

The Rewritten Love A Second Beginning Chapter 21 - 30

Chapter 21

Madelyn had always been arrogant and unyielding, a woman accustomed to having the world at her feet. The predicament she was now in, Zach had foreseen it long ago.

After lighting the candles, Hayson turned. “What exactly happened to Madelyn? Do we know the full story yet?”

Hayson had rushed back as soon as his plane landed, not even taking the time to change clothes. He was a burly figure, appearing clumsy, his wrist adorned with a tough-looking bracelet, eyes stern and a bit intimidating. Hayson had engaged in some rough business in his youth, his exterior not reflecting the terror he could instill. His expressionless face gave a false impression of mildness, of gentleness, yet nobody dared overlook his ability to deliver punishment. Perhaps due to an early life marked by violence, he had installed a statue of a saint in his study and donated generously to the church every year, perhaps seeking to alleviate his guilt.

“We’ve looked into it,” came the reply. “The Arnold family is also investigating this matter. And... yesterday, as I was preparing to act, they’d already taken the initiative. The person who hurt Madelyn was taken away by the Arnold family.”

“The Arnold family?” Hayson’s eyes narrowed.

“Yes.”

The Arnold family, the preeminent name among the Big Four Families of Ventropolis, controlled the city’s economic lifeline. They were true aristocrats, the upper crust. By comparison, the Jent family was a mere stepping-stone at their feet.

“When did Madelyn start associating with the Arnold family? With Forrest?”

“No, it appears to be someone else. I suspected that Forrest had ordered the attack on Madelyn. It doesn't seem possible that Forrest would come to Madelyn's defense.”

Forrest was the Arnold family's adopted illegitimate son. He had indeed had some disputes with the Jent family before joining the Arnolds. If anyone was going to harm Madelyn, it would be Forrest. Perhaps they had grown too complacent, forgetting who granted them their safety. No matter what, Madelyn was Hayson's daughter. Daring to harm her would be akin to slapping him in the face directly.

“Are you sure someone from the Arnold family is helping Madelyn?”

Zach nodded. “Yes.”

Hayson pondered for a moment, his brow creased. “**If** someone's stepped in, then we'll leave things be. That Forrest is nothing more than a stray dog I once **fed**. Teach him a small lesson, but make sure it doesn't trace back to us.”

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A shadow crossed Zach's eyes, he nodded slightly. “Understood, Father.” @

“How's Madelyn doing?”

“She's stable for now.”

“I brought some gifts from Sinagora; you can give them to her later. She inherited my temper, a bit too fiery. You, as her brother, should be more understanding.”

“I treat Madelyn as my own sister. Every young girl has her temper,” he said with a mild tone, but his eyes held a glacial chill.

“Good, as long as you understand. You should go.”

Zach bowed his head slightly. “Rest well, Father.”

The day was resplendent with sunshine, a clear sky stretching as far as the eye could see. The temperature was just right, neither too chilly nor too warm. Madelyn savored a bowl of creamy potato soup served by Rosario, as delicious as ever, a taste that filled her with a sense of nostalgia. Now, on her fifth day, her wounds had scabbed over and begun to heal, albeit a bit itchy, which sometimes made her want to scratch.

“Madelyn, who sent you the flowers?”

Madelyn turned her head to look at the roses by her bedside, a small smile playing on her lips. “A friend asked to have them sent over. He’s a bit unable to get out and about, but the fact he sent someone with flowers to see me makes me very happy.”

Among the nineteen roses, there was a card tucked away. It read, [I hope you leave the hospital soon. I look forward to seeing you again – Ethan.] 19 was her lucky number.

“When you get out, be sure to invite him over. I’ll cook you guys a feast.”

“I will. Once I get out, I’ll definitely meet him.” She was supposed to meet him, but who knew she would get hurt and have to delay their meeting. Madelyn had never met Ethan; they

usually chatted through a window or over the phone. She was looking forward to the day they would finally meet face-to-face.

Chapter 22

“The car’s ready. Are you sure about going to the Arnold residence?”

“Why, am I not allowed to?” The young man sat in his wheelchair, exuding an air of dignified elegance. He wore a shirt and jacket, with a hint of a blue tattoo peeking out from under his sleeve. He seemed enigmatic and aloof, a touch of melancholy playing around him.

