

Chapter 18

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Back at the dorms, Gillian was having pancakes for breakfast when the ringing of her phone diverted her attention to the device. Shoving a last piece into her mouth, she picked up the call without looking at the caller's id. "Talk to me, please," she said.

"Gillian?" The familiarity of Daniel's voice strangely gave her comfort and unease at the same time. At this point, she didn't know what to address him as anymore. All this time, she had looked up to him as a brother only to be told that it was all an enormous mistake. Tragic or not, she wasn't sure, but hearing Daniel's chirpy voice reminded her that she was in a bigger mess than she thought she was. Unmistakably, his determination to woo her only strengthened by the haul of obstacles they went through.

"What's up?" Gillian tried to hide her discomfort and sound normal as possible. The last thing she wanted to do was to give Daniel the idea that things weren't okay. It turned out that she didn't need to live the rest of her life hating herself—what more could she ask for?

"Are you busy today?" asked Daniel with an eagerness that was hard to miss.

Gillian thought about her schedule. "Um, no, I'm free today. Why?"

"Great!" Daniel replied. "Because I am going to ask you out. Would you like to go to a parade with me?"

Gillian's mind was lost for a second. Sure, it was only yesterday when matters were cleared up and Jared gave his blessing to them both, but she did not expect them to proceed this fast. First of all, she needed time to think through and reflect on everything. Second of all, did she really love Daniel the way he loved her?

"Um..." Hesitation brewed in her tone, and she was sure he could hear it. The image of a distressed Daniel immediately triggered the feelings of guilt to swarm inside of Gillian. "Sure, why not," she finally rasped out and sighed inside.

"Okay, I'll come over there in a few!" With that, he hung up.

Gillian stared at the phone even long after the conversation was dead. Thoughts flooded her mind and discharged her into a state of confusion. Why did she feel even more guilty now?

"Boo!"

Gillian almost jumped at the unexpected interruption and only scowled when she realized it was none

other than her roommate Edison Chen. “Would you stop taking pleasure in trying to annoy me?” she snapped.

“Oh, but why?” Edison said. “I thought you said I don't have any sort of impact on you?”

“You actually remember that?”

He scratched his head, trying not to appear like he memorized every single word that came out of her mouth. “Uh, well, you were pretty mad that day, so maybe the impression stuck just like how the image of a witch is always in my mind when I see you.” Basically, he had no idea what he was saying but his mind was not working at its maximum capacity for a witty comeback.

She glared at him. “Stop calling me that, you asshole.”

“Sure, just stop calling me asshole.”

“You started it,” she pointed out.

“Do you have evidence?”

She rolled her eyes. Some things never changed, but oddly enough, arguing with Edison brought a peace to her mind. For a second, she almost forgot all her mind-boggling troubles. “Whatever. I must be an idiot to even bother to argue with someone as dense as you are.”

“Ha- ha! You called yourself an idiot!”

Gillian didn't even bother to reply to that and only glanced toward the door, wondering precisely what moment Daniel would come. Five seconds afterward, there was a knock.

Understanding fell on Edison's face as he watched Gillian stumbling toward the door. Before she opened it, he already knew it was Daniel standing outside. At this point, Edison didn't really know how to feel about the whole ordeal. Should he be angry that Gillian got away with lying and everything? Or should he be happy that she wasn't Daniel's sister and they could actually be a good couple?

Somehow, the last notion kind of made Edison squirm with an uneasiness he couldn't quite fathom.

“Hey...” Daniel beamed with a smile, high in spirits.

“Hi Daniel,” replied Gillian as she tried to squeeze out a smile as well.

“You ready?”

She looked down at her sweats. "Um, no... Give me ten minutes, okay? Sorry!!" With that, Gillian quickly disappeared into her room, cursing herself for being so slow. Daniel only chuckled silently from behind, finding the image cute.

Ten seconds passed before the two men finally acknowledged each other's presence. Daniel gazed at Edison, no longer feeling bitterness against his friend. Now, he finally knew the reason behind Edison's persistence in trying to compete for Gillian's affection and couldn't help but feel like he was the luckiest dude in the world to have such a great pal. With a bright smile, Daniel stepped in and gave Edison a bear hug. "Hey, man, how are you?"

