

The Rewritten Love A Second Beginning Chapter 31 - 40

Chapter 31

Feeling a mix of surprise and apprehension, Madelyn locked eyes with Zach, her nerves jangling. ‘He’s never been like this before... What could have gone wrong? I can’t recall doing anything out of the ordinary.’

Breaking the silence, Zach’s voice cut through the tension. “Jadie would be happy if she knew how much you care about her. But what about you? Are you into Ethan?”

“Huh?” Madelyn’s bewilderment deepened, her thoughts racing. “Why is he suddenly bringing up Ethan? Is he on drug or something? This is so strange.”

Zach remained silent; his focus unwavering as he observed her reaction. Then, abruptly, he withdrew his hand and reverted to his usual cold and distant demeanor, as if the fleeting tenderness he had shown was nothing more than an illusion.

“No!” Madelyn exhaled a relieved breath, feeling the weight on her shoulders lift, and an overwhelming urge to flee washed over her. But just as she was on the cusp of making her escape, a searing and calloused hand seized her wrist, anchoring her in place. Her voice trembled as she asked, “Zach... Wh-What’s the matter? Do you need anything?”

Zach responded, “I’m hungry. Cook me pasta.’

‘What?!‘ Cooking was a skill she had yet to master at this point of life, and Zach was well aware of that. In fact, she could turn a kitchen into chaos with a simple attempt at frying an egg.

Before she could refuse, Zach swiveled around and retreated to the couch, his eyes closing in a semblance of rest.

Assessing the lingering scent of alcohol emanating from him, Madelyn knew he had indulged a bit too much. Resigned to her fate, she made her way to the kitchen, opening the refrigerator and retrieving some cheese, eggs, and bacon.

Zach's habit for drinking on an empty stomach, combined with his penchant of skipping breakfast, often wreaked havoc on his insides. Madelyn thought to herself that, in a way, she was still his sister. Thus, she resolved to prepare him a meal, hoping that her efforts would garner some mercy when he eventually sought revenge on the Jent family.

As Zach watched Madelyn busy cooking in the kitchen, a peculiar warmth stirring within him. Strangely, the sight of Madelyn engrossed in her culinary tasks evoked images of a cozy married life, as if he had witnessed this scene countless times before. It struck him with a sense of familiarity that he couldn't quite explain.

For Madelyn, the aim was simple: cook a plate of pasta for Zach. The dried pasta was remnants

from Rosario's earlier cooking, but she knew that Zach possessed an insatiable appetite, so she added a little extra. Fancy and elaborate dishes were far from her intentions; all she sought was a temporary respite from his penetrating gaze.

Madelyn set water to boil and added the pasta. While waiting, she whisked together the eggs and cheese to make the sauce. When the pasta was cooked, the bacon was ready as well. She drained the pasta and poured the sauce over it, placing the bacon on top. In addition to salt, she added some dried parsley. It would enhance the flavor and aroma.

Adjusting her apron, Madelyn made a conscious effort to ensure it was properly fastened before delicately carrying the steaming plate of pasta over to Zach.

“Zach, your pasta is ready. You can eat now,” Madelyn announced, placing the fragrant plate of pasta on the table. She turned her attention to the figure reclining on the couch, wondering if he had already succumbed to sleep.

Approaching him cautiously, she called out, “Zach, wake up~”

However, there was no response from him.

Madelyn extended her hand, intending to rouse him from his slumber. Just as she was about to touch him, Zach’s foot, which had been planted on the floor, shifted abruptly.

Caught off guard, Madelyn’s foot tangled with his, causing her balance to falter. In an instant, she found herself hurtling forward, landing heavily on top of Zach.

Everything went dark, and Madelyn found herself sprawled on top of Zach, even hearing him let out a pained groan.

As clarity seeped back into her consciousness, Madelyn felt a soft warmth against her lips. Her eyes fluttered open, meeting Zach’s intoxicated and dazed gaze, causing her own eyes to

widen in an instant....

Chapter 32

Madelyn’s heart raced as she darted back to her room, her mind in turmoil, uncertain of how to proceed. She slammed the door shut with a trembling hand, securing it with a lock. Leaning against the door, she shivered, repeatedly wiping her lips as if trying to rid them of some invisible contamination.

Though she had already kissed Zach before when he was in intoxicated state, she couldn't forget the disgust that had emanated from him when he looked at her after forcefully pushing her away.

However, Madelyn had changed. She was no longer the girl she had been before. The mere thought of being entangled with Zach filled her with a profound aversion.

