





# Unshackled Heart

蛻變・重生



DAMIEN HSU

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### *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to my father, a prolific reader who loves me as I am and inspires me to turn ideas into words, and to my mother, who exemplifies a mother's profound love.

## Preface

Do you know what the expression “on the fence” means? What about the expression “few and far between”? Well, let me explain with a story.

Years ago, I attended a boarding school in the United States—a **world away**<sup>1</sup> from the Chinese-speaking schools in Taiwan where I had received my education. By the end of my first year, my **dorm parent**<sup>2</sup> asked me to be his dorm proctor for the upcoming year. This offer, usually given to responsible students in excellent academic standing, completely **caught me off guard**<sup>3</sup>. As an international student new to the country, I was surprised to be considered at all. Initially, I was **on the fence**<sup>4</sup>, unsure about the demands of the job or if I could **rise to the occasion**<sup>5</sup>, but I eventually agreed, thinking it would look good on my college application.

As a dorm proctor, I spent my evenings **making the rounds**<sup>6</sup>

- 1 **A world away from (something)**: completely different from (something) 和... 有天壤之別
- 2 **Dorm Parent or Resident Advisor (RA)**: the person who lives in a dormitory (like at a boarding school) to supervise the students 舍監
- 3 **To catch someone off guard**: to surprise someone by doing something that they are not expecting or ready for 使(某人)措手不及; 趁(某人)不警惕時(做某事)
- 4 **On the fence**: not able to decide something 猶豫無法決定
- 5 **Rise to the occasion**: to show that one can deal with a difficult situation successfully 成功應付困難; 臨危不亂
- 6 **To make the rounds**: to visit or inspect various places or people systematically, especially as part of one's job or duty 定期或有系統地在某地點或人群中進行巡視、訪問或活動, 以提供服務、檢查狀況

during the two-hour **study hall**<sup>7</sup>, taking orders for late-night snacks and ensuring everyone was at their desk studying. This unique experience gave me ample opportunities to engage with my American peers. It was during these interactions that I heard comments about my English sounding “formal, like it came straight out of a textbook.” At first, I took it as a compliment but soon realized they meant my speech lacked the casual fluidity of everyday conversation. In other words, I sounded stiff and unnatural. That’s when I decided that if I wanted to better integrate into American culture, I needed to speak more colloquially. However, back then, books on English idioms or slang were **few and far between**<sup>8</sup>.

Today, while there are more books on English idioms, many still present the information in a dry, non-contextual manner, often listing each idiom followed by a couple of example sentences. This approach makes it hard for readers to grasp how native speakers use idioms in everyday contexts. Recognizing this gap inspired me to write a novel that brings idiomatic expressions to life through everyday language and realistic dialogues between characters. My goal is to help readers immerse themselves in natural contexts and learn English in an engaging manner so that they can speak more like native speakers.

Looking back, I wish I had **come across**<sup>9</sup> a book like this; it would

7 **Study hall**: a period in a student’s day set aside for study and homework; a room in a school set aside for study 學生一天中專門用於學習和做作業的時間段；學校裡專門用於學習的房間

8 **Few and far between**: few in number and infrequently met 不多；罕見

9 **Come across**: to find something by chance (偶然) 發現；碰見

have saved me so much time and energy. That is why I want to provide this book as a resource to those eager to improve their English, just as I wished I had access to it when I was on my English learning journey.



## 序

多年前，我遠赴美國就讀寄宿學校，那裡的教育與我在台灣公立學校的經歷迥然不同。高一即將結束時，我意外地收到邀請擔任下一學年的舍監助理。由於這個角色通常是由品學兼優、責任心強的學生所負責，作為一個剛到美國不久的留學生，我對自己竟然會被列入考慮感到十分驚訝。起初，我對是否接受這個職務有些猶豫，擔心自己無法勝任。但轉念一想，這段經歷或許會為日後的大學申請加分，我最終決定迎接這個挑戰。

成為舍監助理後，我每晚的任務不僅包括在兩小時的自修時間內巡視各個房間，詢問大家是否需要訂宵夜，還要確保每位學生都在書桌前讀書。這段特殊的經歷讓我有機會與美國同學頻繁地交流。在互動的過程中，他們時常評論我的英語聽起來像是從教科書上模仿而來，非常地正式。我原以為這是對我的讚美，但很快我就意識到，他們其實是指我的口語表達缺乏日常對話的自然流暢感，生硬且不自然。因此，我告訴自己，若想真正融入美國文化，就必須學會更貼近日常生活的表達方式。然而，當時關於英語慣用語或俚語的書籍極為稀少。

如今，雖然市面上已有許多關於英語慣用語的書籍，但大多仍以枯燥、缺乏語境的方式呈現，通常只是簡單列出慣用語，再附上幾個例句。這種呈現方式讓讀者很難理解母語者在日常對話中的使用情境。意識到這一點後，我決定著手撰寫這本小說，通過貼近生活的故事情節和人物對話來展現慣用語的使用。我真心希望這本小說能幫助讀者自然地融入語境，以更有趣的方式學習英語，使讀者的表達更貼近母語者的水平。

回首過去，我真希望在高中時期能接觸到這樣的書籍，就能省下許多學習的時間與精力。因此，我想將這本書提供給渴望提升英語能力的讀者，正如當初的自己對這類資源的渴望一般。



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## *Prologue*

*“We are our own worst enemy.”*

- Friedrich Nietzsche

...

Darian grew up in a small town of 8,000 people on the eastern tip of a hilly island nation in Southeast Asia. There, word travels fast, and people don't **shy away from**<sup>1</sup> **sticking their noses in other people's business**<sup>2</sup>. When news **broke**<sup>3</sup> that Darian had left Maria—his wife and high school sweetheart—the whole town was buzzing with whispers within minutes. Many believed that when their marriage started to **go south**<sup>4</sup>, instead of **facing it head-on**<sup>5</sup>, Darian left town in the quiet of the night.

Even a decade after Darian's disappearance, no one in his family had been able to **get a hold of**<sup>6</sup> him. It was as if he had **vanished into thin air**<sup>7</sup>. Initially, the local tabloid newspaper put out various stories about his mysterious disappearance. Many sensational fabrications emerged. Rumors swirled for months that Darian had left Maria—his supposed first and only love up until his departure—to have an affair with a man, insinuating that his marriage to Maria had been all

**smoke and mirrors**<sup>8</sup>. Although these speculations were never proven, they weren't entirely groundless.

Darian had always found excuses to avoid having children with Maria over a span of 12 years, with the last five as a married couple. Some guessed that he had gone searching for his long-lost mother, but those close to him dismissed the idea on the basis that he resented her too much to **entertain**<sup>9</sup> the thought. The wiser folks in town didn't give much credence to the **rumor mill**<sup>10</sup>. While Darian's disappearance briefly disrupted the town's rhythm, the truth behind his vanishing remained elusive.