“But Madam...”

Ethan lifted his dark gaze, coldly staring him down. “It’s not her place to dictate my actions.” “My apologies, sir. I misspoke. I’ll take you downstairs now.”

For Ethan, this was the first time in years he had stepped out of his home. He had not seen the sun in what felt like forever. Once outside, he realized that everything was as she had described; the scenery was breath-taking. He glanced at the jujube tree beyond the wall where he could vaguely see a young girl swinging her legs, her beautiful smile visible even from this distance. As he looked away, the warm emotion in his eyes disappeared, replaced by a cool detachment.

An hour later, he arrived at the most luxurious villa. Dozens of servants stood outside, forming two lines. They watched as a black Cayenne pulled up to the entrance, a trembling bodyguard stepping forward to open the door. As Ethan transferred to his wheelchair, the waiting staff chimed in unison, “Welcome home, Mr. Arnold Jr.”

Ethan showed little emotion. He could not remember how many years it had been since he had last visited the Arnold residence,

“Oh, Ethan...” A deep, aged voice echoed from not too far off, and an elderly woman slowly made her way toward them, leaning on a cane.

“Mom, be careful,” Owen Arnold warned.

Upon seeing the elderly woman approach, Ethan's lips barely moved as he murmured, "Grandma."

Evelyn Anderson's eyes welled up with tears. "You've finally decided to come and see your old grandmother, huh?"

Ethan nodded, then glanced at the middle-aged man standing behind Evelyn. As their eyes met, Ethan indifferently looked away.

"Grandma, I **came** back because **I** have some matters to--"

"Whatever it is, let's talk after we've had **dinner**."

Ethan was wheeled up to the head of a long dining table set for twenty, covered with his favorite dishes. Ascending to the table was not a hardship for him, but Evelyn still assisted,

guiding him to the seat at the head of the table on her left. Knowing Ethan was coming and fearing he might feel uncomfortable, she had dismissed everyone else from the house, sparing Ethan from any discomfort. Her eyes reddened as she watched her slender, radiant grandson.

"Ethan, look at you, you've lost weight. Eat up." She urged.

"Thank you, Grandma," he replied.

Owen, intending to please Evelyn, added, "How've you been these past years? I heard you haven't been going to school. You're nearing the age for college entrance exams. Do you still want to go to school? **If** you do, **I** could arrange for your admission."

Ethan picked up a piece of fish from his plate and took a bite, leisurely responding, “Isn’t it a bit late for you as a father to be concerned about how I’ve been doing these past years?”

The comment seemed to affect Owen, who stiffened, a cold glint appearing in his eyes.

Ethan continued, “No need to worry. I’ve been just fine.”

Despite everything, guilt lingered in Owen’s heart for Ethan.

“Since you’re back, why not stay here? Your room’s been prepared.”

Evelyn chimed in, “Yes, I’ve kept your room for you all these years. You should move back in.”

Chapter 24

Having been in the hospital for the better part of a month, Madelyn made good use of her time. While nursing her injuries, she diligently completed several test papers. Even amid his busy schedule, Zach would visit, review her work, and patiently explain any mistakes. During his downtime, he downloaded a few leisure games on her phone—the latest releases from his company. But Madelyn rarely indulged in these games, devoting most of her time to studying. The upcoming exam was her only best chance to leave the Jent family—to escape the strife between Zach and Hayson.

Zach helped Madelyn with the discharge procedures. There was still a dull ache in her chest, but it had significantly improved. Her wounds had scabbed over, new skin tissue peeking out underneath. It was healing but a bit itchy.

The time Zach was willing to waste on her was nothing more than a performance for Hayson. To the world, Zach was merely a dog that Hayson kept at his side. But only Madelyn knew the truth—that Zach was like a cunning wolf lurking in the darkness, a beast capable of striking a deadly blow at any time. Every action, every word, all carefully calculated. His kindness was never given freely.

Madelyn followed Zach to the Audi parked outside. Inside, Jadie was already seated in the backseat behind the co-driver's seat. Even through the car window, Madelyn could feel Jadie's tension radiating off her.