A wave of nausea washed over Madelyn. It felt as if countless flies were swarming around her. She continued to rub her lips vigorously until they became swollen and numb. Lost in contemplation of the bewildering events that had unfolded, she struggled to comprehend how she had stumbled and fallen into Zach's embrace so unexpectedly.

Under normal circumstances, such an incident would have been unthinkable. However, with Zach in his drunken state, Madelyn couldn't find it in herself to question his actions. She sought solace in the belief that it had been an accident, something not worth dwelling on. Yet, as she lay in bed, restlessly tossing and turning, sleep eluded her. Zach's face relentlessly haunted her thoughts, replaying itself in an endless loop...

In the living room downstairs, Zach sat in silence, his presence a blend of sobriety and intoxication, marked by his dilated pupils. The enigmatic haze surrounding him blurred the boundaries between reality and inebriation. Before he knew it, he had already polished off the pasta on his plate, savoring a flavor that had eluded him during his usual outings.

A thought crept into Zach's mind—had Madelyn possessed cooking skills all along? Was it possible that she had feigned ignorance to deceive him? However, the notion seemed implausible. Recalling her attendance at cooking classes, he reasoned that her ability to prepare pasta shouldn't have come as a surprise.

Earlier on,

he had intentionally tripped Madelyn to gauge her reaction. To his surprise, Madelyn's gaze had noticeably changed. Every time he ventured within three steps of her, he could sense her visible resistance. It puzzled him. It wasn't rooted in jealousy toward Jadie; instead, it was a profound animosity and fear directed solely at him. A nagging question lingered in his thoughts, 'Could it be that she has discovered something? Madelyn, what exactly... do you know?'

Accustomed to having control over every aspect of his life, Zach found himself losing his grip on Madelyn. He couldn't shake off the feeling that she was concealing something from him. However, she was merely a pawn in his game—a piece to be discarded when it no longer served his purposes.

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As the remnants of the pasta settled in his stomach, Zach's intoxication gradually waned. A sense of calm replaced the unsettling churn within him. He reached for a cigarette, exhaling a cloud of smoke that dissipated into the air. Smoking was not a habit he indulged in frequently, reserving it for social occasions or when he sought a means to push people away...

Time seemed to stretch indefinitely, yet Madelyn's mind remained alert.

Knock, knock, knock...

The rhythmic knocks pierced through the stillness of the night, jolting Madelyn from her reverie. She instinctively pulled the covers tighter around her, hiding beneath their comforting embrace. She knew all too well that it was Zach at the door. The clock struck two in the morning, and the absence of Rosario and Hayson left her vulnerable and alone in the house. Determined, she closed her eyes tightly, feigning obliviousness, determined not to give him a response.

“Madelyn, are you awake?”

Silence hung heavy in the air, Madelyn refusing to break it.

The knocking persisted, an incessant reminder of his presence, while her heart pounded like a wild stallion, the rhythm of her fear resonating in her ears. She had made a solemn promise to herself, vowing never to be ensnared by Zach’s deceitful charm again.

Finally, the knocking ceased, fading into the night as Zach retreated. It took an eternity for

before Madelyn dared to move.

Chapter 33

The following day, Madelyn woke up quite late, because she had only fallen asleep around three or four. She rolled out of bed, slipped into her bra, and changed into some comfy loungewear. Covering her mouth, she let out a yawn and made her way downstairs.

“Rosario, what’s on the menu for breakfast this morning?” she called out.

Rosario, busy in the kitchen, responded, “Mr. Jardin caught a cold, so I whipped up some carrot ginger soup. I’ll take it up to him first. There’s more in the pot if you want some.”

Madelyn was taken aback. “How did he get sick all of a sudden? He seemed perfectly fine yesterday.”

“It’s partly my fault. I thought he had left, so I stashed away his bedding to keep it from gathering dust,” Rosario explained as she prepared to bring the carrot ginger soup upstairs. Then, a thought struck her. “Oh, I almost forgot. We’re out of fever medicine at home. I need to go out and buy some. Madelyn, do you have time? Can you take the soup up to him for me?”

“Sure thing, Rosario. Go ahead! I’ll take care of Zach in the meantime.”

Deep down, Madelyn felt a pang of guilt. Somehow, Zach getting sick seemed to be connected to her. Without having eaten anything herself, she carried the soup upstairs. She reached Zach's room and knocked on the door. "Hey, are you awake, Zach?"

Coughing could be heard from inside the room. "Cough, cough... Come in, the door's not locked."

Madelyn pushed open the door and entered, only to find Zach accompanied by Kevin.