A few months after Darian **skipped town**<sup>11</sup>, his father, Peter, had a fatal heart attack on his way to work. For years, his doctor had warned him to **steer clear of**<sup>12</sup> sugary and fatty foods, knowing Peter **had a weakness for**<sup>13</sup> them. If **left to his own devices**<sup>14</sup>, Peter could finish an entire cake **in one sitting**<sup>15</sup>. At first, he tried to watch his diet but then **let it slide**<sup>16</sup>. Even with Maria's constant reminders, Peter ignored the doctor's orders. It might seem harsh to say he **had it coming**<sup>17</sup>, but he never seemed to learn his lesson.

Years earlier, Peter had **passed out**<sup>18</sup> at home from a sugar overload and had a **close brush with**<sup>19</sup> death. A delivery boy saw him lying on the floor through a window, broke in, and saved him. It was a **close call**<sup>20</sup>. If it weren't for the boy, he would have **kicked the bucket**<sup>21</sup> **then and there**<sup>22</sup>. After that, Peter moved in with Darian and Maria so that they could **keep a close eye**<sup>23</sup> on him. Sadly, luck wasn't on his side the next time. He had no one but himself to blame for not watching his diet. His time **was up**<sup>24</sup>.

Peter's sudden passing **came out of left field**<sup>25</sup> for Maria because he had been somewhat active, taking morning strolls even in winter when his knees would **act up**<sup>26</sup> from old tennis injuries. Walking was a habit he had developed with Darian's mom, something they did together. Around the same time as Peter's death, there was a notable spike in elderly deaths. The weather that year was out of the ordinary, with temperatures swinging upwards of 20 degrees within a day. The erratic weather **set off**<sup>27</sup> an unusually high number of cardiac arrests in their small town.

Since Darian had no other living male relatives, the government confiscated the family estate. The island nation followed a patrilineal inheritance system where property and titles were passed down through the male lineage. In exceptional cases, women could inherit if all rightful male heirs were deceased. But since Darian was missing rather than confirmed dead, his disappearance really **did a number on**<sup>28</sup> Maria. It left her with no option but to rent her own house from the government. With no time to mourn Peter, who had been **nothing but**<sup>29</sup> kind to her, Maria argued with the authorities that this chauvinistic law violated her rights as a woman. In the end, however, her efforts were **in vain**<sup>30</sup>.

Maria's case wasn't unique. Several women had petitioned to abolish the sexist inheritance law, but their efforts were **met with**<sup>31</sup> rebuffs. After all, it was a man's world on this island. In fact, some men found it unjust that women couldn't inherit property but said nothing for fear of opening a **can of worms**<sup>32</sup> once women began to gain more rights. It wasn't like Maria hadn't thought about going after Darian, but she had no idea where to start. Whenever she brought

up the idea, people would try to **talk her out of it**<sup>33</sup>.

Maria thought about purchasing the house, holding on to the hope that Darian might one day return, but she didn't have the means. When she consulted a lawyer—male, of course, as female lawyers were rare—he **spoke in riddles**<sup>34</sup> and in a condescending manner. Other lawyers were more or less the same: unhelpful at best, more often insulting and dismissive. All of them dropped her case as soon as they realized they'd have to take it on **pro bono**<sup>35</sup>. Maria knew the odds were against her, but she was determined to give it her all and take every fighting chance she could get. After knocking on countless lawyers' doors and exhausting all possible avenues, she had to give up. Like the women before her, Maria could only sit **on the sidelines**<sup>36</sup>, watching as the government seized the title deed to her house.



## ONE

### *Darian*

**M**y childhood dream of a picture-perfect family got ripped away the day she walked out on us. She used to feed me lines about how **the world would be my oyster**<sup>37</sup> someday. Turns out, she meant it'd be her oyster instead. According to my dad, she left to chase her career dreams because she felt **stuck in a rut**<sup>38</sup> and yearned for adventure. **For all I know**<sup>39</sup>, she could be remarried with a whole new family that I'll never know about.

Dad stepped up, **wearing multiple hats**<sup>40</sup>: he was a father, a mother, and a banker, all **rolled into one**<sup>41</sup>. At home, he played both the **good cop** and the **bad cop**<sup>42</sup>. When my mom left us, it **messed me up**<sup>43</sup>. I **went off the rails**<sup>44</sup> at school, almost becoming a **juvenile delinquent**<sup>45</sup>. I was constantly stirring up trouble, picking fights, and **goofing off**<sup>46</sup>. In middle school, the principal warned me more times than I could count to **mend my ways**<sup>47</sup> or face expulsion. When she was **telling me off**<sup>48</sup>, I didn't really care. Looking back, I owe her a debt of gratitude for **putting up with me**<sup>49</sup> and **calling me out**<sup>50</sup> whenever I **slipped up**<sup>51</sup> so that I could learn right from wrong.

Shortly after my mom left, I began selling **pot**<sup>52</sup> on school grounds to make some **easy money**<sup>53</sup> on the side. My dad didn't have a clue,

at least not at first. It all started when I bumped into a dealer named Dion, known as the **Candyman**<sup>54</sup> in the neighborhood. One day, Dion saw me walking home from school and recruited me to join his crew. I knew **taking up with people**<sup>55</sup> like him was dangerous, but the thick stack of cash he waved in my face was hard to resist. Plus, he made me feel seen and, in a twisted way, kind of cool.

But it didn't take long for me to realize I wasn't the only one caught in Dion's web. Many of the boys selling drugs for him came from troubled families with abusive or drug-addicted parents. **A light bulb went off**<sup>56</sup> in my head when I saw Dion threaten to kill a boy who wanted out. I knew I had to do something—and fast.

Dion controlled his boys by getting them hooked on **hard drugs**<sup>57</sup> like heroin or cocaine. Even though I made it clear from the **get-go**<sup>58</sup> that I was only **down to**<sup>59</sup> sell marijuana, Dion kept **egging me on**<sup>60</sup> to sell cocaine. I was no saint, but I knew cocaine was the devil's drug.

Among Dion's crew, there was a boy named Budi, who had grown up with me. We had always **looked out for each other**<sup>61</sup> until he tragically **OD'd**<sup>62</sup> on heroin and died. It was only then that I found out he'd also been recruited by Dion. Watching Budi die was a **wake-up call**<sup>63</sup>, showing me the dangerous web Dion had ensnared us in. I hadn't signed up for this; I was only in it for a quick buck. It's horrifying to think that I ever considered **roping in**<sup>64</sup> others to sell drugs.

