

A Man with Nerves of Steel

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

Fiona didn't tell Joseph who gifted Cora the fish. Instead, she asked Joseph to ask Cora himself. Naturally, Joseph had no intention of doing that. He knew Córa would never tell the truth.

Still, Joseph had his wits about him. He tried hard to recall the details. The fish had been delivered two years ago, and at the time, Cora had even redesigned the courtyard just to build a pond for the fish.

Joseph said to himself, "So they really did mean something special to her."

Joseph suspected the person who gave Cora the fish was the lover, but suspicion alone meant nothing without evidence. After all, Cora was the kind of person who could even deny a DNA test.

After smoking a cigarette, he went outside and saw that Cora was gone. Meanwhile, Mary was cleaning up, preparing to throw away all the fish.

Joseph said, “No need to clean up. Go buy a few replacements from the pet store.

Mary replied, “You can’t get these from a regular pet store. Otherwise, Ms. Lowell wouldn’t be this angry.”

Joseph scoffed. “She’s just overreacting. I’ll clean this up later myself. For now, go buy a lamb from the market. I’ll roast a whole lamb tonight.”

Mary reluctantly left the house. After she left, Joseph began searching through receipts and records from two years ago. He searched the entire house inside and out but found nothing. It was possible that Cora had already destroyed the records.

So, Joseph went to the neighborhood security office. Fortunately, they still had security footage and registration records from

back then.

He found the vehicle that had delivered the fish. The driver had signed in under the name Meridian Group.

Joseph called the number listed in the records. Surprisingly, it still worked, and the driver was the same man. The driver claimed he didn’t know where the fish originally came from, but suggested Joseph visit Celestial Farm in the countryside, since they specialized in raising premium fish.

Without any delay, Joseph drove there immediately. Though it was at a remote location, the farm had a paved road leading to it, so it was quite convenient to get there.

The farm covered hundreds of acres, with forests, fields, and endless stretches of shaded canopies.

Joseph got straight to the point, saying that someone had recommended the place for high-end fish. He was soon taken to the specialized breeding area.

Looking at the densely packed fish swimming in the huge tanks, Joseph was utterly lost. He showed the staff photos of the fish from his home and asked them to identify the fish.

The manager was a young woman named Wendy Ashmore. She had short hair and a pretty face, and was wearing denim overalls and boots. She looked both stylish and independent.

“Do you even know what breed is in your photos?” Wendy had a favorable impression of Joseph, thinking he looked handsome and gentlemanly. She invited him into a reception room and poured him some coffee.

Joseph shrugged. “I have no idea.”

Wendy asked, “If you don’t know, then why are you trying to buy them?”

Joseph answered, “The ones at my house ended up moving from the pond onto the dining table, so now the pond is empty. My family’s unhappy about it, so I came to buy replacements.”

Wendy replied, “These are outdoor fish. They can’t be kept in indoor aquariums, let alone put on a dining table. What do you do for a living? Don’t you know how to raise fish?”

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Joseph shrugged: “I’m not a fish breeder. I think you misunderstood me. When I said I put them on the dining table, I didn’t mean I was raising them there. I meant I ate them. Look, they look pretty good, right? They tasted even better.”

Joseph pulled out photos of the fish feast.

“You... You actually ate them? Is something wrong with you?” The moment Wendy saw the photos, she felt as though she’d been struck by lightning. Her head was buzzing in disbelief. How could someone have turned such valuable fish into dinner? Her heart ached just looking at it.

Joseph said, “There’s nothing wrong with me. If you have more, sell them to me. Money’s not a problem.”

Wendy shouted, “You do have problems! Get out! My fish are not for eating, you bastard!”

Wendy was so agitated that she called workers in to throw Joseph out and ordered them never to let him back in again.

While he argued with the workers, Joseph managed to gather more information. Not only were these fish incredibly rare and valuable, but more importantly, this was the only place in existence where they could be found.

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Joseph mused to himself, “Cora, that lover of yours, and Natalie’s biological father, is he connected to this place? Or maybe he’s here right now. You really hid this place from me well. But no matter how carefully you hide something, you’ll always leave traces behind.”

The more Joseph thought about it, the more convinced he was of his theory. He still lacked definitive proof, but at least he had

narrowed it down.

He didn’t rush home. Along the way, he thought things through and realized that investigating alone probably wouldn’t get him far. So instead, he went straight to Natalie’s school. After speaking with the homeroom teacher, the teacher brought Natalie out

to meet him.

“What are you doing here?” Natalie’s expression darkened the moment she saw him. She became completely cold and distant.

This girl really was an ungrateful brat. Joseph raised her all these years for nothing.

He felt a dull ache in his chest, but he stayed calm outwardly, pretending not to care. He handed her a slip of paper with two

words written on it.

