such an opportunity go to waste. She chose now to strike because Walt wasn’t around.

And sure enough, his hunch was right. The door flew open at that moment. Marvin Pierce, the associate director of the hospital who oversaw discipline and professional conduct, stormed in with several others.

He announced to Joseph, “You have undermined the ethical standards of our hospital with your scandalous private life. Per policy, you are suspended from all duties effective immediately.

“You also have to move out of the hospital dorms. You can leave the hospital now, but keep your phone on. We reserve the right to hold you accountable for this.”

Joseph’s expression became grim. Even if he could clear his name this time, he no longer wanted to stay at the hospital. Still, he would miss the place since he had been working there for over a decade.

Travis hurriedly tried to defend him. “We’re not even done with the investigation yet-”

Marvin interjected, “This is the administration’s decision. Your department merely needs to carry it out.”

Joseph didn’t bother explaining himself. After leaving the department, he packed his stuff in the dorm, loaded everything into his car, and drove off.

He didn’t go to a hotel this time. After making a trip to the courthouse and finding out that his divorce petition still couldn’t be accepted immediately, he headed for Cora’s place.

“Mr. Hart...”

Joseph simply gave Mary a glance and said nothing. After entering the house, he inspected the kitchen and found a few hygiene issues and some unlabeled homemade foods in the refrigerator.

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They were cured meat from Mary's hometown and some pickles she had made herself. Using these issues as grounds, he dismissed Mary on the spot.

When Mary called Cora to tell her about it, Cora was equally shocked. She tried calling Joseph, but he didn't answer, so she had

no choice but to rush back to handle it.

When she got home, she found Joseph pouring himself a drink, sipping on the best vintage in the house.

"Joe, what's wrong?"

Instead of answering her question, Joseph poured Cora a glass of wine and handed it to her. "Want a drink?"

“Sure. It’s been a long time since we’ve had a drink together.”

Cora scrutinized Joseph. She could tell he was pissed, but she was sure she held the upper hand. As such, she accepted the glass and even clinked glasses with him.

“Mary, whip up some appetizers for Joe and me. I want to have a few drinks with him.”

+15 Bonus

Gora took the chance to assign Mary work, prompting her to hurry into the kitchen to cook.

Seeing Joseph pour himself another drink and raise his glass, Cora wondered if he was planning to get her drunk. If that were the case, he’d better have the alcohol tolerance for it. There was no saying who’d be the one getting drunk that night.

Even after a few more drinks with Joseph, she remained perfectly sober. In fact, she became more energized.

One glass led to another, and before they knew it, three bottles had already been emptied. Both had flushed faces, but neither

was drunk.

Joseph remained clear-headed and quick with his words, while Cora's speech had begun to slur slightly.

When Cora went into the bathroom, Joseph got up to get some water with honey. Upon seeing Mary wiping the table in a bent- over position, he walked right up to her and slapped her backside.

Shocked, Mary sprang back and stammered, "Mr. Hart, you..."

"Would that count as harassment just now? If it does, you can sue me. That way, you'll get a huge payout."

"Mr. Hart, you're drunk. You should go rest."

Mary knew Joseph's sudden out-of-character behavior had to be a setup.

"Oh, and Cora said she wanted you to sleep with me. Do you think she was talking nonsense because she was drunk, or was she serious?"

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Joseph didn't care what choice Mary made, because she might not have any choice at all. If Cora was willing to plant a woman in his dorm to frame him, then it was only natural that Mary be treated as a disposable pawn as well.

Of course, Mary wasn't his target. It was Cora.

He glanced at Mary, who was still frozen there. Was she really foolish or pretending to be? Wouldn't it be better to take the money and leave? If she wouldn't do as told, then she didn't deserve any sympathy from him.

He went into the guest room and fell asleep as soon as he collapsed onto the bed.

After washing up, Cora was going to ask Joseph to go back to their room. She assumed their relationship was fixed and that Joseph had come around and was ready to compromise.

She intended to sleep with him later to deepen their connection, and of course, to satisfy the desires she had been suppressing

for so long.

When she found out Joseph had gone to the guest room, she told Mary to find the key to the room. Upon noticing Mary's odd expression, she said, "After Joe ate the food you made, he didn't complain about it or say you had to leave.