Zach closed his documents and said, "...Let's postpone today's meeting for now. I'll continue to follow up on this project. That'll be all. You can head back to the office, and if anything comes up, give me a call."

"Alright, Mr. Jardin," Kevin replied, grabbing his briefcase. He nodded at Madelyn in greeting.

Zach asked Madelyn, "What are you doing here, Madelyn? Where's Rosario?"

"She went out to buy fever medicine for you," Madelyn answered.

Once Kevin had left, Madelyn set the soup on the bedside table. "Zach, you're sick. You should take it easy right now. Have your meal first."

"Just leave it there," Zach said, his gaze fixed on the laptop screen. He seemed focused and serious. There was something undeniably appealing about a man when he was fully immersed

in his work.

Madelyn knew that once Zach got engrossed in his work, he would likely lose track of time, and by the time he remembered, the soup would probably be cold. In the past, she might have

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taken away his laptop and insisted that he eat. But this time, she decided not to interfere anymore. "Zach, remember to eat and don't forget. I'll go back to studying."

"Alright, if you have any questions or don't understand something, feel free to come and ask me," Zach said.

Madelyn nodded, turned around, and gently closed the door behind her, wanting to avoid disturbing Zach.

Speaking of studying, Madelyn didn't actually return to her books. Instead, she headed downstairs to watch TV. Glancing at the time, she realized it was already past noon. If Hayson didn't come back by midnight, it meant he wouldn't be returning today. Without him around, Madelyn felt a sense of relief.

Although her external injuries had already formed scabs, Madelyn's internal injuries continued to inflict intense pain whenever she made sudden movements. While they had initially shown signs of improvement, they seemed to have worsened after her fall onto Zach's hard body. In an effort to alleviate the discomfort, Madelyn took a few painkillers, which offered significant relief. 1

Just then, Madelyn's phone chimed with the familiar sound of a text message. Without even looking, she knew it was from Ethan.

Ethan: [Is the wound still hurting? What are you up to?]

Madelyn, shuffling in her slippers, responded while pouring herself a glass of water: [It's almost healed. I'm watching a TV show. How about you? Did you take your medication on time? The weather is lovely today. If possible, you should go out for a walk.]

Ethan: [Will you come with me?]

Madelyn: [Of course! Can we go now?]

Ethan: [Not today, I won't be home. But when we meet, I have a surprise for you.]

Madelyn: [Sounds exciting. I'll be looking forward to it.]

The other person didn't reply, and Madelyn tucked her phone away.

Upstairs in the room, Zach sat on the bed, his gaze fixed on his phone, his eyes filled with darkness. An icy chill permeated the entire room.

Chapter 34

BANG!

A loud noise echoed from upstairs, causing Madelyn to glance up at the ceiling. She quickly slipped on her slippers and raced up the stairs, fearing that something had gone wrong with

Zach.

Filled with concern, Madelyn pushed open the bedroom door, her heart pounding with the anticipation of an accident. “Zach, what’s the matter?”

Zach was hunched over on the bed, as if trying to gather the shattered pieces of a bowl from

the floor.

“I’ve got it under control. Just lie down and rest,” Madelyn reassured him. She approached, adjusted the pillows behind his back, and then fetched a broom from outside, swiftly sweeping up the mess on the floor. After that, she crouched down on the floor, meticulously wiping away the stains with a few tissues.

Zach observed her actions, squinting his eyes in a perplexed and puzzled manner. If he hadn’t witnessed it himself, he wouldn’t have believed that Madelyn would stoop to performing such menial tasks. After all, he knew she had never done these things before. He wondered what had brought about this sudden change in Madelyn. Had something happened to her?

The reason Madelyn had transformed into her current self was due to Zach’s influence.

In their previous life, she had married Zach shortly after graduating from college. After eight years of marriage, Zach’s company had skyrocketed, firmly establishing itself in Ventropolis and striking fear into the hearts of many. Meanwhile, Madelyn was left at

home, patiently awaiting his return. Despite having household staff, she found herself simply passing the time as a housewife.

During those years, Madelyn sought other activities to occupy her mind. She couldn't bear to remain idle, as her thoughts would wander. Thus, she took up cleaning the rooms, tending to the flowers, and managing household chores. She even contemplated building her own social circle. It was during this time that she invited the neighbor's wife over for tea, pampered herself with beauty salon treatments, and started going to the gym...

However, as soon as Zach discovered her newfound independence, he insisted that she stay at home, claiming that her actions would bring him embarrassment.