“Ashmore.”

“Meridian.”

Then, Joseph said, “Natalie, if my guess is right, your surname should be Ashmore. Natalie Ashmore sounds much better than Natalie Hart. Some Mr. Ashmore from Meridian Group is probably your biological father. It’s a pretty large company, too. So you might be a future heir. Isn’t that great?”

“So who exactly is this Mr. Ashmore?” Natalie’s eyes lit up. He hadn’t expected Joseph to make such a huge breakthrough after only a few days, especially since she herself had been obsessing over it without finding anything.

Joseph shrugged. “I don’t know yet. This is all I’ve found. Natalie, I know you want to get rid of me as your useless father, but you can’t just sit there doing nothing. Your mom and grandparents constantly have their guards up against me. My hands are tied. You need to do your part, too.”

Natalie said, “What exactly do you want me to do?”

Joseph shrugged. “How would I know what you’re capable of? But whenever you start investigating and hit a dead end, call me, and I’ll give you some advice. No matter what happens, though, in the end it’ll all come down to a DNA test.”

Natalie asked, “You mean I should go directly to this Mr. Ashmore and do a paternity test?”

Joseph shook his head. “Cora definitely has ways to monitor any DNA testing connected to you. The moment you submit a sample, she’ll know. So if you find any useful material, give it to me. I’ll handle the testing.”

Natalie raised an eyebrow. “You know how to do that?”

Joseph scoffed. “Don’t forget what my profession is. If it weren’t for you little bastards dragging me down, I’d have made it big long ago.”

“Fuck you! You’re the bastard! I have a real father!” Natalie cursed back angrily. Then, she got out of the car and stormed back into school. But after crossing the gate, she turned around once more.

Joseph was still sitting in the car, smoking, looking strangely lonely and depressed.

Natalie’s heart hardened. Joseph asked for it. It was his fault for marrying someone like Cora. He was just a poor loser who should hurry up and divorce Cora.

After that, Joseph still didn't go home. Instead, he went to his in-laws' house to visit Selena and Kimberly. Even though they weren't biologically his either, he still couldn't let them go emotionally.

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Bernard and Helen were reluctant, but they still let him inside. Joseph chatted with the girls for a while, then stayed in the living room watching TV instead of leaving.

When dinner hadn't started after a long time, he noticed Bernard and Helen constantly messaging someone.

He said, "Are you trying to contact Coral Don't bother wasting your effort. This morning, I slaughtered the fish someone gave her. Right now, she's probably off seeking comfort from whoever sent them."

Bernard was visibly displeased. "What nonsense are you spouting now? You really just say whatever comes to your mind."

Joseph sneered. "Do you really think DNA tests are fake science? Covering your ears won't change reality. All it'll do is make you look ridiculous."

Then, he stood up and glanced at a turtle soaking in the aquarium nearby. Its entire shell was blood red.

Suddenly, he remembered that this turtle had originally been raised by Cora, too. Supposedly, it was even a blessed turtle.

He felt a chill in his heart. “You’re next.”

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Chapter

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Bernard and Helen looked down on Joseph. On the other hand, he resented them for how they had raised Cora. In his eyes, the Lowell family were either bullies who bullied the weak or manipulators. He didn’t want to stay there a second longer.

Even his daughters wanted to go home with him, but they weren't allowed to. It was an undeniable fact that they were someone else's children.

Just as Joseph stepped out of the house, he saw the Ormplad math tutor from before. "Mr. Hart, Ms. Lowell had me come over," greeted the tutor awkwardly. Considering that Joseph was the man of the house, the tutor forced a natural smile.

"Teach them well. You're a good tutor," replied Joseph, not making things difficult for the tutor before getting into the car and

leaving.

In the house, Helen returned to her room and called Cora. She asked in a lowered voice, "Has your affair been exposed? Joseph was hinting earlier that you've been spending time with other men. Tell me, are you working right now, or are you fooling around out there?"

Cora asked, "What did Joseph say?"

"He said you were fooling around with other men. I don't know whether he said it casually or if he's already suspicious, but either way, I don't think you can keep this up much longer," responded Helen.

She continued, "You may not like hearing this, but you've played with fire long enough. It's time to make a choice. Either you choose other men and divorce Joseph, or you cut off all those affairs and focus on your family, children, and your marriage."

“Mom, it isn’t as serious as you think,” said Cora. 1

Helen replied, “Cora, I know that you’re capable now, but don’t underestimate Joseph. At the end of the day, he’s still a man. If you push him too far and he snaps, what do you think will happen?”

“If he decides to drag you down with him, how are you going to deal with that? Honestly, if you already think he’s beneath you, just divorce him. Don’t lose everything over a small mistake.”