"What he said about firing you just now was just him venting, so don't take it to heart. Just do your job. Oh, and if Joe looks like he's in a bad mood, try to stay out of his sight."

Mary hesitated for a bit before finally saying, "I will. But just now, he told me to sleep with him and that you had agreed to it. I..."

Cora was confused for a second, so she had Mary repeat herself. After thinking about it for a moment, she said, "Those were just Joe's drunken words. Don't take them seriously. He's not that sort of man, and you're not that sort of woman either."

She trusted that Joseph had standards. He would never touch an old, ugly woman like Mary. She grabbed the key, opened the guest room door, and woke Joseph up.

“Why are you sleeping here? Come back to our room. Our bed is much more comfortable.”

“Oh? This isn’t our room? I must’ve walked into the wrong one.”

Rubbing his eyes, Joseph got up and headed to the master bedroom. Along the way, he took off his clothes and dropped them on the floor. By the time he got to the bed, he was buck naked.

“At least the woman you set me up with was clean. She didn’t pass on any nasty diseases. If you want to do it, you’ll have to do the work yourself. I’m exhausted and can’t be bothered to move.”

“Are you still blaming me for that? Honestly, I regret it now. If I could choose again, I wouldn’t have done it. I’ve given you time to think things over. You should understand how I feel by now.”

“If you’re not going to do it, I’m going to sleep.”

Joseph didn’t want to hear it. The booze was hitting him hard, making him genuinely drowsy. Plus, working in the ICU had always been demanding. He never slacked off on a single patient, and the pressure was immense.

Now that he was suspended, he was mentally drained. Pulling the blanket over himself, he prepared to sleep.

He caught a glimpse of a distinct glint in Cora's eyes. It was unmistakably lust.

"You're still mad at me! Why are you making me do all the work? You're usually the one who initiates things. Though... you must be tired since you haven't been eating or sleeping well lately. Fine, if you won't move, then I will."

Cora was riding a wave of desire right now. She didn't want to hold back anymore, so she took the lead. They were in her own home, after all. She didn't need to suppress or hide her needs any longer.

The moment they became one, Joseph knitted his brows. Staring at Cora, he asked, "Cora, do you regret the things you've done?"

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"I regret the decision to set you up with that woman. I shouldn't have let another woman have you. But for everything else, my conscience is clear. I don't regret anything!"

“Honey, you have to believe me. You’re the only man I have! Once I got together with you, I frever looked at another man! You are my only love, my only man, whether that’s in the past, present, or the future...”

“If you don’t regret it, then fine.”

Joseph was starting to think there was no use crying over spilled milk. Having already fallen into the tattooed woman’s honey trap, he no longer saw himself as untainted.

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The next morning, Cora pulled back the curtains, letting a ray of sunlight shine directly onto the bed.

Joseph frowned slightly but didn’t open his eyes. He simply rolled over, unwilling to get up. Hungover, he felt a bit drained. Since the hospital had suspended him, he didn’t need to go to work.

The thought that the three children his wife had given birth to were not his made him feel like a pathetic loser.

Cora, however, had no idea Joseph was thinking all this. She simply assumed he was just groggy from the hangover.

Leaning over, she kissed him on the cheek and forehead before speaking in a soft voice. "Get some more sleep. I'll go check on Selena and Kimberly."

Seeing no reaction from Joseph, Cora continued, "Honey, all the effort I put into my work is for you and our children!

"To be honest, managing a corporation this big with so many people under me Isn't easy as a woman. But just the thought of having you and the kids at home keeps me going every time. So I hope you won't make things harder for me,"

"Stop talking. Let me sleep."

Joseph was skeptical of her words. He was more inclined to believe that the person keeping her going was her lover.

For someone as accomplished as Cora, having three children with some random man must have come at an unimaginable cost.

If she didn't genuinely love her lover, why would she willingly bear those children? Even after things had reached this point, Cora still refused to divorce him and let him go.

Joseph slept a bit longer before taking a shower. He then walked out wearing a bathrobe.