After Daniel released the hug, Edison just shrugged. "I'm cool, like always."

Daniel chuckled. "Yeah. Well... um.... I know we haven't been on good terms, and I apologize for the way I acted. I really thought you were up to no good, you know? We agreed on a fair competition but things just kind of didn't seem that way, so I just thought..."

"That I was a backstabbing asshole?" Edison rolled his eyes. "Come on, you know me better than that. I wouldn't do that just over a girl. I don't even like her."

"Yeah, yeah," agreed Daniel. "Sorry, man. Well you tricked me! Who would have ever thought it was just an act... but anyway... we're cool, right?"

"Yeah. We're cool," Edison gave his pal a big pat on the back. "Just promise me to have fun and if you really do like that witch, then well, good luck, man."

"Come on, don't talk about her like that," scolded Daniel.

"Oh, sure, I'll watch my mouth around you," Edison assured.

"Thanks."

Right at the moment, Gillian reappeared from her room. Now she was clad in casual jeans and a yellow t-shirt. Her outfit could be almost thought of as too simple and plain for a date, but to Daniel, he only appreciated it even more. Unlike other guys, Daniel disliked it when girls try too hard on dates to look extravagant to the point of barbarously overdressed. Somehow, Gillian's simplicity only made her appear all the more attractive in Daniel's eyes. It was like she didn't need to dress to impress.

"Um, I'm ready," Gillian announced, feeling the awkwardness of the silence that was about to settle in.

Daniel snapped out of his gaze. "Let's go." Being the gentleman that he was, he gestured for her to go first. When Gillian walked out of the door, Daniel followed. Before closing it, he looked back at his friend and winked. "Wish me luck."

Edison watched as his friend leave. He didn't know why, but he felt strangely bothered.

But, by what?

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Gillian did not know what day it was, but when Daniel said a parade, it was definitely a parade. She could hear loud trumpet noises and beatings of drums as a line of people marched down the street. The few in front were waving banners enthusiastically.

“My dad is sponsoring the parade for his company,” Daniel supplied helpfully, as if sensing her confusion. “It's an event that he hopes to bring together the merging of two companies.”

Gillian just nodded. For as long as she met Daniel, the amount of wealth and power his family possessed never sank into her mind until now. Sure she knew, but to actually witness it was entirely a difference experience. “Is he here?”

“I don't know. Probably out talking with his partners, though,” replied Daniel. He looked left and right and then with a mysterious smile said, “Come on, let's go down that way. I'm sure you're already bored watching them march.”

“Sure.” Gillian just nodded.

As they made their way down the block, Gillian realized that this was also a festival. There were stands and people were checking things out. Seeing the excitement, Gillian suddenly realized that she hadn't felt this way in such a long time. For the past few months, she was warped in uncertainty and anxiety about her future and family that she didn't even have the time to have fun.

Daniel caught her blank gaze and couldn't help but wonder what she was thinking. “Everything's all right? You don't happen to hate festivals, do you?”

Gillian shook her head. “Oh, no...”

“Oh, just checking,” said Daniel. “The last thing I want is you being bored.”

Daniel was always so considerate and caring. She couldn't help but feel like the luckiest girl in the world to be standing next to him. She had always admired Daniel—he was the exact example that she would categorize as perfect, but perfect as a brother or what? Could it ever be more than that?

“Come on.” Daniel shook Gillian out of her daze as he gently grabbed her by the hand. The move was so simple, yet it brought all sorts of emotions to run through her body. The warmth of his hands made her feel like a little girl in need of guidance and protection. Normally, Gillian would rebuke to associate with such image that contradicted everything she tried to be, but somehow, she didn't mind it with Daniel.

Oh gosh, Gillian thought. Am I really falling for him?

“Let's go inside the arcade,” suggested Daniel as he led her into the building.

“Oh, I have never played at an arcade before,” announced Gillian. “Be nice!”

Daniel smiled. “Oh yeah? Well, I'm honored. I'll make sure you have a good time!”

Daniel headed over to the token machine and five minutes later, he returned with a handle of golden tokens. “All rightey, come on.” They walked over to the closest game which was shooting basketballs. Daniel inserted the coins and said, “You wanna go first?”