After Helen ended the call, her expression darkened. She had always considered Joseph insignificant. After all, he was a nobody with no background. Now that Cora was recklessly playing with fire, the situation had become far more unpredictable.

Meanwhile, when Cora returned home, she saw that Joseph was back as well. However, there were other cars parked outside So, she turned to Mary questioningly.

Apparently, a few people from the hospital where Joseph worked at were there. Aside from Walt, there was also Travis. They were in the study, and Joseph had locked the door. He didn’t allow anyone to disturb them.

Cora glanced at the study. A sign that read “Do Not Disturb” hung on the door. Just then, she heard the bleating of a lamb coming from the backyard. Immediately, she knew that Mary hadn’t been able to stop Joseph. He had actually bought a lamb and brought it home.

She waited in the living room for about 20 minutes. When the door to the study finally opened, she saw Walt and Travis walk out together. Travis didn’t even spare her a glance before leaving the house.

“Cora, you’re back,” greeted Walt, slowing his steps slightly.

“Walt, you’re here,” replied Cora with a nod. Then, she shouted, “Joe, come out and see the guests off.”

Walt responded, “No need. Let Dr. Hart continue reviewing the materials.”

He continued, “Cora, could you advise him to come back to work? To be honest, two surgeries failed at the hospital today, and two patients died. Those patients came because of him, but he wasn’t at work. Now that things have gone wrong, the families

are causing trouble.”

Cora asked, “Were those surgeries originally scheduled by Joe? Did he promise the families he would handle them?” 1

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Walt answered, “Not exactly, but the patients really did come because of Dr. Hart’s reputation. It started after he assisted with a surgery at the Traditional Medicine Center.

“It was an extremely difficult surgery, and the patient he saved later recommended him to these families. Even the director and I personally came to invite him back,”

“Alright, I’ll talk to him properly. He’ll return to work. I’ll personally take him to the hospital tomorrow,” replied Cora.

After seeing Walt out, Cora felt heavy. Joseph being too outstanding wasn’t necessarily a good thing. A man who became too capable was much harder to control.

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When Cora entered the study she found Joseph watching surgical recordings. There was a lot of blood in the recordings. For someone outside the medical field, the graphic scenes were hard to stomach, and she couldn't bear to watch them.

"Joe, can we have a talk? You can watch those later," said Cora.

Joseph replied, "What's there to talk about? Two people died today because your father insisted on forcing me out of the hospital."

"What do you mean by that? How is this related to my dad? Explain yourself clearly," stated Cora.

Joseph responded, "What do you not understand? Your father couldn't stand the fact that we still weren't divorced, so he pressured the hospital to get rid of me. Then, Walt followed his lead and fired me.

"Those two patients came to the hospital specifically for me. If I had still been in the ICU, they would have been under my care, and I would have performed the surgeries myself.

"I'm not arrogant enough to say I would have guaranteed success, but I could have given them at least a 90 percent chance. But what's the point of talking about it now? The patients are already dead.

“Still, you should pass a message to your father. If he doesn’t want blood on his hands, he should stop interfering in hospital affairs. People’s lives are at stake. Actually, the same goes for you.”

After that, Joseph paused the video and lit a cigarette before walking out of the study.

Cora argued, “Joe, if you knew your work at the hospital was so important, why didn’t you go back? Now that something happened, you’re blaming my father for it? That’s just avoiding responsibility.”

Joseph stated, “People know where the truth lies. However, Walt shouldn’t remain as the hospital director either. He’s the one who truly deserves to be kicked out of Jenton University Hospital.”

“But I already told Walt that you would return to work. I’ll send you there tomorrow,” said Cora with a frown. At that moment, she felt as though he was deliberately using the situation to turn the tables against them.

Joseph chuckled and said, “Ms. Lowell, your influence really reaches everywhere. If I refuse to obey you, are you going to set another honey trap for me? Or maybe you’ll hire people to beat me up like what your father did? Or perhaps you have some other cheap trick planned?”

“Joe, how did you end up this way? You never acted in such a manner before,” replied Cora in disbelief.

“Before? And now? I’m living worse than a dog at the moment. Walt can fire me with a single sentence. And her. Even she dares to glare at me and remind me not to forget my place in this house,” said Joseph while pointing at Mary.

He added, “Cora, tell her. What is my status in this house?”

Mary immediately sensed danger and hurriedly spoke up, saying, “Mr. Hart, you’re the man of the house.”

Joseph burst into laughter. “That isn’t the attitude you had before. Now that Cora is around, you’re suddenly afraid of speaking honestly? You roll your eyes at me even when Natalie is around.

“As a man, I make less money than Cora. Whenever Bernard is unhappy, he can just hire someone to beat me up, and I don’t even dare to complain. So, in your eyes, I’m basically useless. I’m just a man with no real authority in this house.”