Circling around the car, Zach stopped by the driver's door. Catching Madelyn's gaze, he seemed to sense her hesitation and offered an explanation, "Since you're being discharged today, we can take Jadie home with us to celebrate, and then we can all have dinner together."

Madelyn said nothing, simply pressing her lips together as she climbed into the co-driver's seat. Her eyes fell on a sticker there, and a flush of embarrassment heated her cheeks.

'Look at what I've done! Co-driver exclusive to Madelyn! I used to think it was a way to proclaim Zach's ownership to everyone. People must have found it amusing, and why wouldn't they? In Zach's eyes, I must seem like a silly girl who would blindly follow him around.'

Caught in a daze, Zach leaned in abruptly, a whiff of camellia fragrance mixed with faint tobacco scent filling the air. It was a scent she was familiar with—Jadie's perfume of choice. was camellia. Seeing him approach, Madelyn almost instinctively shied away, a flicker of panic in her eyes. Zach feigned ignorance to her obvious refusal, his hand reaching to secure her seatbelt without any physical contact.

As the car gradually pulled away, a silence enveloped the interior, an eerie undercurrent seeping through the tranquility. Only Zach, occasionally casting glances into the rear-view mirror, disturbed the quiet.

"Are you feeling unwell?" he asked.

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Madelyn knew his concern was not for her, and she had the tact not to respond. She directed her gaze out the car window instead.

In a voice soft as silk, Jadie replied, "No, I'm fine. I just get a bit carsick when I haven't traveled in a while."

"I'll try to drive slower. If you feel uncomfortable, let me know."

“Okay.”

Throughout the drive, Zach struck up casual conversations with Jadie about her studies to distract her, their chatter acting as a lullaby. Leaning on the seat, Madelyn dozed off. She was not sure how long she had been asleep until the sound of her name being called roused her.

Chapter 25

“Madelyn.”

Madelyn stirred, eyes blinking open to meet Zach’s piercing gaze, a shadow of intensity hiding beneath his indifferent stare. Still groggy from her slumber, she was motionless for a

moment, then startled backward. “Bro... what... what’s wrong?”

“We’re home.” Zach’s cool voice told her. “Get out of the car.”

“Ah... okay.”

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As Zach straightened up and exited the vehicle, Madelyn unfastened her seatbelt. She glanced at the sticker in the car and promptly ripped it off. Every item that adorned the car, including the fragrance she had been using to mask the scent, was swiftly tidied away. As Madelyn stepped out of the car, Zach observed the items she held, both of them tacitly silent, understanding that certain words, if spoken, would only widen the chasm between them.

As Madelyn entered the foyer, Rosario approached her. “We have a guest today. Wash your hands and come to dinner.”

“A guest? Who?” Madelyn asked, her brow furrowed in confusion.

“Your homeroom teacher.”

‘Jasmine?’ Madelyn’s heart skipped a beat. ‘Why would Jasmine come here? Is she trying to get close to Hayson? Has she moved up her plan with Zach?’

Madelyn’s hands trembled slightly, a shadow of apprehension flashing briefly in her eyes. It was there and gone so quickly, almost impossible to catch. “Where’s Miss Manning?”

“She’s discussing something with Mr. Jent in the study. Something about that incident at your school.”

In her past life, nothing of this sort had occurred. Perhaps, with her return to this life, she had altered the course of her fate, and some events changed along with it.

Bypassing Madelyn, Zach moved to sit on the couch next to Jadie, who was engrossed in a television program.

A voice drifted down from the upper floor. “Mr. Jent, rest assured, there will be no repetition of what happened with Madelyn. I deeply regret my oversight as a teacher.”

“It was a minor squabble between students, nothing to worry about. Miss Manning, why don’t you stay for dinner? I’ll have a driver take you home afterward.”

Flipping her hair from her face with a laugh, Jasmine replied, “Are you sure I wouldn’t be intruding?”

“Not at all. Rosario, set one more place at the table.”

“Yes, sir.” Rosario dutifully responded.