Gillian smiled. “Yup.” She grabbed a ball and shot.

“Good job!” Daniel cheered when it went through. He grabbed his and shot.

“You're better,” smiled Gillian.

They continued throwing balls with Gillian squealing in excitement every time she made it in. She was lost in her current state that she wasn't aware that Daniel purposely missed a few shots just so that she could have a few more points than him.

“Oh my god! I won!” she exclaimed like a little child.

A wide smile seemed to be stamped on Daniel's face. “My, my, aren't you improving quite fast... Well I'm not surprised. You did make us win the basketball match, remember?” At his reference to the basketball game between them and Edison and Takeshi, Gillian couldn't help but feel the embarrassment burning her cheeks.

“That was so stupid,” said Gillian. “I couldn't believe I actually made you guys do that...”

“Well, it was Edison's idea, not yours,” Daniel replied. “He's stupid.”

At that, they both shared a laugh.

“But yeah, I am grateful for him though,” continued Daniel more seriously. “I know it wasn't the smartest thing to do, but he was just only trying to protect me.” Then Daniel's expression seemed to change into one of admiration. “That guy... he always projects himself as someone who doesn't care, but deep inside, he's a real loyal pal who really cares... too much sometimes. Maybe that's why he chooses to hide it because it's true that when you care too much, you tend to get hurt more.”

“Edison's been hurt before?”

Daniel nodded. “Yeah. It may sound surprising to you, but when we were little, he was always the one that was helping people, you know. He was such a sweet kid. But the other kids kept taking advantage of his kindness, particularly one girl.”

“What did she do?” Gillian definitely did not expect to hear something like this about Edison.

“Well at the time, Edison had a crush on her. Then she told him that if he really cared about her, he should do everything she told him to do.”

“She sounded like a complete brat,” Gillian commented.

“She was,” Daniel agreed. “She was completely cruel. She told him to strip in front of the other kids. He did. She told him to jump into a river. He did. She told him to fail every one of his test. He did. He did just about everything she demanded him to, naively thinking that it'd make her like him back.” Shock scrambled across Gillian's face as she listened.

“...but one day,” Daniel continued, “she announced in front of all the other kids that she would never like Edison Chen because he was a fool.”

“Oh my god,” muttered Gillian. “That must have been painful...”

“It was,” said Daniel. “Poor Edison. He was just a kid. He really thought he could win her by doing those things only to be insulted for it.”

“Why did she do it?”

Daniel shrugged. “You know how kids are. They're just mean just because.”

Gillian nodded in understanding. “Is that why Edison hates girls from that point onwards? And doesn't feel guilty when he plays them?”

“Perhaps,” Daniel said. “I know him pretty well.”

“That's not fair,” Gillian suddenly said, surprising Daniel. “I feel sorry that he got hurt but it's not right to inflict pain on others just because one person crushed you.”

“Well, it's not like he intended to,” supplied Daniel. “I mean, you know Edison. He's popular and girls flock to him willingly. It's not that he has plans to do anything to them. They basically just ask for it when they chase after him knowing that he doesn't like them.”

“He can say no.”

“True,” agreed Daniel. “But don't blame a man's hormones. When a hot girl throws herself at you, it's hard to say 'no'. We only regret afterward when the girl actually wants more but we don't.”

“Exactly which makes him a jerk.”

Daniel shrugged. “Tough case. It's just how guys are. You have to think on our side, too. Think about it. We show no interest, yet girls like that and chase after us and seduce us, even. Being men, we give in to our animal desires. However, the girl almost always expects more from that afterward. Yet because we don't even like her in the first place, we try to avoid her. She gets hurt, and lo and behold, we become the assholes.”

When Daniel put it like that, Gillian could see where he was coming from. Yet she still could not agree.

“But don't get me wrong!” Daniel was haste to fill in. “I'm not like that at all. I just understand how guys like Edison work and how he gets misunderstood. I'm not saying that I treat girls like that. No! Not at all.” Then he stared at her with a sincerity that almost shook her being. “I will never, ever treat you like that, Gillian. You have to believe me.”