After saying all that, Joseph turned to look at Cora.

“Mary, apologize to my husband immediately! He’s the man of the house. You can’t disrespect his authority. Don’t forget that you work for me. Apologize now!” Cora reprimanded sternly.

She felt cornered. Her chest tightened with irritation, but she still had to stand up for Joseph. Naturally, no matter how obedient a housekeeper was, Joseph was more important to her.

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Seeing how unfavorable the situation had become, Mary despised Joseph for holding grudges over this but still apologized to him quickly.

As she was apologizing, he interrupted her, saying, "I don't need her apology. Kick her out of the house if you still think I'm the man of the house, Cora."

He crushed the cigarette against the coffee table. The ashtray sat right beside that area, but he deliberately ignored it. Then, he got up and headed toward the study.

As he listened to the conversation continuing behind him, the corners of his mouth twitched. He had a taste of a successful

scheme.

Cora's voice rang out. "Mary, pack your things and leave."

Mary stuttered, "Ms. Lowell, I..."

"Leave!" Cora shouted.

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Once Joseph was focused on work, his mind became completely calm. All of his attention was on analyzing the surgical recordings. Soon, he frowned,

The failed surgery couldn't exactly be blamed on Travis' mistakes. Given his age and medical ability, that outcome was already the limit of what he could achieve. Even if Walt had been the lead surgeon, the outcome would likely not have changed.

Every surgery carried risks. Even Joseph himself couldn't guarantee a perfect success rate. After replaying the recordings one more time, he wrote down a reflection. It was only then that he realized he was hungry and left the study.

In the living room, Cora was reading a book. She looked calm and composed. When she saw Joseph come out, she lifted her head to look at him. She wanted to see what he would do next.

"I'm making a late-night snack. I'm just going to make chicken noodle soup. Do you want some?" Joseph asked casually, as though their fierce argument earlier had never happened.

Cora froze for a second before answering with a smile, "Sure."

She set down her book and followed him into the kitchen to watch him cook. She watched him pick up the apron, shake it, and tie it around his waist with ease. When she watched him cook quickly and professionally, she suddenly remembered that he had studied culinary before.

Back when Cora had been pregnant with Natalie, her morning sickness had been so severe that she vomited up everything she

ate.

Unable to bear watching her suffer, Joseph had gone out of his way to learn cooking so that he could prepare meals suited specifically to her tastes. That was how she survived that miserable period.

It was the same during her postpartum recovery. He had taken care of her very tentatively. When she became pregnant with Selena and Kimberly, he had still done everything he could for her.

Before Cora realized it, more than ten years had already passed. As the memories surfaced, she felt emotional. At the same time, she thought that Joseph's cooking should probably be even better now.

When Joseph finally served the chicken noodle soup, Cora took a bite. The familiar taste instantly spread through her mouth. She had a good appetite all of a sudden, and before she knew it, she had finished all the noodles, even drinking the soup down to the last drop.

After cleaning up the kitchen, Joseph headed toward the indoor swimming pool to relax. Not long afterward, Cora joined him. The tension from the argument before was gone. It was replaced by a harmonious atmosphere as the two spent time together in the pool.

The next morning, Cora noticed that Joseph was still lounging at home. She asked, “Why aren’t you at work? I already gave Walt my word. You aren’t planning to make me break my promise, are you?”

“Walt isn’t worth it. He’s just an old schemer. Don’t worry about my business. Go and handle your own work. By noon, I’ll give you a surprise,” replied Joseph. He didn’t go along with Cora’s wishes, nor did he plan to help Walt.

“You had better not turn that surprise into a disaster,” teased Cora with a laugh. Since their relationship had only just eased up she had no intention of starting another fight.

Later, Joseph contacted a roast lamb restaurant and had them take the lamb for slaughter. Then, he borrowed several cooking supplies from them before driving out to the riverside. He set up a grill and began roasting the lamb himself.

Not long after, Paige came over and said, “Dr. Hart, before I came, I thought you would be miserable after getting kicked out of the hospital. I didn’t expect you to be living so comfortably.”

Joseph replied, “Work is work, and life is life. Losing my job doesn’t mean I should throw away my life too. Resting now just means I’ll have more energy when I work again in the future.”

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He handed her a drink and told her to eat something else first because the roast lamb still needed a while.

Paige filled Joseph in on everything that had happened at the hospital. There had been confrontations with patients' families last night and this morning Travis had failed to control the situation and only made things worse.

Early in the morning, Walt had gone to report the matter to higher authorities, leaving the hospital temporarily under Marvin's control.

"Dr. Hart, it's a good thing that you didn't return to work. Otherwise, Dr. Pierce would have targeted you. But without you, our department feels completely unstable. Nobody feels secure and everyone is on edge," said Paige.