Madelyn understood that Zach's disapproval wasn't rooted in a dislike of her going out; rather, he simply didn't want anyone else coveting what belonged to him. Whenever she visited the gym, a few young men would express interest in her, but what Zach failed to realize was that in her eyes, no man could ever compare to him. Gradually, Madelyn became a prisoner, confined within the decaying walls of their already defeated household, akin to a canary trapped in a gilded cage.

Her previous life resembled that of a fallen consort in an ancient Oriental palace, waiting each day for the emperor's fleeting favor.

If we were to sum it up succinctly, Madelyn's past existence could only be described as heartbreakingly tragic."

II

Perhaps... Zach, convinced that she would never leave him, had acted recklessly, failing to appreciate her love. Madelyn couldn't help but imagine that in her past life, after Zach had learned of her death, he must have found happiness with Cecilia!

After Madelyn finished cleaning, she brought a bowl of soup and settled herself by the edge of the bed. "The soup has cooled down now. Be careful not to spill it again."

"Madelyn, thank you..." Zach's voice was hoarse, punctuated by a few coughs.

Madelyn handed him the bowl, but the intense heat emanating from his palm caused her to flinch. Observing his frail condition, she grew increasingly worried that he lacked the strength to hold the bowl steady. The last thing she wanted was for the soup to spill all over the bed, leaving Rosario with yet another mess to clean up.

With a hint of reluctance, Madelyn reached a compromise within herself.

"Zach... If it's alright with you, let me feed you."

Chapter 35

"Why would I mind? It's actually thoughtful of you, knowing how to take care of me," Zach said, reaching out to tousle her hair.

Madelyn smiled lightly, "You're my brother, and it's my duty to look after you, especially when you're sick."

She brought a spoonful of soup to Zach's lips, and he obediently opened his mouth, swallowing it down.

Taking care of Zach had become a routine for Madelyn in her previous life, although she remained unfazed as long as he didn't fix his gaze on her. Her only goal at this moment was to finish the task swiftly and leave.

Little did she know that it would take almost ten to twenty minutes just to feed him a bowl of soup. Zach ate slowly, coughing incessantly, and there was little Madelyn could do to assist. A glimmer of hope emerged only when Rosario returned...

“Mr. Jardin, let’s check your temperature first!” Rosario handed Zach a thermometer, which he held in his mouth for a while before removing it. The reading showed a temperature of 39 degrees.

Rosario urgently exclaimed, “That’s a high fever, Mr. Jardin. Perhaps you should go to the hospital!”

Zach replied, “Going to the hospital is too much trouble. Let me try taking some medicine first.

“Alright then, Mr. Jardin. If it becomes unbearable, be sure to inform Madelyn. If Mr. Jent finds out how sick you are, he’ll surely hold me accountable,” warned Rosario.

Madelyn’s eyes flickered with a trace of unease. Hayson, her father, had always prioritized Zach, his godson, over her, his own daughter. She feared that Hayson’s anger would somehow impact Rosario, so she hastily said, “Rosario, it’s alright. You don’t need to blame yourself. I’ll stay here and take care of everything. Attend to your other tasks!”

“Alright, Madelyn. Remember to give Mr. Jardin his medicine after half an hour and ensure he drinks plenty of hot water to induce sweating,” instructed Rosario.

Madelyn nodded, “I’ve got it.”

Once Rosario departed, Madelyn took charge of Zach’s affairs, carefully removing the laptop from his blanket and setting it aside.

“What are you doing, Madelyn?”

“Now that you’re sick, it’s important to put your work aside for now. You should lie down and rest properly,” Madelyn insisted, gently guiding Zach to lie down and covering him with the

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Chapter 36

Zach woke up drenched in sweat, his dream feeling all too real. As his eyes fluttered open, he found himself still mired in the anguish of losing Madelyn.

Grief, despair an ache that clenched his heart and stole his breath. He never anticipated a mere dream would elicit such a profound response from within. What made it even more bewildering was that in the dream, Madelyn perished, and he, too, was shattered, as if facing his own demise. It was utterly absurd.

“Zach, you’re awake!” a soft voice came from beside him.

It was Jadie.

Zach glanced at the wall clock, his thoughts murmuring, ‘Afternoon already? It’s getting dark outside. How long have I slept?’

He noticed a tinge of redness in Jadie’s eyes, as if she had just cried.

“Jadie, weren’t you supposed to be at school?” Zach asked with a hint of concern.

Jadie’s voice held a tinge of disappointment as she replied, “Zach, don’t you remember? You promised to pick me up after school on Friday. I waited for you, but when you didn’t show, I called Kevin and found out you were sick. I rushed over here immediately.”