Mary happened to be in the living room. When she saw Joseph, she stood up hurriedly and said softly, "Mr. Hart, you're up. What would you like to eat? I'll go make it now."

But Joseph ignored her completely as he walked straight into the study. Mary felt confused, wondering if sleeping with him was the only thing that would make him happy.

She hurried to the gym in the basement to tell Cora, who was in the middle of doing yoga, what had happened. Wiping her sweat, Cora told Mary to prepare breakfast. She then took the food into the study herself.

"Honey, you're up. You drank so much yesterday. Your stomach must be upset. I got you something light to eat. Come and have some. Oh my gosh, why are you watching that?"

Walking closer, Cora noticed that Joseph was watching an anatomy dissection video. The images were graphic, and since she wasn't in the medical field, she found them hard to handle.

“I’m a doctor. If I don’t watch this stuff, what am I supposed to do? You don’t expect me to work at your company, do you?”

“You might trust me, but your parents sure don’t. Just the other day, they told me you’re their only child and that you’ve only had daughters. And they warned me not to set my sights on your family fortune.”

Joseph paused the video and stood up.

“Don’t take my parents’ words to heart. They didn’t mean to target you. We’ve had misunderstandings lately, but now that we’ve cleared the air, let’s just move on. Honey, you don’t need to go to work. Just stay home.”

“Stay home so that you can support me?”

“I didn’t mean it like that. I just want you to live freely and not have so much pressure.”

“I can live freely? Wow, thank you so much! To show you my love, I can only offer myself in return and devote my whole life to you, since I have no other way to repay you.”

Chapter

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With a smile, Joseph pulled Cora into his arms and kissed her.

Outside the door, Mary hadn't gone far. She was eavesdropping, worried that Joseph might bring up firing her again.

The whispering inside turned out to be Cora telling Joseph to stay home and be a kept man. Mary couldn't help but feel anxious.

Then, after a brief silence, Mary heard Cora's voice.

"No... It hurts..."

Mary immediately felt her face grow warm. It was obvious to her that the two were going at it again. She couldn't help looking down on Joseph, thinking that this was how he pleased Cora.

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“Honey, you did all that to get back at me! You’re not allowed to touch me again tonight. And go sleep in the guest room!”

Cora pushed Joseph off her. She was a bit displeased, but it wasn’t because he did a bad job. On the contrary, his skills were top- tier, and he made her feel amazing.

Ever since Joseph came back, whenever he had free time, he’d cling to her, asking for it. At first, she needed it too, so they had

fun nonstop.

But gradually, Cora realized Joseph’s stamina was more than she could handle. He was like a high-powered sports car with a gas tank that never ran dry.

Naturally, his relentless intensity was more than her body could handle, and she ended up injured. Pushed to the limit and denied basic respect, she finally put her foot down to assert her authority.

Joseph didn’t say a word. He went to get some water, washed up, and then went into the study.

In the evening, Selena and Kimberly came home from school. They were both happy to see Joseph. Selena was a bit reserved, but Kimberly was a whole different story.

Rushing toward him, Kimberly wrapped her arms around his leg, calling him “Dad” repeatedly in an affectionate voice. Her innocence and cuteness brought life and warmth to the home.

Joseph had mixed feelings. Looking at his two beautiful daughters, whom he had put so much effort into raising, he was reminded that they were actually bastards Cora had had with someone else.

He wanted to explode, to tear this whole family apart. Even so, his wisdom and the maturity that came with being 40 kept him from being that impulsive. He believed he still had a future, so he forced himself to suppress the urge for revenge.

Regardless of the circumstances, the children knew nothing. They were still young, and they shouldn’t have to bear the consequences of an adult’s mistakes.

Joseph tried to act just like he always did. “Go wash your hands first. I’ll check your homework after you’re done eating.”

“You don’t need to check mine. I’m doing very well in school!”

Selena was brimming with confidence. She was at the top of her class in every subject. She even excelled in sports. Whether it was track and field, ball games, or even mind sports, she could effortlessly claim first place if she set her mind to it.

“I don’t have homework, so you don’t need to check mine!” Kimberly said with a giggle.

She had just started elementary school, so she barely had any homework.

Fine, then no checks for anyone. They could do whatever they wanted.