Joseph replied, "You're giving me too much credit. I'm not that important. When you go back to the department later, focus on your own responsibilities. If anything happens, keep me informed."

"Alright. I'll listen to you," responded Paige.

Joseph smiled faintly as he studied her expression. He asked, "Why are you so supportive of me?"

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Paige said she believed that Joseph had been framed, but her words didn't fully earn his trust. Currently, he believed that people couldn't be trusted and that only facts could be trusted. 1

Still, her willingness to side with him was useful, regardless of her motives. For now, he chose to accept her goodwill.

After Paige left, Joseph unexpectedly received a call from Natalie. She said that she wanted to meet him, so he told her to come

to the riverside.

She arrived by cab. When she heard that he was by the river, she assumed that he might be planning to jump in. However, when she arrived, she found him roasting a lamb while drinking beer and other beverages. He was carefree. Instantly, she felt embarrassed by how childish her assumption had been.

“Joe, your cooking is amazing,” said Natalie. Since she was hungry, she devoured the lamb, and the grease glistened at the corners of her mouth.

Joseph said nothing. He just continued placing the roast lamb onto her plate, carefully choosing all her favorite dishes.

For ten years, this had always been how things were between them. After all, he had truly treated her as his biological daughter back then. Nevertheless, the DNA test report had shattered all of that.

After Natalie finished her meal, she let out a satisfied burp and got up from the fishing chair. She stretched her body and walked around to help with digestion. As she looked at Joseph, she felt complicated.

If he hadn’t controlled her so strictly all these years, he would have been a great father. But whenever he treated her like a child and monitored every aspect of her life, she felt like she had no freedom at all. She would rather not have a father like him.

Natalie believed the DNA test report. She wasn’t Joseph’s biological daughter. Then, she pulled out a stack of documents from her bag and handed them to him.

She said, “These are all the people with the family name, Ashmore, connected to Meridian Group that I could find. Is my biological father, whom you mentioned among them?”

“Anything you can find, I can find too. What you need to focus on next is how to collect DNA samples from them. You also need to check whether any of them, or their wives or children, look similar to you. Of course, in the end, a DNA test is still needed,” stated Joseph.

“There are so many people here. How am I supposed to find all of them?” Natalie questioned.

“Your biological father is either someone highly capable or a complete loser. You can narrow it down by checking their ages and statuses,” replied Joseph.

Natalie asked, “What do you mean?”

Joseph answered, “It was more than ten years ago. If your biological father had been an ordinary nobody back then, would your mother, who’s arrogant by nature, ever have looked at him?

“A man who was already outstanding more than ten years ago has probably climbed into an important position within Meridian Group by now. Otherwise, he has probably become useless.”

“Only these few people are left, then,” said Natalie. She circled several names on the list and continued discussing with Joseph how to obtain DNA samples from them.

“By the way, you said you know how to run DNA tests yourself. How can this be? You aren’t lying to me, are you? If you buy all the equipment, will Mom even agree to it?” Natalie asked.

Joseph snorted. “Are you looking down on me? I’ve worked in hospitals for years. Did you think I knew nothing? I know plenty of people in the medical equipment industry. Buying equipment from them isn’t expensive. You could buy them too, but you don’t have the technical skills.”

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Natalie shot back immediately. “Don’t underestimate me. I’m just younger than you right now. Once I’m your age, I’ll know everything too. My achievements will definitely surpass both you and Mom!”

In her mind, she wasn’t any less intelligent than Joseph. What she lacked was simply experience.

“Joe, if I really do find my biological father, what will you do?” Natalie asked.

Joseph answered, “I’ll divorce your mother. At that point, she won’t have anything left to argue about. Honestly, whether it’s you, your mother, or anyone else connected to this family, I don’t want to see any of you ever again or have anything to do with you.”

“I don’t want to see you either,” responded Natalie instantly. Even after eating his food and receiving his care all these years, she still subconsciously believed that his kindness toward her was simply something she deserved.

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At Lowell Group, Fiona walked toward Cora with a box of roast lamb. She said, “Joseph sent this over. It’s lamb leg meat. He told me to let you try it.”

So, this was the surprise Joseph had mentioned that morning. The aroma of roast lamb instantly caught Cora’s attention. After taking a bite, she found the flavor excellent. She asked, “Did Joe come?”

“Yeah. He’s downstairs handing out roast lamb to everyone. From the sound of it, he doesn’t want to come up. I can drag him up if you want,” responded Fiona.

“No need. If he doesn’t want to come up, let him stay downstairs,” said Cora. She felt a bit displeased, but after thinking about it, Joseph was currently enjoying the spotlight. She shouldn’t compete with him over this.