Dion coerced me into helping him dispose of Budi's body and warned me not to involve the police because I had become his accomplice. He made it clear that if I were to report anything, I would go

down with him. The whole experience turned me into a complete **basket case**<sup>65</sup>. Afterward, the guilt **weighed me down**<sup>66</sup>, and I knew I couldn't keep living with the burden. It took a whole lot of courage, but I eventually **ratted Dion out**<sup>67</sup> to the police, knowing I would implicate myself. Luckily, as a minor and an informant, I got a deal to wipe my record clean if I stayed conviction-free for five years. It was an offer too good to **pass up**<sup>68</sup>. In hindsight, I'm grateful for the chance to start my life with **a clean slate**<sup>69</sup> and get it back **on track**<sup>70</sup>.

Years later, I heard Dion had died in prison. I felt no sorrow for him; he deserved to rot for his crimes. Selling drugs was just **the tip of the iceberg**<sup>71</sup>. He was running a drug cartel, involved in **human trafficking**<sup>72</sup>, and trading illegal arms on **the dark web**<sup>73</sup>. Despite some efforts to turn his life around, he remained a recidivist. It's a cruel reality that many can't find their way back once they **go astray**<sup>74</sup>. I know teenage rebellion is a cliché, but I took it too far. When our hormones are raging, it's hard to think about the consequences of our actions. Often, the foolish decisions we make in our youth can have an irrevocable impact on our future. I consider myself lucky. Not everyone gets a second chance at life, but I did.

During that chaotic time, my dad saw my rebellion as a desperate cry for attention, worried that mom's leaving had scarred me for life. **There was no denying**<sup>75</sup> that I was lost—every boy needs his mom, right? I was so **consumed by**<sup>76</sup> my own pain that I failed to recognize that my dad had also lost the love of his life, the mother of his child.

Despite their differences, my dad loved my mom deeply, so much that he found the strength to let her go. In my youthful naivety, I

couldn't comprehend that kind of love. I was mad at my parents for not fighting harder for each other.

Even though love still remained between them, my parents knew their marriage had reached a point beyond saving. Continuing their tumultuous relationship would have brought more harm than good. **In retrospect**<sup>77</sup>, I wish I had known that. I truly give **props**<sup>78</sup> to my **old man**<sup>79</sup> for being the pillar of our family and for never giving up on me.

With time, I now understand that my **acting out**<sup>80</sup> was born from a desire to feel loved and to fill the void in my life. But can you blame me? I lost my mother **for good**<sup>81</sup>.

## TWO

### *Maria*

That night, I woke up with a sick feeling in the **pit of my stomach**<sup>82</sup>. I knew **something was up**<sup>83</sup>. As I rose from my slumber, my heart sank as my eyes landed on a note on my nightstand that read, “I’m sorry.” Darian had left me. My heart began to race like a wild stallion, ready to burst out of my chest. The news hit me **like a ton of bricks**<sup>84</sup> and completely blindsided me. My mind tried to piece together what could have possibly prompted such callousness. Was it my one transgression that led to this?

A month before our wedding years ago, my friends threw me a bachelorette party—a supposedly innocent girls’ night out at a local club. It was a packed Saturday night, with people squeezed shoulder to shoulder like sardines. Near the bar area, I **ran into**<sup>85</sup> John, Darian’s coworker who’d **had a thing for me**<sup>86</sup> ever since he moved to our town. I’d always **kept my distance**<sup>87</sup> because I was already with Darian. But that night, John approached me, taking advantage of my inebriation to manipulate me into cheating on Darian. He **painted**<sup>88</sup> it as my last chance for a fling before **the big day**<sup>89</sup>. In a moment of weakness, I caved to his persistence and charm. I regretted it immediately and felt dirty for what I’d done. I should have exercised more self-restraint, being a **lightweight**<sup>90</sup> and all. Typically, after two

drinks, all **bets are off**<sup>91</sup> for me.

For weeks, I kept this secret to myself, but the guilt **ate away at me**<sup>92</sup>. On our wedding day, I **came clean**<sup>93</sup> to Darian about my indiscretion because I didn't want to start our marriage with a lie. He asked me to promise never to repeat it, and I **gave my word**<sup>94</sup>. I thought we'd **put this to bed**<sup>95</sup> since I'd kept my promise. I know I haven't been a perfect wife, but don't we have to accept **the ebb and flow**<sup>96</sup> of any relationship? Perhaps he never truly got over what happened at the club. Still, I couldn't comprehend how he could just walk away, disregarding our vows of "for better or worse till death do us part." Did the past 12 years mean nothing to him?

### THREE

#### *Tiffany*

I was stunned when I heard that Darian had taken off like that. I know Maria and Darian **had their differences**<sup>97</sup> over the years, but seeing Maria grieve over the loss of her love pains me deeply. I've always **prided myself on**<sup>98</sup> being a good judge of character, and I **took Darian as**<sup>99</sup> a **stand-up**<sup>100</sup> guy, someone **on the up and up**<sup>101</sup>. It seems I misjudged him. **Come to think of it**<sup>102</sup>, Maria's indiscretion before the wedding day may have triggered Darian's departure. Once Maria confessed to Darian about the night with John, **the die was cast**<sup>103</sup>—their marriage was doomed. Forgiveness isn't Darian's **strong suit**<sup>104</sup>, and he **takes things to heart**<sup>105</sup> easily. **It's safe to say**<sup>106</sup> that you don't want to **get on his bad side**<sup>107</sup>.

Maria came to me about two weeks after Darian had left her. It was clear that she had not been sleeping; the bags under her eyes **gave it away**<sup>108</sup>. As her best friend, I felt partly responsible for Darian's departure. Thinking back on the night of Maria's bachelorette party, I remembered seeing John getting cozy with Maria but did nothing to intervene.

Growing up, Maria was the girl every guy wanted. She was pretty, kind, and smart. I was always the sidekick, the girl standing beside her

whom people barely noticed. Boys only saw me as a stepping stone to get close to her. I'd be lying if I said I was never jealous of her effortless beauty, popularity, and girl-next-door charm. She was the kind of girl that boys would be proud to bring home to meet their parents.

Maria didn't come from money. Her dad was a **washed-up**<sup>109</sup> musician making a mediocre living at a local jazz bar. Her mother was once a modestly successful ballet dancer before becoming a full-time homemaker. Maria **took after**<sup>110</sup> her mother's slim figure and fair complexion. Even though Maria wasn't a dancer like her mother, she **carried herself**<sup>111</sup> like one, always standing tall with her chin parallel to the floor, walking as if she were gliding across the room. Her graceful bearing earned her many admirers.