“I’m sorry, I completely forgot,” Zach said, closing his eyes, taking a moment to recover. The dream had left its mark, still vivid in his mind.

“Are you feeling any better now, Zach? Would you like some water?” Jadie inquired.

“No, I’m good.”

“Alright.” Sensing his distress, Jadie reached out, her hand intertwining with his, providing silent support.

At that moment, a knock echoed through the door.

Zach’s eyes fluttered open, his gaze shifting toward the entrance. “Come in.”

“Mr. Jardin, it’s time for dinner. How are you feeling now?” said the person entering the room, Rosario.

An unexplainable heaviness settled in Zach’s chest at the sight of Rosario. “I’m feeling slightly better. Where’s Madelyn?” he asked.

Rosario responded, “Madelyn is downstairs, having her meal. Shall I call her for you, Jardin? Is there something you need?”

Mr.

Suddenly, Zach became aware of something amiss. Thoughts raced through his mind,

Madelyn? Why did I mention Madelyn? Am I under some kind of spell?’ He pressed his hand

against his forehead, weariness seeping into his voice as he replied to Rosario, “No, it’s alright.

Then, turning to Jadie, he added, “You should go and have your meal as well. Once you’re finished, I’ll join you.”

“Okay,” Jadie responded.

Meanwhile, Madelyn couldn’t contain her joy at no longer having to cater to Zach’s needs. After finishing her meal, she settled on the couch and turned on a variety show. It was Friday, with the weekend looming ahead. She was certain Jadie would be home, taking care of Zach. If his condition didn’t improve, Jadie would undoubtedly insist on taking him to the hospital. Thus, Madelyn eagerly anticipated the prospect of being free from Zach’s presence for the next couple of days.

Hayson didn’t return until eight o’ clock in the evening. Just as Madelyn had expected, as soon as Hayson heard about Zach’s illness, he hurriedly went to Zach’s room to check on him.

Rosario came perilously close to losing their job, as Zach returned to find no bedsheet on the mattress, forcing him to sleep on the bare surface.

Jadie, on the other hand, harbored a deep fear of Hayson, remaining silent and withdrawing feeling like an invisible presence within this household, devoid of any agency.

Madelyn continued to implore Hayson, kneeling on the floor, “Father, Zach’s illness has nothing to do with Rosario. It’s all my fault. Please don’t scold Rosario any further.”

She knew that in Hayson's eyes, nobody in the household could hold a candle to Zach, not even for a moment. While Zach was merely unwell, Rosario bore the brunt of severe consequences.

Chapter 37

'This is so unfair to Rosario,' Madelyn silently cursed.

"If something like this happens again, don't expect me to acknowledge the years you spent serving my father and hesitate to dismiss you," Hayson's words reverberated through the room.

"Yes, sir!" Rosario responded.

Hayson furiously dropped the cane he had been clutching and stormed off to his room upstairs, leaving behind a tense atmosphere.

With a heavy heart, Madelyn led Rosario back to Rosario's room, determined to tend to her injuries. She couldn't shake off the tumultuous thoughts swirling in her mind, a whirlwind of disbelief and outrage. 'How could he dare to strike Rosario with that cane?' she silently seethed. 'The pain she's enduring is unimaginable. After all the years of devoted service she has selflessly given to our family, how could Hayson bring himself to inflict such cruelty upon her?'

After Madelyn applied the medicine on Rosario's wounds, Rosario offered her a comforting reassurance.

"Silly child, why are you crying? I'm fine," Rosario gently consoled

“But he hit you! That despicable jerk! How could he stoop so low?”

“Young lady!” Rosario’s gaze suddenly turned cold, her tone firm. “He’s your father. You can’t speak so disrespectfully.”

Madelyn fell silent for a moment before saying, “Understood. I won’t utter such things again.”

As Madelyn entered her own room, her gaze instinctively drifted toward the window. A car parked by the front gate captured her immediate attention. Seated in the passenger seat was a woman dressed in a striking red dress. Though the woman’s face remained blurry, an undeniable sense of intuition welled up within Madelyn, whispering that this woman was none other than her homeroom teacher, Jasmine Manning. Jasmine seemed preoccupied, engrossed in the act of touching up her makeup using the car’s mirror.

Shortly after, Hayson concluded a brief conversation with Zach and made his exit.

The sight only fueled Madelyn’s growing conviction that Jasmine had bewitched Hayson, causing him to disregard his responsibilities at home.

As the car began its departure from the Jent residence, a flicker of concern crossed Madelyn’s thoughts. With a sense of urgency, she quickly retreated behind the protective embrace of the curtains, aware that Jasmine might have noticed her presence.