A while later, Fiona received a notification on her phone. She clicked into Joseph's post and discovered that he had asked everyone to rate his roast lamb.

"Joseph really knows how to win people over. Everyone ate his food, so, of course, they're praising him. Besides, his cooking is incredible. Everyone will definitely like it," said Fiona while leaving a five-star review herself.

Cora glanced through the post as well. Since there wasn't anything inappropriate in it, she relaxed.

"Cora, is this really Joseph's personal savings?" Fiona asked upon seeing that Joseph's post mentioned personal savings.

Core replied, "None of the household expenses required his money. So, whatever he has left counts as his personal savings."

After doing a quick calculation, she realized that one lamb wouldn't have been enough to feed everyone in the company. He had probably spent tens of thousands of dollars on this meal alone.

When she thought about it, she didn't believe that his goal was just to improve his image or gain influence within the company. Before she could think further, he began brutally mocking the network technology department in the comments.

The entire department was instantly thrown into chaos. The general meaning of the post was that the network technology department had deleted Joseph's posts twice previously. Since they were apparently awesome, he decided to reward them differently.

Everyone else in Lowell Group had received authentic roast lamb, but the network technology department had been served beef offal. This was their exclusive reward because the department was simply too impressive.

In the post, Joseph even uploaded a series of pictures showing how the beef offal had been cleaned, prepared, and roasted, confirming what the network technology department had eaten.

"This..." Fiona didn't expect the situation to turn around this fast. She thought that Joseph was seriously petty.

"So, this is the surprise you planned to give me. You're seriously impressive," muttered Cora. She felt a chill. Joseph was just pulling a prank, but considering his relationship with her, the entire Lowell Group would now remember his name forever.

Just as Cora finished reading the post and started thinking about how she was going to reprimand Joseph when she got home that night, two resignation emails popped into her inbox.

Both were from the network technology department. Unable to endure the humiliation, they had directly submitted their resignations.

“Fiona, is there any legal way to punish Joe for this?” Cora asked.

Fiona answered, “There were no cases of food poisoning, and the meat came from a legitimate restaurant supplier. Besides, Joseph is a doctor. He wouldn’t make a rookie mistake like that.

“Considering your relationship with him, taking legal action wouldn’t look good either. Sure, I could send him a lawyer’s letter, but it probably wouldn’t mean much to him.

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“If things actually went to court, he would definitely bring up all the old conflicts between you two. That would put us in a passive position. He probably already expected all of this.”

“He truly is an educated hooligan,” mumbled Cora. Feeling a headache, she waved Fiona away. She wanted a moment alone to think.

Recently, Joseph’s actions had become more and more outrageous. She must suppress this growing recklessness soon; otherwise, she would never have another peaceful day again.

Cora murmured, “Joseph, I can tolerate your little games. But if you keep pushing things further and further, I won’t let you off the hook so easily!”

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Inside the room, Joseph examined every valuable item one by one, trying to track where each had come from. Cora had brought home countless rare things. If any of them were put on the market, they would fetch great prices.

However, Joseph didn't care about their monetary value. What he cared about was who had given them to Cora.

Many of the items hadn't appeared out of nowhere, especially the ones Cora had brought back shortly before her birthdays. Those were the most suspicious.

After they had children, Cora almost always spent her birthdays at home with the family. It seemed perfectly reasonable, but a cheating woman who didn't want to arouse suspicion would naturally spend important anniversaries and birthdays with her husband and children.

Such a woman would be reckless before the celebrations. That was when she would meet up with her lovers. This meant that these gifts were likely birthday presents from the men she had been involved with behind Joseph's back.

The gift collection included traditional paintings, antiques, rare trinkets, and even the small turtle at Bernard's house, along with many other items of uncertain value. None of them had receipts or invoices. Most of them had been gifts.

For more than ten years, Cora had cheated on Joseph many times behind his back. It was beyond humiliating.

As Joseph stared at the things, hatred grew in him. He wanted to kill Cora and her lovers. The hatred of having one's wife stolen was irreconcilable. The humiliation of being cheated on felt like a blood feud.

While facing all of this, he searched online for information about the items. At the same time, he took pictures of them and posted them on secondhand marketplaces.

He wasn't an expert in antiques or collectibles, but if someone truly wanted these objects, that person would definitely be an expert. Once people started contacting him, he could learn more from them.

Joseph had already blocked Walt's personal number and his office line. If Walt called from another phone, Joseph would end the

call the moment he realized who it was.

Nonetheless, when Joseph received a call from Marvin, he hesitated for a moment before answering.

Trying to extend an olive branch, Marvin began, "Dr. Hart, I've more or less understood your situation. I believe the two of us can come to some kind of agreement. It'll benefit both of us greatly."

Joseph responded, "Continue talking."