Joseph generously gave them some freedom. Normally, he’d be all over their holistic education, from reading and writing to music, chess, art, and physical fitness.

He spared no effort in the hope that they would become more exceptional than both him and Cora. But after learning the children were not biologically his, reality turned harsh, and the three daughters had become, in his eyes, someone else’s children.

And someone else’s children did not concern him, nor were they his responsibility.

That evening, Selena’s tutor came over to teach her Orimplad maths. Joseph told the tutor not to rush into the lesson. Instead, he handed a test paper to both the tutor and Selena, then collected them when time was up.

After grading the papers, he found that the tutor couldn't solve a single problem, whereas Selena only got a third of them right. Joseph fired the tutor on the spot, though he did make sure they were paid all the compensation that was due first.

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When Cora saw the results of Joseph's test, her first thought was that Joseph was right and that the tutor was incompetent.

But over the next two days, she noticed that none of the tutors she hired could pass Joseph's test. She was pleasantly surprised by Joseph's brilliance and assumed that since he didn't have to work at the hospital, he would devote himself more to tutoring Selena and Kimberly.

Feeling reassured, she began going to social events to maintain her friendships, and she often stayed out from morning until late at night. That was, until Mary snitched. Joseph wasn't tutoring Selena and Kimberly at all. He was letting them play video games instead.

She began to feel a vague sense of unease. Joseph seemed different ever since he came back home.

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Joseph was smoking on the balcony of the study when Kimberly came over to tell him Helen was here.

“Got it. Go play.”

Joseph didn’t really care, so instead of going out to greet Helen, he lit up another cigarette.

Not long after, Helen stormed in and started chewing Joseph out immediately. “What kind of father are you? How can you let them play video games? You’re going to spoil them rotten.

“Spoil them? What do you mean? Does turning them into someone like Cora, who betrays her family, betrays her marriage, and is addicted to cheating, count as successful parenting? I certainly don’t want them growing up to become people like that,” Joseph retorted bluntly.

“You dare talk about Cora like that? You’ve got a lot of nerve.”

“If she has the nerve to do it, I have the nerve to call it out! I’d say it to her face, too. Because it’s the truth, and I have proof! Mrs. Lowell, if you have a problem with how I’m

raising them, or if you just have a problem with me, then tell Cora to divorce me. I'll walk!"

Helen, once the heiress of the prestigious York family in Jenton, had seen her family profit greatly over the years through frequent business partnerships with Cora as Cora's wealth continued to grow.

"Proof? What proof? That paternity test? Hmph! Cora said that's fake. You're just waving a fake document around, trying to act important. Who are you trying to fool?"

Joseph chuckled loudly. "Mrs. Lowell, logically, given that you are a visiting professor at Jenton University and honorary vice- chair of the Jenton Writers Association, you shouldn't be an uneducated person.

"If one day a doctor told you that you and Cora weren't blood relatives, you'd do a DNA test too, right? The only thing you could trust would be scientific evidence.

"At the moment, Cora is telling bald-faced lies, and yet you're going along with it. Oh, I get it now. You know who Cora's lover is. You know who Natalie's biological father is, and you've all been deceiving me!"

"You really know how to make outrageous accusations—"

Joseph cut Helen off, "I might be blunt, but my point stands. If you can't stand me, then take them to live at your place."

He stepped out, called Selena and Kimberly over, and told them to pack their stuff as they would be staying at Helen's house that night. Without waiting for anyone's opinion, he headed to the outdoor swimming pool.

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He swam until he was exhausted. When he got out, he realized that Helen had already taken the two children away. And instead of messing with Mary, he simply went back to his room to rest.

Sometime before daybreak, he woke up and went to the master bedroom looking for Cora, only to find that she still hadn't

returned.

"Off meeting her lover again, huh? That trashy woman!"

With a look of disdain written all over his face, Joseph changed his clothes and went out for a drive.

He came back at dawn, ate breakfast, and went back to his room to catch up on sleep. Joseph then woke up at 10:00 am, worked out, and read a book.

Before noon, Bernard arrived with three bodyguards. Without giving Joseph a chance to speak, he had them restrain Joseph.