Madelyn remained rooted to the spot, watching as the pair descended the stairs, jesting and laughing, Hayson's arm casually draped around Jasmine's waist, an intimate gesture. Jasmine looked stunning today in her white body-hugging maxi skirt, adorned with delicate pink lace short sleeves. Underneath, she wore a fitted camisole as a base layer, accentuating her graceful curves. Her every move, every smile, seemed to captivate the hearts of men, exuding a captivating charm that was both alluring and gentle. The exchange of glances between the two emanated an undeniably passionate air.

Jasmine's gaze then turned to Madelyn. "Madelyn? Are you feeling better?"

As Jasmine approached, Madelyn took note of the wrinkles in the hem of Jasmine's dress, and one missing button at the top of her bodice, faint traces and subtle blemishes confirming Madelyn's suspicions. Suddenly, she felt a wave of nausea washing over her. Clapping a hand over her mouth, she ran off, unable to bear the discomfort any longer. All eyes followed her abrupt departure, but they merely assumed she was unwell and thought nothing more of it.

There was a restroom on the first floor. Leaning over the sink, Madelyn spat out the bile that had risen in her throat, a cramp gripping her stomach. She turned on the faucet and stared at her reflection, her eyes reddened and moistened by saline. 'How much longer can this family hold together?'

The bathroom door was knocked. "Madelyn, are you feeling ill again? Should I call the doctor to come and check on you?"

Wiping away her tears, Madelyn quickly exited the bathroom. As she opened the door, she saw Rosario standing there and instinctively flung her arms around her, hoping to draw some comfort from the familiar presence.

Rosario gently stroked her back. "What's wrong?"

Madelyn did not say a word.

Chapter 26

Once she had collected herself, Madelyn returned to the table and took her seat.

Hayson, in a rare display of interest, asked, “Miss Manning mentioned that your grades have improved considerably recently, which is commendable progress from last time. What would you like as a reward?”

Usually, Hayson was stern toward her, seldom engaging in conversation even at the dining table. But with Jasmine’s presence, it was evident that his mood was unusually pleasant.

Seizing the opportunity, Madelyn made her request. “After the college entrance exams, I’d like to travel to Marisburg with some friends. May I, Dad?”

“Hmm, be sure to take a chauffeur with you. It’s not safe to go out alone.” Hayson agreed.

Not overly exuberant, Madelyn managed a small smile, replying, “Thank you, Dad.”

At this, Jasmine chimed in. “Are you going to Marisburg to see the ocean, Madelyn? I’ve heard the scenery there is excellent. After the college entrance exams, it would indeed be a good idea to unwind.”

Madelyn gave a noncommittal response. “I haven’t had a chance to go out and have fun in a while.”

As a maid refilled Jasmine's juice glass, she asked, "Have you decided on which university you'd like to apply for? If you're thinking about Ventropolis University, with your current grades, a final push could well secure you a place."

Ventropolis University was a reputable institute of higher education with moderate competition. Considering Madelyn's strong performance in liberal arts, her chances of admission were fairly high. Zach was aware of Madelyn's academic abilities. He had seen her test papers while at the hospital, and he knew she was more than capable of securing admission to Ventropolis University, one of the best universities in the country.

Poking absently at her food, Madelyn responded in an indifferent tone. "I haven't decided yet. I'll see."

"That's fair. Once you've made up your mind, I can help you formulate a study plan. Don't forget to keep up with your studies."

Jasmine projected the air of a concerned mentor, the same façade that had tricked Madelyn in her previous life. She would not stay in Ventropolis; that much she had decided from the start. Studying abroad, even at an ordinary, non-prestigious university would suffice.

Madelyn found her mind wandering throughout dinner. When Zach tried to engage her in conversation, she responded with vague affirmations. With Hayson thoroughly ensnared by Jasmine and Zach focused entirely on Jadie, Madelyn excused herself from the table midway

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through the meal. Regardless of whether Jasmine would become part of the Jent family or not, it no longer had anything to do with her.

Stepping out onto the small balcony of her room, Madelyn stared at the tightly shut window across from her. Glancing at the time, it was already noon.

‘Hasn’t he woken up yet?’

As she wondered about his activities, Madelyn noticed a convoy of black cars pulling up at the villa next door. She watched, curiosity piqued, as a chauffeur emerged from a stretched Cayenne and assisted a young man, clad in a black casual outfit with a dignified posture, into a wheelchair.

‘Is that Ethan?’