“Walt’s management has created too many problems for the hospital. He either needs to retire or leave. I may not be extraordinary, but I’m confident I can manage the hospital properly.”

“So, whether or not I can return to the hospital depends on you?” Joseph asked.

Marvin answered, “Dr. Hart, once you come back, I can appoint you acting director of critical care. Because of your experience, you were only recently promoted to deputy director.

“So, I can’t promote you immediately. However, I can give you the authority of a director. Once the timing is right, the title will naturally follow.”

“Rewards usually come with a price attached. Since you value me this much, what do you need me to do?” Joseph questioned.

“I want you to perform surgery on the patient in Ward 15. It can only succeed. Failure isn’t an option,” answered Marvin.

“I see. I’ll think about it,” replied Joseph, ending the call.

The patient in Ward 15 was a retired big shot from the state level. His condition was extremely poor, and according to the original treatment plan, surgery needed to be performed within the next few days.

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Performing surgery on someone like that required the hospital's best medical resources. However, Walt was old, and Travis had already made mistakes. As for the remaining surgeons, none of them was good enough.

The surgery Joseph had previously performed on Jerome had been submitted by the Traditional Medicine Center for state-level evaluation. In the end, it had been selected as one of Jenton's top ten landmark surgeries of the year. In terms of surgical difficulty, it had even ranked within the top three.

That was exactly what Walt meant by Joseph's reputation was blooming outside the hospital. Naturally, the patient's family would specifically want Joseph to perform the surgery. Marvin had recognized Joseph's value because of that and wanted to

recruit him.

"Marvin, do you think offering me a few scraps is enough to turn me into your weapon? Enough to make me fight your battles and help you seize power and benefits? You must be dreaming," muttered Joseph.

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

Although Joseph was no longer working at Jenton University Hospital, he was still a doctor at heart. After three days without treating patients, he felt restless. Jenton University Hospital no longer trusted him, but there were still people who believed in his medical skills, like the patient with rheumatic disease. 1

Joseph went to the patient's home to perform acupuncture therapy. Afterward, he stayed for a simple meal before administering another round of treatment later that night. It was only then that he left together with Dolly.

In the car, Dolly asked, "I didn't want to ask earlier while we were at their house, but how did things fall apart between you and Dr. Loughlin?"

Joseph answered, "To tell you the truth, my marriage has hit some serious problems. I asked for a divorce, and my in-laws agreed to it, but my wife refuses to admit any fault and won't agree to the divorce.

"So, my father-in-law used Dr. Loughlin to force me out of the hospital. He even wants me out of Jenton. There's no personal grudge between Dr. Loughlin and me. He just chose my father-in-law's side. That's all."

"I see. I kept thinking that Dr. Loughlin valued you highly and genuinely wanted to mentor you. I couldn't understand why your relationship suddenly became so strained," replied Dolly.

Joseph admitted, "I'm grateful to him. He certainly made things easier for me at the hospital. Nonetheless, these favors came from the authority of his position.

"At the end of the day, he still belongs to my father-in-law's circle. My father-in-law has always believed that being a doctor is worthless. In his eyes, my profession can't bring the Lowell family fame or status."

“Your father-in-law has completely misjudged you. He never realized how exceptional your medical skills are. Honestly, Dr. Loughlin also shares some responsibility. He never truly gave you the chance to fully showcase your talent,” said Dolly.

Joseph responded, “Dr. Loughlin didn’t give me many opportunities. Of course, that was probably because my wife asked him not to. She wanted to limit my workload so that I would go home earlier. When I first joined the hospital, I worked incredibly hard. I genuinely wanted to build a name for myself.”

“It’s indeed hard to balance career and family. Only people in the medical field know how much we suffer. You mentioned marriage and family earlier. My situation isn’t much better than yours.

“To be honest, my husband and I have been emotionally distant for years. If it weren’t for our child, we probably would have already divorced. You’re still young. I’m sure you’ll get through this,” said Dolly, patting Joseph on the shoulder as encouragement and testing the waters.

“We’ll encourage each other then. Sorry, my negativity has impacted you,” apologized Joseph. He could more or less sense what Dolly was hinting at, but he deliberately gave no response. Trust wasn’t something she could gain from him so easily.

After a moment, Dolly said, “By the way, Dr. Hart, if you want to keep practicing medicine during this period, you can work at my sanatorium. My doors will always be open to you.”

“I’m just afraid that it’ll cause trouble for you. After all, the Lowell family is at the height of their power in Jenton right now. If they find out your sanatorium is taking me in, they may target you too,” replied Joseph.

Dolly responded, “Don’t worry about it. Our sanatorium doesn’t compete with anyone, and we mainly care for elderly patients. The Lowell family probably wouldn’t even bother paying attention to us.”