In that moment, Madelyn’s mind raced as she silently contemplated the dire consequences

that awaited her if her knowledge of Jasmine’s collaboration with Zach and his true intentions were to be exposed. Aware of the perceptive and cunning nature that defined Zach, she understood that he would stop at nothing to protect his secrets. The mere thought of his ruthlessness sent a chilling shiver down her spine.

Nibbling anxiously on her fingernails, Madelyn paced the room, her mind racing in search of a solution. Her very survival hinged on dispelling Zach's suspicions, but she couldn't afford to reveal her knowledge of his true motives within the Jent family.

Approaching him directly and uttering, "I don't care about your plans for the Jent family or Hayson. If you want Jent Corporation, take it," would be a reckless and swift path to her own demise. 1

She understood the urgency of allaying Zach's doubts and convincing him that she posed no threat. Yet, her deep understanding of his cunning tactics and vengeful nature fueled her fear. Zach nursed an unyielding grudge against the Jent family, and Madelyn was acutely aware of the depths of his animosity.

However, Madelyn resolved not to disturb Jadie and him for now. Instead, she would seek an opportune time to approach him the following day.

Apart from Rosario, there were other servants who visited the house at specific times to tend to their cleaning duties but didn't stay overnight. As a result, when hunger struck Madelyn late at night, she had to fend for herself in the kitchen. With Rosario suffering a severe back injury, Madelyn had taken on the responsibility of preparing her own meals in recent days.

That particular night, after ensuring Rosario's well-being, Madelyn ventured out of Rosario's room. Resting against the railing of the staircase, a parched throat compelled her to seek refreshment. Descending to the ground floor, she noticed that the living room lights were still ablaze. Assuming Jadie was preparing a late-night snack for Zach, Madelyn paid it little mind. Little did she know that the timing of her appearance would prove less than ideal.

With disheveled hair and weary eyes wide open, she stepped into the room, only to quickly clamp her mouth shut, suppressing a yawn. A sense of embarrassment washed over her, accompanied by an inner admonishment: ‘Could I have chosen a more inappropriate moment?’

At the dining table, Jadie and Zach sat, indulging in their late-night meal. Their gazes swiftly turned toward Madelyn, leaving her feeling flushed and self-conscious. Offering a sheepish smile, she mustered an explanation. “I was feeling thirsty and came downstairs to get some water.”

Jadie, feeling apologetic, spoke up. “Madelyn, we thought you were already asleep, so we didn’t call for you. There’s some gnocchi soup in the pot. Why don’t you join us?”

Madelyn graciously declined, intent on avoiding any third-wheel moments and hoping to win Zach’s favor. “No, thank you. I’m not accustomed to having late-night snacks, and I have a fear of gaining weight. I’ll simply have some water and retire to bed.”

Chapter 38

Madelyn poured herself a glass of water from the fridge and hurriedly made her way back to her room upstairs.

Jadie glanced back, watching Madelyn’s figure disappear on the stairs. “Maybe I should bring her a bowl now. I’m worried she might feel uncomfortable.”

Zach reached out and affectionately ran his hand through Jadie’s hair. “I’ll go,” he offered, rising from his seat.

Jadie bit her lip and stayed silent. Deep down, she didn't want Zach to be alone with Madelyn. However, she also dreaded the idea of facing Madelyn herself. Just as Madelyn was about to reach for the door to close it from her bed, the lock clicked, and Zach took the liberty to walk in.

Zach had many admirable qualities, but the fact that he never knocked before entering her room slightly annoyed her.

“Jadie made some gnocchi soup. It's delicious. Care to give it a try?”

“I...”

Before Madelyn could finish her sentence, Zach was already seated by her bedside. His presence emitted a cool, almost intimidating aura that made her heart race. He held a spoon and stirred the gnocchi soup in the bowl. “Would you prefer to eat it yourself or shall I feed you?”

“I-I'll eat it myself,” Madelyn stammered. The bowl felt scorching in her hands, and her fingers grew numb from the heat, but she didn't dare utter a word.

Zach's eyes turned icy as he stared at her. “Madelyn... Have you misunderstood something about me recently? Is that why you've been avoiding me?” His voice remained calm, yet it carried an underlying hint of intimidation.

“If there's a misunderstanding, why don't you speak up, Madelyn? I don't want you to misinterpret your own brother.”

Madelyn's hand holding the spoon suddenly trembled. “N-No,” she replied, her outward demeanor composed while her heart felt stuck in her throat.