From this angle, Madelyn could only see his back. More than a dozen bodyguards emerged from the vehicles, a formidable display that gave off an air of organized crime.

‘What exactly does his family do?’

Madelyn had never asked. From an earlier argument she had overheard between Ethan and a woman, she had some idea. Ethan’s misfortune was linked to his family, hence why she rarely brought it up. Their usual conversations revolved around mundane day-to-day topics.

She had not managed to get a good look at his face. Protected by his bodyguards, Ethan had already entered the villa. Not long after, a knock sounded at her door. It was Zach. He mentioned that Hayson had called for her as he wanted to discuss something.

Chapter 27

Following one another, they stepped into the study, Zach closing the door behind them. The tension in the room was thick enough to touch, enveloping them.

Hayson lit a couple of candles in the room, creating an almost sacred ambiance. “Made some new friends recently?”

The sudden question caught Madelyn off guard, her breath hitching as her heart pounded in her chest. “Y–Yes... Father, have I done something wrong?”

Hayson took a seat at his desk, his gaze fixed on her as Zach stood by his side. “Madelyn, do **I** frighten you?”

Madelyn lowered her gaze, weighing her words before she meekly replied, “No... it’s just that you’re often too strict. I’m afraid of making mistakes and being punished.”

This was unexpected. Hayson studied her carefully. His daughter was changing. The brashness of her youth was fading. “When did you become acquainted with the Arnolds?”

‘The Arnolds? I only know one person by that name. Something must’ve happened. Given Father’s tenacious nature, if something has gone wrong, he wouldn’t just stand by. The only explanation for his questioning... could it be that Ethan is involved? This is the only thing that makes sense. Even if I don’t tell him now, he will find out sooner or later.’

Madelyn decided to be truthful.

“I just met him a few days ago. He lives next door. We chatted a bit under the jujube tree in the backyard.”

“Really?” The Arnolds are in Southern Haven Villas too?

Madelyn continued. “His name is Ethan. Honestly, he’s a good guy, Father.”

Hayson rose and walked over to Madelyn, patting her shoulder. “I’m just worried about you. The Jent family has many eyes on it, and I don’t want you to be misled.”

“I understand, Father. I’ll be careful.”

“If you have time, invite your friend over for dinner.”

Though Hayson’s statement felt like a hint at something, Madelyn simply nodded in agreement. “I understand, Father.”

“Go home now.”

“Yes, Father.” Madelyn **left** the study, closing the door behind her.

“What do you think about this?” Hayson asked Zach.

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“I suspect Madelyn is still unaware of Ethan’s true identity.”

“The information about Ethan has been well protected by the Arnolds, but I’ve heard that Ethan was in a car accident a few years ago and was paralyzed. Forrest could likely replace Ethan as the heir to the Arnold family.”

“But the Young family is of equal standing with the Arnold family. They’re business rivals, and their longstanding feud is bound to result in one of them losing.”

Hayson nodded approvingly. “Your analysis is good. The Young family is currently under the control of a woman. But, a woman can only do so much in the business world.”

“Despite being an Arnold, it’s a pity that he’s just a useless pawn now due to his condition. A piece that has lost its value will naturally be discarded.”

Hayson turned his question to another topic. “I heard the Young family is grooming a new heir?”

Zach nodded in agreement. “Yes. As it stands, she’s Ethan’s half-sister from the same mother. The husband married into the Young family, but the daughter the Youngs are raising is too carefree and ditzy to be taken seriously.”

Chapter 28

Jadie waited for a moment before she spotted Zach emerging from the study. Swiftly, she moved toward him. “Zach, what’s wrong? You look upset. Did he... give you a hard time?”

Zach, with a blazer draped over his arm, was visibly troubled. But upon catching sight of her, his expression softened slightly. “It’s nothing. Let’s head back.”

Seated in the car, Zach’s grip on the steering wheel tightened as he replayed the conversation from the study, his gaze sharp and determined.

“This is an invitation to a charity gala happening next week. I’ll send someone to assist you. You know what to do.”

Zach accepted the invitation. “Is Father trying to ally with the Young family?”