Joseph expressed his gratitude. “In that case, thank you.”

Joseph accepted the offer. The sanatorium held the proper medical licenses, so it was still capable of carrying out certain treatments and procedures.

By the time Joseph returned home, Cora was already there. She stood in the middle of the living room with her arms crossed, staring coldly at him as he walked inside.

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She demanded, “Where were you? Your phone was off, and nobody could reach you. You fired everyone in the house, and now, you’re abandoning all the house chores, too? I worked all day outside, and when I came home, I couldn’t even get a proper meal!

Joseph shot back, “Cora, with your intelligence and ability, do you really think you would starve to death? You say you work hard all day and can’t even have a proper meal afterward. Then, what are you working so hard for? You’re busy, so your work matters. When I’m busy, my business doesn’t count?”

Cora snapped, “You’re just twisting things around.”

“Do you want to argue?” Joseph questioned.

Cora replied, “I don’t want to fight with you. I’m just stating facts.”

Joseph answered, “And so am I.”

Without another glance at her, he walked straight into the study.

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

In the middle of the night, Joseph was surprised when Fiona knocked on the door and walked in cheerfully. She said, “Joseph, come out and have a late-night snack.”

Joseph asked, “Why are you here?”

“Don’t you already know the answer? You stopped cooking for the Lowell family, but you can’t possibly let Cora starve.. She asked me to buy some late-night snacks for her. She thought that you’ve been working hard, so she told me to buy an extra portion for you,” answered Fiona.

Joseph set aside what he was doing and went to the dining room. Sure enough, Fiona had bought a huge spread of food, and Cora was already eating.

Joseph opened the container meant for him and immediately saw dishes like chicken and beef offal.

“Fiona, I didn’t expect your tastes to be this intense. You’ve really opened my eyes,” said Joseph.

“It isn’t mine. Cora ordered it for you,” explained Fiona quickly.

Joseph replied, “I may be middle-aged, but I’m not falling apart physically yet.”

“You don’t need to explain that to me. Cora would know better, right?” Fiona turned to Cora.

“Just eat your food. You talk too much,” snapped Cora. She glanced at Joseph and saw that he had started eating. At that, she

smiled.

“It isn’t as good as my cooking. Fiona, don’t bother buying this next time. If you want to eat it, just tell me ahead of time and I’ll make it for you,” commented Joseph before putting down his cutlery.

Fiona complained, “Yours tastes great, but it’s hard to digest.”

“Hard to digest? That’s what happens when people bring trouble onto themselves. Fiona, you should also be more careful. You still haven’t handled the matter I asked you to deal with before,” said Joseph.

“Joseph, I...” Fiona didn’t expect Joseph to mention that. She quickly turned to Cora for help.

“Joe, you’re talking too much. People should focus on eating while at the dining table,” stated Cora.

“I’m not hungry. You two can continue. Cora, since we no longer have housekeepers, I’ll have to trouble you to clean up,” said Joseph.

With that, Joseph headed downstairs to the basement gym to work out for a while before entering the indoor swimming pool

area.

Not long afterward, Cora came down as well. By the edge of the swimming pool, she slipped off her pajamas before stepping into the water without wearing anything.

Clearly, Fiona had already left, and with only the two of them remaining in the house, she no longer had to restrain herself.

Neither of them argued. The tension between them ignited almost instantly, and the atmosphere in the swimming pool became heated. Eventually, the two leaned against the swimming pool's edge, letting the water support their bodies.

"Cora, I thought you would call Fiona over and make her join us. I didn't expect you to send her away instead," said Joseph.

"Am I not enough for you?" Cora questioned. She was slightly out of breath as her cheeks were flushed. She looked enchanting.

Joseph replied, "That isn't the point. After what happened that night at the hospital dorm, I started feeling like my views on relationships had changed a little. I don't know what you really think, but from what I saw, you were willing to tolerate my disloyalty. It felt like opening Pandora's box."

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"Honey, don't bring up that night again. I regret it too. If I had to choose again, I wouldn't make the same decision. But you only get that kind of opportunity once. Don't think about it happening again," replied Cora.

"You misunderstood what meant," said Joseph.

Cora responded, “No, I understand perfectly. You’re hinting that you want more women around you, but I know you aren’t that kind of man.”

“What I really meant is that you changed the way I see you. You aren’t as simple or kind as I once thought. When it comes to getting what you want, you’re willing to do anything,” said Joseph.

Cora argued, “Honey, you’re misunderstanding me! Everything I’ve done was because I love you. I never wanted to hurt you. I just wanted you to understand how much I loved you. Back then, you insisted on divorcing me, so I panicked and chose the worst possible method. I can’t lose you. Do you understand?”

After a pause, she said, “Honey, I’m tired. Carry me back upstairs.”

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