When Maria first got together with Darian, I didn't talk to her for weeks because I had been **carrying a torch**<sup>112</sup> for Darian. He was the only man I had wanted to be with since we were kids. As you can imagine, I was **green with envy**<sup>113</sup>. I had dreamed about our wedding, the dress I would wear, and the number of children we would raise. Perhaps my infatuation with Darian was more about the allure of love itself; any fleeting affection could be construed as undying adoration at a tender age. My feelings could have been directed toward anyone, and Darian just happened to be the first person I liked. Back then, Darian might not have been strikingly handsome or irresistibly charming, but something about him drew me in. If he had **asked me for my hand**<sup>114</sup>, I would have said yes **in a heartbeat**<sup>115</sup>.

I vividly recall how Darian used to prank-call his friends during grade school. Sometimes, he would **sidle up to people**<sup>116</sup> and give



them a **wedgie**<sup>117</sup> or let out a sudden, ear-piercing cry, **scaring them out of their wits**<sup>118</sup>. He had a playful nature and would **get a kick out of**<sup>119</sup> shocking people. His mischievous antics always left us feeling both excited and apprehensive, but they **drove his mother up the wall**<sup>120</sup>. To give him **a taste of his own medicine**<sup>121</sup>, some friends and I once ordered 15 pizzas to be delivered to his house, which he had to pay for. As we grew up, we shared many **inside jokes**<sup>122</sup> that never failed to **crack us up**<sup>123</sup>. Those were the good old days, back when I was still an innocent, naive girl. Now, that girl is long gone.

On Maria's wedding day, I stood by her side as the maid of honor. Losing the man of my dreams to my best friend really **rubbed salt in the wound**<sup>124</sup>. I had to hide my broken heart from everyone. That day marked a profound shift in me. It wasn't that I lost faith in love, but rather the desire to invest in it with the same intensity and purity.

I knew people **called me all kinds of names**<sup>125</sup> behind my back for dating around without settling down like the other girls back home. I just felt **boxed in**<sup>126</sup> **doing things by the book**<sup>127</sup>. People in this town were too **strait-laced**<sup>128</sup>. I saw no harm in keeping my options open. Normally, I brush off what others say about me, being thick-skinned and all. **Taking criticism in stride**<sup>129</sup> has served me well, pushing me out of my comfort zone to take risks others might avoid.

Despite my less-than-stellar track record, my mother persisted in her quest to find me suitors, convinced that dating is **a numbers game**<sup>130</sup>—as long as I kept going on dates, I would eventually find my **Prince Charming**<sup>131</sup>. She saw marriage as an integral part of a woman's life and feared I might end up alone. To please her, I went

on countless dates. However, my reluctance to settle down often deterred the suitors she found for me. Many, if not all, quickly **ran for the hills**<sup>132</sup> when they discovered my unconventional views on relationships.

At my cousin Sarah's wedding, I faced backhanded comments for being single, yet my parents decided to **turn a blind eye**<sup>133</sup>. This lack of support in social settings left me feeling **hung out to dry**<sup>134</sup> by my family, who also failed to defend my lifestyle choices on other occasions. It's not that I was against marriage. If true love came knocking on my door, I wouldn't turn it down. But in my eyes, no one **measured up to**<sup>135</sup> the feelings that Darian once inspired in me.

After losing Darian to Maria, I couldn't muster any enthusiasm for dating for a while. Whenever I turned down men—many of whom were considered **eligible bachelors**<sup>136</sup>—my friends would call me crazy or joke about my hidden desire to take a dip in the **lady pond**<sup>137</sup>. They couldn't understand why I passed up those opportunities. I'm not saying that **swinging both ways**<sup>138</sup> never **crossed my mind**<sup>139</sup>, but I've always been **boy crazy**<sup>140</sup>. I **have a few tricks up my sleeve**<sup>141</sup> and understand **what makes a man tick**<sup>142</sup>.

Truth be told, I was often approached by men, especially the wealthy, older ones, who were willing to **provide for me**<sup>143</sup>. But I'm **not cut out**<sup>144</sup> to be a **trophy wife**<sup>145</sup>. I wanted to find a man with whom I could build a life. For the longest time, I thought that man was Darian, but my love turned out to be unrequited. That night when I saw Maria, our very own Miss Perfect, coying up with John at the club, I chuckled to myself, wondering why anyone, least of all

her, would risk their marriage for a fling. I found myself wishing Darian would find out about it and **call off**<sup>146</sup> the engagement.

...

Without Darian, Maria's life spiraled into disarray. Night terrors haunted her sleep, leaving her restless and tormented, while migraines plagued her days, forcing her into isolation and darkness. In that challenging time, I saw her suffering firsthand. John, ever hopeful, thought Maria might **fall for**<sup>147</sup> him now that Darian was **out of the picture**<sup>148</sup>. He **went out of his way**<sup>149</sup> to please her, **lending an ear**<sup>150</sup> whenever she needed it and showering her with expensive jewelry. But unlike other women, Maria wasn't impressed by the sparkles and **wouldn't be caught dead**<sup>151</sup> wearing diamonds. They say diamonds are a girl's best friend, but they certainly weren't hers.

Among the gifts John gave Maria, one caught her eye: a pair of bell-bottoms that was hard to **come by**<sup>152</sup>. These were original, limited-edition Levi's with a distressed appearance and vintage aesthetic that added to their allure. I had **tipped John off**<sup>153</sup> about Maria's fondness for them, and he used his connections in New York City to get a pair from the original collection. The gift **cost a pretty penny**<sup>154</sup>, but he was determined to win her over **at all costs**<sup>155</sup>.

John wasn't the type to **talk big**<sup>156</sup>, but around Maria, he couldn't help himself. It was as if he were under a spell. Usually, Maria would avoid **trading on**<sup>157</sup> John's affection, but this time, she really liked those jeans. I could see the genuine thrill in her eyes. As appealing and even thoughtful as the gift was, she hesitated to accept it, worried

it might give John the wrong impression about their platonic relationship turning romantic. When she **confided in**<sup>158</sup> me, I told her to trust her instincts, but she overlooked her own reservations and took the gift.

As Maria and John's relationship developed, tensions simmered beneath the surface. John wasn't sure if Maria's accepting the gift meant he still **had a shot**<sup>159</sup>. He made a conscious effort not to **cross the line**<sup>160</sup> and instead respected her need for space. **To his credit**<sup>161</sup>, he handled the situation with maturity and restraint for a while. However, one night, in a drunken state at a restaurant, he couldn't control his emotions. He professed his love and pestered her to go home with him. Maria **tuned out**<sup>162</sup> his outburst, pretended nothing was wrong, and quickly made her escape.