“No, it’s a bid for a strategic marriage between our families. You’re not getting any younger, Zach. It’s about time you settle down. Currently, the Young family seems like

“I understand. I won’t disappoint Father.” For some reason, Zach pulled over.

Confused, Jadie turned to him. “Zach, what’s going on?”

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best bet.”

Before she knew it, Zach pulled her into his arms, the delicate scent of camellias from her filling his nostrils. Jadie stiffened at his sudden embrace, caught off guard. Though they had been together for years, there had always been a chasm between them, a line neither had dared to cross even though their feelings were apparent. Now, Jadie could sense something was off with Zach. This man who had always been conscious of boundaries was initiating an intimate moment.

The air in the car grew thick with tension, Jadie slowly relaxed into his arms, her head tilted back to rest on his shoulder as her hands rubbed gentle circles on his back. Her voice was soft, almost a whisper. “Zach... What’s wrong? Are you upset about something?”

It was only after a while that Zach let her go. “Jadie, I’ve got some things to deal with soon. I need **you** to stay on campus for a while.”

Jadie paused, taken aback by his request. A wave of disappointment washed over her. Her heart felt heavy in her chest. “Did I cause you trouble?”

Zach smoothed her disheveled hair with a gentle hand. “No, you’ve been great. Just give me some more time. After you graduate, **I’ll** give you all the answers you’re seeking.”

Zach had the most expressive pair of almond-shaped eyes, full of depth and sentiment. But he had always been reserved, hiding his emotions, which made him appear cold. Staring into his intense gaze, Jadie’s heartbeat picked up pace, and she lowered her slightly flushed face.

“Zach... I understand. I’ll do as you say.

A hint of a smile tugged at Zach’s lips. “I’ll pick you up after school on Friday.”

Jadie nodded. “Alright.”

After dropping Jadie home, Zach made a beeline back to the office, where Kevin Harrison was waiting to debrief him on the upcoming arrangements. Kevin, Zach’s right-hand man, presented several documents for him to sign. Wearing a sleek black vest and gold-rimmed glasses, Zach exuded a commanding air of self-discipline. He meticulously reviewed the departmental reports and upcoming project proposals. Outside the window, the sky had faded to darkness. His phone, placed on the desk, buzzed to life. His gaze never left the papers, as he accepted the call and placed it to his ear.

“This is Zach Jardin speaking. Who is this?”

“Oh darling, I miss you so much...” A woman’s voice, sultry and seductive, wafted through the receiver.

Zach's eyebrows knitted together. He put down the documents, leaning back in his chair, an air of impatience emanating from him. From the other end, the sound of running water could be vaguely heard.

"You've got three minutes. You'd better have something important to say."

"When did you become so timid, Zach? Scared our secret might be discovered? Why don't you guess what I'm doing? If you guess right, I'll come over right now and you can do whatever you want with me."

"Jasmine, I don't have time for games. If you don't want this, feel free to decline. There's no need to test me. I've always said that you're free to walk away anytime."

Zach ended the call, and just as his screen was going dark, a new message popped up. It was from someone named Ethan.

Chapter 29

Madelyn shot back a message almost instantly.

Madelyn: [You can come to me anytime you want more. I'll make it for you.]

Ethan: [Deal.]

Zach watched the exchange with a heavy gaze. For reasons he could not quite understand, seeing Madelyn respond to another man's text elicited an odd discomfort, a feeling that something uniquely his was being claimed by another. He had accessed this information by secretly installing surveillance software on Madelyn's phone during a hospital visit.

For the next half hour, Madelyn chatted with Ethan about the usual humdrum of childhood daily life and interests. It was bland, mundane, and yet Zach consumed it all. He noticed how Madelyn had indeed changed. Once they finished, Zach felt strangely spent. He glanced at the clock—half—past eight. He had wasted more than an hour on Madelyn.

Back at the Jent residence, Hayson was out schmoozing. He would not return tonight, or likely any other night. His bed was elsewhere, amidst a rotation of mistresses. After sending her final text, Madelyn ascended the stairs to draw herself a bath.

In truth, the walnut cake had been Rosario's handiwork. Madelyn's role had been limited to minor flour kneading and water pouring. It was not that she could not do it; it was just that Rosario fretted over her, cautious of her healing wound. In her past life, Madelyn had honed her culinary skills to please Zach, cooking meals and pastries that would put Michelin chefs to shame. After all, as the saying goes, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Zach had indeed been ensnared, and he had become so particular about his food that he found outside meals unsatisfactory.