Gillian nodded. Daniel never occurred to her to resemble a bit like Edison Chen. “Um, let's go over there.”

“Oh right, sorry,” said Daniel, chuckling. “You should have said so earlier! I must have bored you with Edison's life story.”

She shook her head. “Not at all. It's interesting to finally see the story behind his facade.”

“I guess,” said Daniel. “But don't let him know I told you all of this. He would cry and throw a fit. We both don't want that.”

“Consider me suitably warned.”

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After what seemed like hours, Daniel and Gillian finally left the arcade. They were strolling on the streets. By now, the parade had died down and only a few stations scattered here and there. The sun was starting to set, and people were about to head home.

“Thanks for the prize,” said Gillian, looking down at the Hello Kitty doll she had in her arms. “I had no idea you are so good with these little games.”

Daniel's chuckle was loud and clear. “Well, I got to say, when you have motivation, everything

becomes easier.”

Gillian looked up at him, wondering what he meant. “Huh?”

“I’m just saying that when I think of you, it gives me this unexplainable power that makes me feel like I can do anything,” he said seriously. “It sounds funny, doesn’t it? I’m not trying to scare you off but honestly, you have that impact on me that no other girl has. Ever. Not as long as you’re here.”

Such words uttered by Daniel made Gillian stare at him, almost awestruck. How could he say such words with so many meanings attached to them? Her respect for him had just boosted to several levels because he was never afraid to show her how he felt. She, on the other hand, had so many conflicting emotions raging inside of her that she did not know how to deal with. It didn’t help that she wasn’t able to tell him any of them. Was she just a lie, after all?

“Oh hey! It’s you two!” The familiarity of Hye Kyo’s voice drew both their attentions as they turned their heads. Hye Kyo was walking toward them with Ariel at the side. “What a coincidence. Did you guys catch the parade also?”

Daniel nodded. “We sure did.”

Somehow, Gillian felt awkward to see Hye Kyo. She always trusted her friends, but Gillian felt like she needed to keep a distance for now. She decided to keep quiet.

“We too!” Hye Kyo announced as though it wasn’t obvious. “Hmm, where you guys heading to now?”

Ariel nudged at the side, wondering what Hye Kyo was up to. “Um, we’re supposed to catch dinner, remember?” she whispered but Hye Kyo totally disregarded her.

“I want to go home now,” Gillian declared.

“Oh, I’ll take you home,” Daniel offered until Hye Kyo interrupted.

“Ariel, drive Gillian to Margaret’s. Remember she told us she had something important to tell Gillian?” Hye Kyo gave Ariel the nudge.

“She does?” Ariel asked.

Obvious was the concern that flickered in Gillian’s eyes. “Is something the matter?”

“I don’t know. She sounded pretty urgent, though,” supplied Hye Kyo. “Go.”

Ariel just rolled her eyes and decided to go along, knowing that there wasn’t harm done. “Come on,

Gillian. This way.” With that, the two left.

With a triumphant smile, Hye Kyo hopped over to Daniel's side. “Hey. Long time no see.”

Daniel just smiled politely. He was pretty much gleeful for most of the day, and nothing could affect his spirits now. He only exuded more happiness. “How have you been, Miss Song?”

“Don't call me that!” Hye Kyo pouted, tugging on his arm. “You make me sound so old.”

“Oh, I don't mean that, Hye Kyo.”

“That's better,” she smiled. “Say, are you busy? Maybe we can catch dinner. I'm pretty sure you haven't eaten yet.”

Daniel thought for a moment. Now that she mentioned food, he was a bit hungry. Besides, he was in such a good mood, he'd say yes to anything. “All right. We can grab some Japanese food.”

Fifteen minutes later, they were seated across from each other in a rather classy Japanese restaurant. Daniel opted for some sushi while Hye Kyo picked out a classical Japanese dinner combination. Soon, the waiter returned, and both of them indulged in their meals happily.

“Hmm, so how are things with Gillian?” asked Hye Kyo. “I hope she's not mad at me...”

Daniel shook his head. “You know Gillian. She's not the type to hold grudges. Besides, what you did wasn't wrong.”

“You think?”