On numerous occasions, Maria tried to **lay her cards on the table**<sup>163</sup>, but John always diverted the conversation by **going off on a tangent**<sup>164</sup>. I listened to Maria's frustrations about her desire to express her truth but being stifled by John's manipulative tactics. I saw John grow increasingly desperate, **resorting to**<sup>165</sup> the misguided belief that getting a girlfriend would make Maria jealous and change her mind, only to realize later that his plan had backfired. It was clear to everyone but John that Maria had long ago given her heart to Darian. Love can blind even the most perceptive souls.

John **strung his girlfriend along**<sup>166</sup> for a few months before telling her the truth. It wasn't his proudest moment, **to say the least**<sup>167</sup>. The poor girl had truly fallen for<sup>168</sup> him. To ease his guilt, he offered her money to compensate for his selfishness, which she outright rejected.

His offer infuriated her because it demeaned her worth and reflected his calculated callousness, and she knew she deserved better.

**On paper**<sup>169</sup>, John **had everything going for him**<sup>170</sup>: a high-paying job, looks befitting a Greek god, and a charming personality that made most women **weak at the knees**<sup>171</sup>. Maria considered giving it a try with John, but the emotional scars from her bachelorette party, where she had been unfaithful to Darian, ran deep—so deep that she shut off all feelings for John, fearing that they could lead her down a treacherous path again. It wasn't hard to understand Maria's hesitation. The word on the street was that John enjoyed the chase more than the relationship and would lose interest once he got the girl. This made Maria wary of getting involved with him, a man who seemed incapable of commitment.

Besides his reputation, John gave Maria the impression that he had a hidden agenda behind his grand gestures. This lingering suspicion, compounded by his reputation, was enough for Maria to **keep John at arm's length**<sup>172</sup>. She was well aware of his ability to sway a woman. Having once **succumbed to**<sup>173</sup> his charms, she wasn't about to **fall for them**<sup>174</sup> again.

As Maria's best friend, I felt emotionally conflicted. On the one hand, I genuinely cared about Maria and wanted to **be there for her**<sup>175</sup> as she dealt with the aftermath of Darian's departure and navigated the complexities of her relationship with John. I listened to her frustrations, offered advice, and stood by her side. Yet, I couldn't ignore my growing resentment that Maria had come between the man of my dreams and me. I **wrestled with**<sup>176</sup> my loyalty to Maria and my

jealousy of her. In the end, I chose to set aside my personal feelings and be her **pillar of strength**<sup>177</sup>, offering a shoulder to lean on during her darkest moments.

## FOUR

### *John*

Peter and my dad, Bill, were **thick as thieves**<sup>178</sup>, working together at Centri Bank, the largest bank in town. At work, my dad was Peter's **right-hand man**<sup>179</sup>; off the clock, they were best friends. When Peter's wife left him, he **hit the bottle**<sup>180</sup>. Alcohol provided some temporary comfort to numb his pain, but its effectiveness quickly waned. That's when he turned to gambling and lost a **good**<sup>181</sup> chunk of his family fortune in a matter of days. You'd think he would have learned his lesson, but no—he decided to **up the ante**<sup>182</sup> by investing in high-risk stocks and **lost his shirt**<sup>183</sup> in a market crash. His crippling debt and gambling addiction led him to **siphon off**<sup>184</sup> money from the bank's long-term investors. Although he knew it **was only a matter of time**<sup>185</sup> before he **wound up**<sup>186</sup> **behind bars**<sup>187</sup>, he was already **in too deep**<sup>188</sup>.

When Peter **got wind**<sup>189</sup> that management at the bank had begun to **smell a rat**<sup>190</sup>, he panicked. He **bought a few people off**<sup>191</sup> and cooked up a scheme to **frame my dad**<sup>192</sup> for his own crime. Unfortunately, the authorities took the bait and caught my dad **red-handed**<sup>193</sup>. Before he knew what hit him, my dad was slapped with false accusations and handcuffs. Innocent as he was, he soon realized he was fighting a losing battle. Peter covered his tracks well, leaving no

paper trail behind. Without evidence to **clear his name**<sup>194</sup>, my dad had no choice but to **take the fall for**<sup>195</sup> Peter. Seeing his best friend **sink so low**<sup>196</sup> as to **set him up**<sup>197</sup> was a **bitter pill to swallow**<sup>198</sup>.

It was devastating to see my father do a **perp walk**<sup>199</sup> with his head bowed in front of the whole neighborhood. Our family became the town's **laughing stock**<sup>200</sup>. We had to **lay bare**<sup>201</sup> our financial history of the last 10 years and move out of town while my dad **served time**<sup>202</sup>. Not only was my dad's reputation **in tatters**<sup>203</sup>, but his assets were seized. Adding to my pain, I had to leave behind a girl I had a crush on, who witnessed our family's downfall. I remember everything as if it were yesterday. At the tender age of 10, I promised myself that I would one day **get back at**<sup>204</sup> Peter for what he did to my family.

...



Bill



Arete



John



Amy



Growing up biracial, I often felt like a misfit. With a Greek American mom who immersed me in her culture and a dad of Asian descent, I **stood out like a sore thumb**<sup>205</sup>. While my classmates were into action blockbusters or **chick flicks**<sup>206</sup>, I was drawn to the suspense and intrigue of Hitchcock movies, a passion I inherited from my mom. My peculiar tastes only served to alienate me further.

Because I was shy and **slow to warm up**<sup>207</sup>, I **came off as**<sup>208</sup> stuck-up or aloof, making it hard for me to make friends. As a result, I became a **lone wolf**<sup>209</sup>, **burying myself in**<sup>210</sup> art books—my trusted companions. It was only when I had a brush in my hand that I truly felt **in my element**<sup>211</sup>. I could lose myself in the canvas for hours.

My sister, Amy, couldn't have been more different. While I took after our Greek mother, she inherited her Asian appearance from our dad. With my curly hair making me stand out, I became an easy target for bullies. But whenever other kids gave me a hard time, Amy **came to my rescue**<sup>212</sup>. She was the popular one, **breezing**<sup>213</sup> through school with top grades, while I barely gave my studies much thought. Instead, I found escape in doodling in my notebooks, letting my mind wander during class. Though we were polar opposites, she was my **rock**<sup>214</sup>. I looked up to her and happily followed her around like a duckling.

Our close bond lasted until high school when we suddenly found ourselves **at odds with each other**<sup>215</sup>. I couldn't pinpoint what sparked our sibling rivalry, but things began to shift after Amy's surprise visit from **Aunt Flo**<sup>216</sup>. From then on, she forbade me from entering her room, even though she frequently **barged into**<sup>217</sup> mine.