“What did I tell you before?” Bernard asked coldly. “I told you not to come back and to leave Cora. Why did you return?”

Joseph let out a sneer. “You and your daughter are something else. One forces me to leave, the other makes it impossible for me

+15 Bonus

to survive outside of this home. Are you playing games with me?”

“Teach him a lesson!”

At Bernard’s command, one of the bodyguards stepped forward. He struck Joseph several times with no restraint, causing Joseph’s gums to bleed.

Joseph ran his tongue over his teeth, then spat a mouthful of bloody saliva right onto Bernard’s shirt. Bernard flew into a rage, ordering his bodyguards to drag Joseph into the yard and beat the living daylights out of him.

Once Joseph was knocked flat, Bernard walked over and said, “I already told you-go against me, and there won’t be a place left for you in Jenton.”

“Hmph! I didn’t do anything wrong!”

Joseph spat out another mouthful of blood. He had zero intention of backing down.

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Bernard signaled the bodyguards to keep going. He was going to beat Joseph into submission that day.

Seeing that Joseph was being beaten again and Bernard showing no sign of stopping, Mary quickly called Cora.

Shocked, Cora immediately called Bernard and gave him an earful. Only then did Bernard call off the assault.

“Don’t think you can act all arrogant just because Cora is protecting you! As long as you’re in Jenton, I can deal with you

whenever I want!”

Having made that threat, Bernard stormed off.

Support

admin

A Man with Nerves of Steel

Joseph lay on the ground, his eyes unfocused and filled with helplessness. The sky was overcast, mirroring his mood and his situation perfectly.

Mary came over. Noticing that Joseph was still breathing, she asked, “Are you okay? Should I call an ambulance?”

Joseph didn’t respond. After catching his breath for a bit and realizing he wasn’t in bad shape, he got up and went back inside. He had a first-aid kit, so he patched himself up.

Less than ten minutes later, Cora rushed in.

“Joe, are you okay?”

Cora looked him over. There were obvious marks on his face from the beating, and she could see a cut at the corner of his mouth.

“How could they hit you in the face? Dad went way too far! Joe, Dad didn’t really mean to hurt you. He was just mad about how you were educating the kids.

“He is super strict when it comes to them. And since my mom was badmouthing you, he just got upset,” Cora hurriedly explained, trying to prevent further misunderstanding.

“Cora, this isn’t the first time your dad has put his hands on me. Should I fight back?”

“Definitely not. He’s in his 60s. How can you hit an old man? Joe, my dad was in the wrong this time. I’ll apologize on his behalf and compensate you. Let’s just let this matter go.”

“Let’s just get a divorce. I’ve already tolerated your infidelity and the fact that you had children with another man. I don’t want any compensation from you anymore. All I want now is a divorce!”

“You... Why are you bringing this up again? How many times do I have to tell you that I didn’t cheat and that Natalie is your daughter?”

“If you keep letting your imagination run wild, I’ll start to think that you’re suffering from paranoia. Don’t make me send you to a psychiatric hospital for treatment.”

“You think I’m crazy?”

As their eyes met, Joseph suddenly realized she might actually send him to a psychiatric hospital. That way, she could keep the marriage going and perfectly cover up her affair.

“Just think about everything you’ve done lately. You’ve secretly taken a paternity test, run away, taken me to court, demanded billions in compensation, and fired the kids’ tutor. Which of these is normal?”

“If you’re not mentally ill, then behave yourself and stop causing trouble.”

Cora gave Joseph a hard stare, adding, “Even if you really are mentally ill, I still won’t divorce you! You know I love you. I’ll take care of you-I’ll look past all of it!”

“Cora, whatever you say goes, so what else can I even say? Fine. I won’t bring it up anymore. Happy now?”

Joseph felt powerless, but deep down, a small flame was steadily growing stronger. When it finally broke out, someone would surely be reduced to ashes.

Seeing that Joseph's gaze had softened, Cora felt relieved as she was sure he had backed down. Looking at his injuries, she asked, "Are you alright? Do you need to go to the hospital?"

"No. They're just superficial wounds."

Joseph found Cora's concern fake and hypocritical. He went out to the balcony to smoke and saw Cora asking Mary some questions.