She had learned to cook for Zach because he suffered from a stomach condition. When he took over the family business, he often drank himself into oblivion, only to take out his frustrations on her. The worst incident landed him in the hospital with a bleeding ulcer, an admission she had forced upon him. From that day on, Madelyn ensured he ate three solid meals a day, never missing one. Even when Zach did not want her at his office, Madelyn would stand at the building's foot, entrusting meals to his assistant.

She believed that Zach would forever savor her cooking, but he had eventually grown tired.

Their third wedding anniversary had been **the** turning point. Madelyn had prepared a grand feast and waited for him to return. Hours turned into a snow-laden night. She remembered his icy words cutting through her anticipation like shards of frost.

"Madelyn," he had begun, his voice colder than the snow outside, "even if you spend every day crafting meals with different ingredients, making a variety of dishes, the end result is always the same. No one can savor the same meal forever. Don't waste your

time. Rather than pouring your energy into this, think about how you can dress up better. Look at yourself **now**;

you're about as appetizing as garbage.”

Chapter 30

Moonlight pierced through the window, its cold brilliance illuminating the room. Madelyn, clad in her nightgown, descended the stairs into the living room. Rarely prone to wake during the night, she had awakened thirsty only to find her water pitcher empty. As she made her way downstairs, sleep still fogging her vision, she turned and gasped at the unexpected sight of a dark silhouette on the couch.

“Ahh!”

Her drowsiness evaporated instantaneously, as the figure rose from the couch, switching on the wall light. The sudden brightness made her squint, and it took a moment for her to make out the man before her.

“Bro, what are you doing here? You didn't go home?”

The room was steeped in a faint aroma of alcohol, a scent unmistakably emanating from Zach.

‘He just got back from an outing? And why isn't he with Jadie? What's he doing in the Jent residence?’

Despite eight years of marriage, Zach's intentions were as elusive to her as ever.

As Madelyn spoke, Zach moved closer, their distance shrinking. She was backed against the wall, escape impossible. As he approached, his gaze swept over her. Though it was a casual, unassuming look, she could not help but notice the strange glint in his eyes. His breath hitched, revealing a hint of disarray. She knew Zach was not one for infidelity—not until Jadie was out of the picture. After Jadie's death, Zach had drowned himself in debauchery, sampling many women. Madelyn was aware that, with Hayson around, Zach would not dare touch her.

A tremble ran through Madelyn's lashes as she feigned ignorance, intending to escape. But he suddenly stretched out a hand, bracing it against the wall, blocking her path. A ripple of panic coursed through her, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Bro... is there something else you need?”

Her heart raced, each beat faster than the last. His piercing gaze, sharp enough to cut through even the thickest armor, was daunting. His powerful aura, coupled with the thick scent of alcohol, left her feeling uneasy.

Gently, Zach brushed her hair behind her ear. “Madelyn, have I done something to upset you recently?”

“No... no...” Madelyn, fists clenched against the wall behind her, kept her gaze lowered, afraid to meet his eyes. She knew if she did, he would instantly spot her vulnerability, deducing her every thought with a single glance.

“Really? Because it feels like you've been avoiding me. Is it because of Jadie?”

Zach leaned in closer, this proximity revealing the contours of her body beneath the thin nightgown. He clearly remembered the sight of her waist hollow revealed by the curve of her back.

‘Truth be told, for an eighteen-year-old, her figure and body is extraordinarily well-developed. I wonder how many men will fall beneath her enchanting spell once she fully matures.’

In a soft voice, Madelyn responded. “I've always known you loved Jadie... I was foolish before, but now I understand. So, I thought it best to keep my distance. To avoid any misunderstandings with Jadie.”

“Lift your head.” His tone was unbearably firm, brooking no argument.

Despite having lived twice, Madelyn was still mortally afraid of him. She lifted her gaze, eyes brimming with a pitiable innocence that was profoundly touching. This vulnerability stirred an urge in him to dominate, to ravage.

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‘This is how she’s meant to be.’