At that moment, Zach retrieved his phone from his pocket, unlocked it, and presented a photo to her. He placed the phone in front of Madelyn. “What were you secretly looking at in this picture?”

‘This photo...?!’ Madelyn’s eyes widened, and her body trembled. The bowl slipped from her grasp, spilling soup onto the sheets. Zach’s expression turned cold and sinister, as if he was forcing her to admit something! The photo clearly captured her standing by the window, and

the angle suggested it was Jasmine in the car who had taken the picture of Madelyn.

The hot soup seeped into the sheets, scorching her thighs. Hastily, she threw off the blanket and stepped out of bed, avoiding eye contact with him to regain her composure. “Z-Zach... Who took this picture?” She reached for Zach’s phone while tossing the soiled blanket aside, pretending to contemplate for a moment. “Brother... there are certain things I’m not sure if I should reveal.”

Zach pulled her down to sit beside him. “Go ahead, tell me.”

Madelyn spoke up, her voice trembling, “Did Ms. Manning take this picture? When my father came back earlier today, I saw her in his car while I was by the window.

Remember? She’s the

teacher who visited us before.”

She added, her tone filled with concern, “I suspect father might be pressuring her. I have a vague understanding of what he’s been involved in, but I’m still too young to intervene...”

Her voice trailed off, then she continued, her eyes pleading, “Brother, if Ms. Manning is truly being coerced by father, can you help her? She’s a good person, and I don’t want him mistreating her.”

Zach noticed her eyes welling up with tears. Tenderly, he cradled her face with his left hand, gently wiping away the tears with his thumb. His gaze softened as he reassured her, “You forget, I attended your parent-teacher conference. I happened to jot down your teacher’s contact information. Yes, this picture was indeed sent to me by your homeroom teacher.”

He explained further, “But she felt too embarrassed to disclose her current relationship with your father. That’s why she asked me to gauge your reaction first. After all, she’s your teacher...”

Chapter 39

“Plus, you’re about to take the college entrance exams, and I don’t want you to get distracted and let it affect your mood,” Zach added.

Madelyn replied softly, “Actually, I really like Ms. Manning. She always looked out for me back in school. If she’s willing to be with my father, I would accept her.”

She continued, “And... she doesn’t need to worry about my exams because I’ve already made up my mind about which institute I want to apply to.”

Zach asked, “Oh yeah? Mind to tell me?”

Madelyn said, “I want to enroll in the education degree program offered by Lorville University. My dream is to become a renowned teacher. After graduation, I plan to apply for a voluntary teaching program to teach in rural areas.”

Zach’s dark eyes flickered, briefly glancing at Madelyn, who had her gaze fixed on the ground. “Lorville is thousands of miles away from Ventropolis. Even with the fastest plane, it would take over ten hours. Madelyn... I don’t want you to go to such a distant city,” he expressed with concern. He then questioned, “Why would you choose to go so far when everything is perfectly fine here?”

Madelyn silently cursed, ‘Huh? He doesn’t want me to leave? It’s not about not wanting me to go-it’s about keeping me under his control and preventing me from breaking free. With her well-rehearsed arguments at the ready, she spoke softly, “I’ve heard from Rosario that my mom chose to participate in a voluntary teaching program in the countryside, and it was through teaching that she met my dad. I want to walk the same path as my mother and become a teacher. Moreover, the act of guiding and nurturing students resonates deeply with me, bringing true fulfillment.”

She continued, “If I aspire to become a teacher, then I should attend the best education degree program available. I’ve researched the Bachelor of Education program at Ventropolis University, but it doesn’t compare to the quality offered at Lorville University.”

With a pleading tone, she added, “Zach, you’ll support me, won’t you? Can you help me convince Father too?” Madelyn playfully grasped Zach’s hand and pleaded, “Brother... please...”

A slight furrow appeared on Zach’s brow, and a flicker of impatience crossed his eyes.

Sensing Zach's discomfort with physical contact, Madelyn discreetly withdrew her hand.

Zach's frown deepened as he spoke, "If you're set on going to Lorville, I'll try to persuade your father..." He continued, "But you need to think this through carefully. Once you leave Ventropolis, you'll lose the protection we provide. If anything were to happen, neither your father nor I could come to your aid in time."

Madelyn responded calmly, "Don't worry, once I'm there, I'll be responsible and cautious. I won't let you and father worry about me."

"I'll support you no matter what," Zach assured her.

"Thank you, Zach." Madelyn smiled, exuding radiance.

Zach exited the room, closing the door behind him, and proceeded to delete the photo from his phone. Madelyn's words and responses seemed to hold deeper meaning for him, but he began to question if he was overanalyzing the situation.