When I confronted her, she would **play dumb**<sup>218</sup>. In retaliation, I hid one of her purses, knowing it would **drive her nuts**<sup>219</sup>. Of course, when she **told on me**<sup>220</sup>, my mom spanked me and made me **come clean**<sup>221</sup>. I couldn't understand what the big deal was, considering Amy had dozens of purses.

Amy and I used to bond over our love for food, but that changed in high school as she started experimenting with extreme diets, especially when she had a date lined up. **Harping on**<sup>222</sup> her weight became the norm as her figure became her priority. Sometimes, she would go on a **crash diet**<sup>223</sup>, fasting for two to three days **at a stretch**<sup>224</sup>. Despite my mom's advice against **quick fixes**<sup>225</sup>, she wouldn't listen. At one point, she even popped diet pills, which sent her hormones **out of whack**<sup>226</sup>. When my mother found out, she grounded Amy. The whole dieting thing put a lot of strain on their relationship.

Although I pulled a ton of pranks on Amy and acted like I didn't care, deep down, I still held onto the idea of her being my big sister who used to **put me first**<sup>227</sup>. Whenever she hung out with her friends, I would ask to **tag along**<sup>228</sup>, but she would tell me to **get lost**<sup>229</sup>. Usually, my mom would **leave us be**<sup>230</sup>, but our bickering sometimes **got on her nerves**<sup>231</sup>. When she reached her **boiling point**<sup>232</sup>, she would beat the crap out of us with whatever she could get her hands on—usually a bamboo stick or a feather duster. It was a time when **corporal punishment**<sup>233</sup> was widely accepted. Both my sister and I received our share of disciplinary actions, mostly deserved.

Growing up, I used to think my mom favored Amy. Whenever she split up chores, I always **got the short end of the stick**<sup>234</sup>, like mow-

ing the lawn and scrubbing the toilet—the **heavy lifting**<sup>235</sup>. **On top of that**<sup>236</sup>, Amy consistently got first **dibs on**<sup>237</sup> everything and always rode **shotgun**<sup>238</sup> in the car. It made me wonder if my mom **played favorites**<sup>239</sup>. But as I grew older, I began to realize that parents can be hard on their children because they want their children to **amount to something**<sup>240</sup>.

...

We had a fresh start when we relocated to Malong, a city where nobody knew us. With my dad in prison, we **scraped by**<sup>241</sup> on my mom's meager salary working at a restaurant. Adjusting to our new surroundings took time. We had to **find our footing**<sup>242</sup> in this unfamiliar place. Financial hardship forced me to grow up quickly and **stand on my own two feet**<sup>243</sup>, shouldering responsibilities that most kids my age didn't need to worry about. My mom worked her butt off to put food on the table and a roof over our heads, waking up at the crack of dawn and coming home late at night, **bone tired**<sup>244</sup>. Even with little **gas left in her tank**<sup>245</sup>, she made it a priority to care for us, making sure that our basic needs were met and we felt loved. Watching her toiling away **day in and day out**<sup>246</sup> made me **tip my hat**<sup>247</sup> to single parents.

But just when we thought things couldn't get worse, they did. Knowing that my mom needed the job, her boss took advantage of her by demanding long hours without giving her fair pay. Barely **making ends meet**<sup>248</sup>, my mom toyed with the idea of getting a **side hustle**<sup>249</sup> at a laundromat near where we lived, but the demanding hours at the restaurant made it impossible. She knew trying to nego-

tiate with her boss would be pointless since he **held all the cards**<sup>250</sup>. It was a painful **blow**<sup>251</sup> to our family, especially when everything seemed to be going wrong.

**To top it off**<sup>252</sup>, my mom pushed herself to the brink of exhaustion from **running on empty**<sup>253</sup> for months. When she finally collapsed, her boss gave her only one morning off. That was **the last straw**<sup>254</sup> for me. I was livid and wanted to **give him a piece of my mind**<sup>255</sup>, but my mom told me not to **rock the boat**<sup>256</sup>, even though she agreed that he had been exploiting her. During our heated exchange, I **lashed out**<sup>257</sup>, calling her a coward for being a **doormat**<sup>258</sup>. In a fit of anger, she slapped me across the face and told me that it takes more courage to restrain oneself and see **the bigger picture**<sup>259</sup> than to act on impulse. Looking back, we were **living paycheck to paycheck**<sup>260</sup>. Had she let her anger take control, it could have left us homeless.

My mom believed that **you reap what you sow**<sup>261</sup> and that God would be the ultimate judge of the morally corrupt. Even in difficult circumstances, she reminded us to **keep our chins up**<sup>262</sup> and never compromise our morals. She remained the one consistent voice of reason in my life, even when I felt dejected.

One day, I was **coming down with something**<sup>263</sup> at school. When the principal notified my mom at work, she risked losing her job to come get me. **When it came to**<sup>264</sup> her children, she never **fell short**<sup>265</sup>. She was the reason Amy and I turned out alright. She led by example, showing us the importance of having a strong work ethic. Yes, money was tight for a while, but we managed to **eke out a living**<sup>266</sup>. I used to scour the streets for loose change and save it in my **piggy bank**<sup>267</sup>. We

were so **strapped for cash**<sup>268</sup> that we'd put purchases on **layaway**<sup>269</sup>. Yet, even during the toughest times, we found hope in small acts of kindness from neighbors and strangers, reminding us that every dark cloud has a **silver lining**<sup>270</sup>. These acts of goodwill fueled our belief that things would eventually improve.

Amy and I were **latchkey children**<sup>271</sup>, often left home alone for long periods of time. Adult supervision was a luxury we couldn't afford, but we made the most of it and found joy in the kitchen. With no money to eat out, we turned the kitchen into our little sanctuary, using cooking to escape adversity. We worked with what we had—thin slices of preserved beef and canned goods instead of hearty steaks and fresh produce. We made pizza **from scratch**<sup>272</sup> and **nuked**<sup>273</sup> it in our second-hand microwave, which **went haywire**<sup>274</sup> a lot. We bought that microwave by paying in five installments. The pizza might not have tasted gourmet, but it filled our hearts because we made it with our own hands. Even when we finally had a bit more money and could afford a new microwave, we **couldn't bring ourselves to**<sup>275</sup> **part with**<sup>276</sup> the old one because it had seen us through our lowest moments.

My mom used to say, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Those words became my mantra, and I vowed never to let anything defeat me, no matter how bad things got. In a way, I owe it to Peter, who **made a man out of me**<sup>277</sup> and a tight-knit family out of us. By 16, I was financially independent while most people my age still relied on their families. My mom taught me the importance of self-reliance. Her own parents **cut her off**<sup>278</sup> for marrying an Asian man, so she knew she had to carve out her own life.