“Yeah, you only wanted to help her, right?”

“Of course...”

“Exactly,” said Daniel. “So don't worry about it. You guys just need to talk about it a bit, and the awkwardness will be dispensed.”

Hye Kyo giggled which made Daniel frown in confusion. When she detected it, Hye Kyo was quick to clarify, “Oh no, it's nothing. I just find it cute when you speak like that.”

“Like what?”

“You know, like very seriously. Usually I'd think it's dorky, but when you do it, it's like... oh my...”

Anyone could tell that from the way Hye Kyo's voice pitched that it was an obvious invitation to flirting. Daniel, however, dismissed it. "Oh... Is that a good thing?"

"Of course..." said Hye Kyo in the same tone. "You're so..." She giggled.

Daniel's confusion only reproduced by tenfold. He didn't get why she wouldn't finish her sentences but decided not to pester about it, deeming it unimportant. Rather, he just focused on finishing his meal.

After they were done, Daniel and Hye Kyo left the restaurant and were walking side by side when Hye Kyo started to wobble. Daniel, seeing it, caught her in time before she could lean forward for a fall. "Whoa, you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry, my heels are just bothering me," Hye Kyo confessed with a sigh. "I'm such a nuisance..."

"Don't say that," said Daniel. "It's okay. I'll hold you."

"Aren't you sweet," cooed Hye Kyo as she leaned against him, feeling the warmth of his chest. Strangely, she felt secured in his arms. She knew that if she closed her eyes, nothing would happen to her; Daniel was a reliable man. "Gillian should feel lucky she has you... because I'm really jealous."

Daniel was taken aback by what she just said, but decided not to comment on it. He was holding onto her tightly, making sure she wouldn't wobble again when Hye Kyo almost tripped over her own two feet and stumbled against him, her cheeks extremely close to his.

Silence enveloped them for a brief moment as Hye Kyo stared into his eyes, seeing what she wanted to see. She knew he found her attractive but his gentle nature held him back. Overruled by impulsive desires, Hye Kyo leaned in and kissed his cheek.

Daniel's eyes bulged wide open upon the contact of her soft lips. Immediately, he released her, awkwardness shading his features. "Umm..."

"I know you want me," Hye Kyo cooed. "I see it."

"I think you're mistaken," Daniel awkwardly said. "I love Gillian."

"Doesn't matter. You want me," Hye Kyo repeated more sternly. She couldn't believe he just rejected her.

"I only have eyes for Gillian. I'm sorry."

Although Hye Kyo did not harbor deep feelings for Daniel, her ego couldn't take the rejection. "I don't think so, Daniel. I'm the one that should feel sorry for you because Gillian doesn't even have eyes for you."

“What?”

Hye Kyo stood up straight, gaining her composure. She crossed her arms. “Oh my, you didn't know? Oops...”

“What do you mean by that?” Daniel asked. “I don't know, what?”

Hye Kyo sighed. “Oh, you know... Gillian and Edison?”

Daniel stiffened. “What about them?”

“They're in love?”

Daniel's eyes widened. “What? No!”

“Uh huh...” Hye Kyo said. “I saw them kissing.”

“You what?” Daniel couldn't believe his ears.

“You know... K-i-s-s-i--”

“I know how you spell kissing.” Hye Kyo was surprised to hear how snappy Daniel sounded. “But did you really see them? Are you sure?”

“Of course,” said Hye Kyo. “I trust my own two eyes. I saw them kissing in Edison's car right outside Margaret's house.”

Shock, rage, and hurt washed over Daniel like a tidal wave. His mind suddenly was bombarded with the uninvited images of Edison and Gillian in the act. He was normally rational, but when matters concerned Gillian, Daniel couldn't help but allow the unthinkable emotions to usurp his entire being. He always had the suspicion that Edison harbored feelings for Gillian, but could it be true? Did Edison just straight out lie to him when he said he didn't like Gillian at all?

Or was Gillian just a living lie? After all, she wasn't honest with him right from the start.

“I wouldn't lie about this, just so you know...” added Hye Kyo. “I may be a bitch, but I'm a pretty real one.” With that, she stalked away.

Daniel felt torn. He didn't know what to believe at all.