He pondered to himself, 'If Madelyn knows my true motive for staying with the Jent family, wouldn't she do everything in her power to kick me out? Why would she choose to leave instead?!

The revelation that Madelyn wanted to go to Lorville caught Zach somewhat off guard. Her words hinted that once she left the Jent family, she had no intention of coming back. Even if the Jent family disappeared from Ventropolis, it seemed insignificant to her.

If Zach's suspicions were correct, Madelyn must have possessed impressive acting skills. He couldn't help but think she would be wasted if she didn't pursue a career in the entertainment industry. And if Madelyn truly wanted to sever ties with the Jent family, she would need to make thorough preparations. If his assumptions about her were

accurate, he couldn't help but wonder how a privileged kid like her, who had grown accustomed to a life of luxury, would cope once she lost her wealth and status...

Chapter 40

Madelyn watched as Zach walked out of the room. After he closed the door, she pressed a hand against her racing heart, wondering, 'Will he suspect anything now?' She had dropped hints before, mentioning her plans to leave Ventropolis and move thousands of miles away to Lorville after the college entrance exams. She had also suggested that after graduating from university, she intended to teach in remote areas, so as not to interfere with his revenge against the Jent family.

In other words, she had told that Zach he could treat her as though she were already gone, banishing her from his life. She would never return once she left this home.

Glancing at the stain on the bedsheet, Madelyn let out a sigh. 'Zach really knows how to hold a grudge. I just changed this bedsheet today. Does he want me to spend a night without any covers?'

The blankets in the cupboard hadn't been washed or aired out for nearly six months, and Madelyn was allergic to dust. If she wrapped herself in those blankets, she was guaranteed a trip to the hospital. She couldn't help but mutter, 'This jerk really knows how to hold onto a grudge. He's such a miser!'

Madelyn tossed the blanket onto the floor, deciding to wash it the next day. She grabbed a thick jacket to keep herself warm, turned off the lights, and lay down on the bed.

The following morning, the sun beamed brightly, casting a cloudless sky. Madelyn stretched lazily and roused from her slumber, realizing that she didn't have a headache or a stuffy nose. To her surprise, she also discovered a gray striped blanket draped over her,

though she had no recollection of when it had appeared. Startled, she swiftly removed the blanket, recognizing it as something that only Zach would possess based on its distinctive pattern.

“What the heck? Did Zach sneak into my room last night?” Madelyn’s face paled, and her head throbbed with intensity. ‘Lately, Zach has been making more frequent visits to my room. This is not a good sign. I distinctly remember locking the door, didn’t I?’

Impatiently, Madelyn tugged at her hair.

Just then, Rosario knocked on the door and entered. “Madelyn, quit lazing around. Mr. Jent is downstairs waiting for you to join him for breakfast.”

Madelyn was taken aback. “My father is back?”

“Yes. He arrived with a woman, and...” Rosario’s expression grew complicated, but she quickly stifled it, refraining from saying anything further. “Hurry up!”

“Alright.” Madelyn swiftly dressed, freshened up, and made her way downstairs.

She secured her hair with a clip and noticed that her usual spot at the dining table, the seat next to Hayson, had been taken by Jasmine. Meanwhile, Zach and Jadie occupied the seats

across from Hayson and Jasmine. Madelyn’s steps faltered, and Rosario pulled out a chair for her.

Sitting beside Jasmine wasn’t a significant issue for Madelyn, as she had done so in her previous life. However, in that moment, she couldn’t help but feel a slight repulsion. She sensed a distinct sense of being out of place among the five of them.

Hayson's displeased voice rang out, "Why are you just getting up now? What were you doing last night?"

Before Madelyn could respond, Jasmine spoke up on her behalf. "Come on, Madelyn is under a lot of study pressure right now. She probably stayed up late studying last night, so it's understandable that she woke up late." She then turned to Madelyn, "Isn't that right, Madelyn?"

Madelyn mustered a smile, pulling at the corners of her mouth. "I apologize, Father. It won't happen again."

Rosario aided the situation by placing a bowl of cream soup in front of Madelyn. "Go ahead and eat."

Jasmine delicately selected some Mediterranean-style grilled vegetables and placed them onto Madelyn's plate. "Do you need a tutor, Madelyn? I've heard that you're planning to apply for the education degree program at Lorville. Their faculty of education is known for excellent teacher training. Are you feeling confident about it? Moreover, Lorville is quite far away, and you'll be on your own. Your father and I would be concerned."

Madelyn silently speculated, "Huh, Zach must have been the one to inform her."