Although my maternal grandparents refused to acknowledge my parents' marriage and cut ties with us, they surprised us with a letter on my 17th birthday, offering to fund my college tuition. I always believed they'd **come around**<sup>279</sup> eventually. How could anyone turn their back on **their own flesh and blood**<sup>280</sup>? Initially, my mom wanted to turn them down—she didn't want to be their **charity case**<sup>281</sup>—but she soon realized that giving me the best education possible had to come before her pride.

However, their offer came with a condition: it would only stand if I attended college in the northeast region of the United States, where they lived. Even without a prior relationship with my grandparents, I felt a strong yearning to connect with them and learn about my heritage. Besides, the U.S. had always fascinated me. Attending college in New York would not only bring me closer to them but also provide a unique opportunity to immerse myself in a rich cultural **melting pot**<sup>282</sup>. My mom knew this was an opportunity she could never have given me, but it meant I'd have to leave her and be on my own in a country she knew little to nothing about. Even though she struggled to let me go, she eventually gave her consent.

The moment I received my college admission letter, I started counting down the days to my departure. Time seemed to pass more slowly the more I focused on it. When the day finally arrived for me to head to the airport, my nerves suddenly **set in**<sup>283</sup>. The unknown, which usually excited me, now fueled my anxiety.

The flight to the United States was bumpy, and as a first-time flyer, I was a **bundle of nerves**<sup>284</sup>. I had no clue how to calm myself. The

turbulence was so violent at times that I thought **my number was up**<sup>285</sup>. In my fear, I found myself calling on the names of deities, from Gautama Buddha and Bodhisattvas to Allah and Jesus Christ.

Sensing my anxiety, the old lady sitting beside me tried to distract me with conversation. She spoke softly to avoid disturbing the sleeping passengers, who seemed **unfazed**<sup>286</sup> by the turbulence. Her voice carried a tender quality that instantly soothed my nerves. For a moment, I forgot I was stuck in a confined space 40,000 feet above the ground.

Between her thick British accent, which demanded my full attention, and my broken English, our conversation was like a **train wreck**<sup>287</sup>—imagine a mute trying to talk to a deaf person. However, she was patient with me, using hand gestures and speaking slowly to bridge our language barrier.

Two layovers later, I finally arrived in New York City. Stepping into the bustling John F. Kennedy International Airport, my heart raced with excitement and uncertainty as my eyes scanned the crowd. There, amidst the sea of people awaiting the arrival of their loved ones, I spotted my grandparents, who had immigrated to Long Island years ago after my parents got married. They stood there, clutching a sign in their weathered hands, with my full name sprawling across it in bold, oversized letters, their eyes filled with anticipation. The name sign was a small but significant gesture, their way of ensuring that we could find one another.

I recognized them instantly from the pictures they had sent me. A

surge of emotions **washed over**<sup>288</sup> me as I approached them. Our eyes locked. Their disapproval of my parents' marriage might have created a rift between us, but we shared an unbreakable bond. Ultimately, blood is thicker than water. With tearful eyes, we exchanged hugs. Much to my surprise, it felt instantly like home, a sensation that was both foreign and natural, one that I could certainly get used to.

On the way to Long Island, we caught up on one another's lives, yet the **elephant in the room**<sup>289</sup>—why they had taken so long to reconnect—remained unaddressed. However, **underneath it all**<sup>290</sup>, there was a sense of deep relief that our union was always just a matter of time. For the moment, any unanswered question seemed insignificant compared to the joy of being together for the first time.

I stayed with them for two uneventful yet lovely days before heading to the city for new student orientation. During my stay, both my grandparents, even my stoic grandfather, seemed excessively attentive and caring. They repeatedly asked if I had brought enough clothes and insisted on giving me cash in case I needed anything. Food was their love language; they kept feeding me and asking if I was hungry, as if they were burdened with guilt, trying to make up for all the love owed to me for the years past.

When I finally ventured into the city from Long Island, my immediate reaction was that New York City was **not all it's cracked up to be**<sup>291</sup>. The noise was deafening, the streets were crowded with tourists, and the subway emitted a pungent odor that was vomit inducing. Some areas were plagued with filth, and the occasional scuttling cockroach made me gag. Yet, despite these initial impressions, it took



me no time to fall in love with the city they call **the Big Apple**<sup>292</sup>.

Underneath the city's gritty exterior, I found a pulsating energy that was irresistible. Its cultural richness, the **hustle and bustle**<sup>293</sup> of everyday life, and the endless opportunities captivated me. I found solace in its diverse neighborhoods, iconic landmarks, and the immense sense of freedom permeating its streets. In the end, my grandparents' presence in Long Island and my own determination to bridge the gap between our worlds pushed me to embrace the city's contradictions. New York City became more than just a backdrop; it was the stage for a transformative chapter of my life.

...

My first winter in the U.S. was brutal. Having come from the tropics, my body was not prepared for sub-zero temperatures. When Christmas came, I stayed at my grandparents' house, where I stoked a fire in the fireplace, made a sweet potato pie, and even skated on a frozen lake—things I'd only seen on TV.

Christmas shopping with my grandparents was **epic**<sup>294</sup>; they took me to a nearby mall where sales were **in full swing**<sup>295</sup>. The mall was gigantic and packed with holiday shoppers rushing to **get some last-minute shopping in**<sup>296</sup>. It felt like a swarm of hungry zombies desperately seeking salvation. My grandparents asked me what I wanted for Christmas, promising to grant my every wish. I didn't **go overboard**<sup>297</sup> with their generosity because I was a sensible young man. But who needs Santa Claus when you have such indulgent grandparents?

When the holiday season ended, the thought of returning to school filled me with dread. With limited knowledge of the language and culture, I struggled to fit in and often embarrassed myself by **speaking out of turn**<sup>298</sup>. My grandparents **picked up on**<sup>299</sup> my unease and asked me why I wasn't excited about going back to school. I didn't give them a straight answer, partly to spare them from worrying and partly because I didn't think they could do much to help.

With the start of the new semester, I became dedicated to immersing myself in American culture. Yet, making friends proved challenging, except for the special connection I made with someone named Allen Baker.

Allen was an insanely tall, blonde guy with a chiseled jawline, a prominent nose, and some distinct **crow's feet**<sup>300</sup> on the corners of his eyes. He possessed immense knowledge about Asian cultures. Initially, I thought he had approached me out of curiosity about my background, maybe seeking a **token Asian friend**<sup>301</sup>. But when he invited me to his family's **Passover**<sup>302</sup> seder, a cherished occasion for Jewish families to come together, I realized that his interest went beyond mere curiosity. It was clear that he valued cultural openness and exchange, and our friendship was genuine.