Choptat 318

+15 Bonus

He couldn't figure out why Cora still refused to divorce. With a silent sigh, he decided he would have to find the other man, apply pressure, and force the children onto him.

Even if the man didn't want the kids, he would still have to take responsibility. Only then would Cora admit everything.

Half an hour later, Cora brought in a group of people. There were four tall, sturdy middle-aged men and one slightly plump middle-aged woman. The woman introduced herself as a doctor and said she was there to examine Joseph.

However, the type of examination pissed Joseph off. It was a full psychiatric evaluation. Without a doubt, if the results suggested he was mentally ill, Cora would not hesitate to have him taken away or confined for treatment.

Once again, Joseph was plunged into a kind of despair beyond feeling

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

+15 Bonus

Once the evaluation was over, Joseph was sent to his room to rest, with those four burly middle-aged guys standing guard outside. Cora and the doctor moved to the sitting room, where Mary served the doctor a cup of tea,

She then stepped back but stayed nearby, remaining within earshot.

Cora was deeply concerned, so she got straight to the point. “How is Joe? Does he have any mental issues?”

“No, there’s nothing wrong with him. He might just be under a lot of stress. Don’t pressure him too much. He’ll adjust with time. His emotional state is quite unstable, and he can become impulsive at times.

“If he can take his medication as instructed, I can prescribe some mild sedatives to calm his mind.

The doctor’s evaluation found zero evidence to support a mental illness diagnosis.

“Glad to hear that.”

Cora slipped the doctor some cash as hush money before asking Mary to see her out. She then took the medicine to Joseph.

“What are these?”

Although Joseph was highly skilled in medicine and could recognize most drugs, the pills Cora gave him had no packaging. They looked like sleeping pills, but not quite the same.

“Sedatives. They’ll help you sleep so you won’t be so agitated.”

“And if I don’t take them?”

“I’m worried you’ll do something drastic to hurt my parents or our daughters. You’re under a lot of pressure and may be overthinking things. You need to rest and let your brain relax. Honey, this is for your own good.”

“Cora, the weak can’t go against the strong. I’m no match for you all.”

Joseph took the pills before lying down to rest. Cora sat beside him until he was completely out cold.

Mary poured Cora a glass of water, asking, “Mr. Hart had been perfectly fine before. How did he suddenly end up like this?”

“Joe is fine. He won’t hurt us, so don’t overthink things. Oh, and as always, don’t gossip about our family matters to outsiders.”

Cora glanced at her schedule on her phone. She was supposed to attend a dinner engagement that evening. But after Bernard brought people to beat Joseph, things had changed.

Normally, she would still go. But with Joseph emotionally unstable, she thought it over and asked Fiona to attend in her place.

Late at night, Joseph woke up to find Cora right by his side, having fallen asleep in a chair. As soon as he got up, she woke up too.

“Joe, how are you feeling? Do you want water or something to eat?”

Joseph actually felt fine. Even though the bodyguards had worked him over, he didn’t have any internal injuries. He said he was hungry, so Cora got Mary to prepare a late-night snack.

Seeing Joseph walking into the bathroom and standing motionless under the shower, Cora followed him in after a moment’s thought.

Hugging him from behind, she murmured, “Honey, don’t scare me. You need to be okay. Let’s live a good life together! I love you! I really, really love you!”

Joseph’s lips twitched. Pulling Cora around to face him, he pressed his lips against hers. Upon receiving a response from her, he ripped her clothes right off.

After Mary was done making the late-night snack, she went to get Cora. Before she even reached the bedroom door, she heard

+15 Bonus

suggestive noises coming from the master bedroom, where the doot was ajar.

Her face immediately burned with embarrassment. Knowing Joseph's stamina, she figured it wouldn't be over anytime soon, so she went to keep the food warm and came back to eavesdrop.

A thought crossed her mind. She thought that if Joseph made a move, maybe she should give it a shot.

Early the next morning, Joseph was in the study reading when Cora came in with a tablet.

She showed him a set of photos. The three bodyguards who had beaten him up yesterday now had broken arms and legs.

Standing behind him, Cora kissed the top of his head and said, "Honey, you are my man. No one is allowed to hurt you."

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