On the day of the seder, I stopped by Chinatown to pick up a box of Honeycrisp apples. Allen had once told me that his mom had a special fondness for crunchy fruits. Chinatown was my **go-to**<sup>303</sup> place for affordable produce, being a poor student and all. Later that evening, I had my first seder dinner, which was more of a spiritual experience than a culinary one. I learned about **kosher**<sup>304</sup> meals and

tasted **matzo**<sup>305</sup> for the first time. We sang, drank, told the Passover story, broke matzo into pieces and passed them around, and ended the evening reciting ancient verses. The whole experience opened my eyes and enriched my understanding of diverse traditions.

The following summer, Allen accompanied me home to Malong. This trip completely changed his life: he met his future wife, Teresa, a devout Christian who attended church on Sundays and said **grace**<sup>306</sup> before each meal. On his first Sunday there, Allen joined me for a church service. Although he was Jewish, he was open to visiting places of worship outside his own faith. The church was packed that day. Being in a crowded church triggered Allen's claustrophobia, which had developed a few years back when he was locked up in an elevator for 14 hours **on a dare**<sup>307</sup>. Just as Allen was about to step out of the church for some fresh air, he saw Teresa. In that moment, his anxiety magically dissolved.

Allen gravitated toward Teresa like a moth to a flame. He originally had planned to stay for two weeks, but meeting Teresa motivated him to **stick around**<sup>308</sup> until the end of summer. To cover his expenses, he took on two jobs: running errands for a printing company and working as a **busboy**<sup>309</sup> at a restaurant. These jobs required minimal training and were perfect for someone with a limited time commitment.

When he wasn't working, Allen dedicated almost all of his time to Teresa. Before he knew it, Teresa **had him under her spell**<sup>310</sup>, though she remained oblivious to his deep adoration. **As far as Allen was concerned**<sup>311</sup>, expressing his feelings to Teresa **felt like talking to a**

**brick wall**<sup>312</sup>—he practically had to **spell out**<sup>313</sup> his love. Despite her sharp mind, Teresa often seemed unaware of others’ true feelings. Even the most perceptive individuals can have blind spots when it comes to matters of the heart.

Teresa **had a way with**<sup>314</sup> people. She could make them **spill their guts**<sup>315</sup>, drawing out their deepest secrets that they wouldn’t normally reveal. Strong-willed as she was, her words **came across**<sup>316</sup> as unthreatening and dignified. She was a woman of conviction, soft-spoken yet firm, unwavering in her beliefs—a rare gem that Allen felt fortunate to have found. Her candor and pure-hearted nature were **a breath of fresh air**<sup>317</sup> for him. Though not your typical beauty, Teresa captivated Allen with her unique wit and magnetic confidence, leading him to **fall for**<sup>318</sup> her hard and fast. But honestly, I couldn’t see what Allen saw in Teresa. To me, she was a tomboy with average looks, who was unafraid to speak her mind. It just goes to show that **beauty is in the eye of the beholder**<sup>319</sup>, or as they say, **to each their own**<sup>320</sup>.

On the Sunday service when Allen first met Teresa, I had the great fortune of meeting a pastor, Father Gomez, whose presence was so calming and laughter so contagious. Usually, I needed a nudge to attend church on Sunday mornings since I preferred **sleeping in**<sup>321</sup> on weekends. With some lingering jetlag, I woke up early and thought, “Why not?” In the brief exchange with Father Gomez, I was **blown away**<sup>322</sup> by his wisdom, which **resonated with**<sup>323</sup> me on a deep, personal level. Over the past four decades, Father Gomez had served in different churches across the island, offering his compassionate ear to countless individuals seeking guidance and forgiveness.

As the weeks went by, I kept bumping into Father Gomez. Our encounters could be pure coincidences, but I had a strong feeling that fate was **at play**<sup>324</sup>. Each time we ran into each other, Father Gomez had an uncanny ability to know exactly what I needed to hear. He seemed to see through the layers of my soul, sensing the struggles and hidden thoughts long buried within me. In one encounter, I revealed some of my darkest thoughts, thoughts I had buried so deeply that they no longer felt like mine. With Father Gomez, I felt safe. He was a trusted confidant who always listened without judgment and offered words of comfort that helped alleviate the weight I carried. With each encounter, I grew increasingly sure that our meetings weren't mere chance but part of a greater plan, as though the universe had conspired to bring Father Gomez into my life and intertwined our destinies for a reason.

...

Before the summer ended, Allen and Teresa had fallen **head over heels**<sup>325</sup> for each other, and Allen already dreaded the thought of leaving her. Initially, I thought their church **meet-cute**<sup>326</sup> was just a summer **fling**<sup>327</sup> that would **fizzle out**<sup>328</sup> by the end of the season. To my surprise, before we left for New York, Allen gave Teresa a promise ring as a token of his undying commitment. This marked the beginning of their three-year long-distance relationship before **tying the knot**<sup>329</sup>—**some**<sup>330</sup> commitment.

After we returned to New York, many women would either drop hints or outright **make passes**<sup>331</sup> at him, but he kept his distance from temptation. Whenever friends offered to **fix him up**<sup>332</sup>, he would

immediately bring up Teresa, almost paranoid that she might find out and question his loyalty. Allen proudly proclaimed to everyone in New York that he had found his soulmate, his perfect match. It wasn't long before I realized that he was serious about Teresa. As his closest friend in college, I witnessed his faithfulness firsthand. His total abstinence from sex throughout our college years **spoke volumes**<sup>333</sup> for his ironclad commitment to Teresa and his devotion to his Jewish faith, which discourages premarital sexual activity. I **busted his chops**<sup>334</sup> all the time, saying that Teresa **had him by the balls**<sup>335</sup> or that he was **eating out of her hands**<sup>336</sup>, but deep down, I admired his devotion.

Allen had a fascination with Asia, as evidenced by his Asian-themed room decor. His friends in his predominantly white circle repeatedly teased him for having what they termed “**yellow fever**<sup>337</sup>,” a label he found distasteful. He understood their limited exposure to diverse cultures and their choices to marry within the race. However, Allen firmly believed that one's preferences in love were personal and not **up for**<sup>338</sup> judgment. He **couldn't care less**<sup>339</sup> about how others perceived his choices because he was confident in his feelings and knew that love transcends racial boundaries.

Ironically, Allen, being the white guy, became my gateway to Asian culture during college. He frequently invited me to watch Asian-themed films or try different Asian cuisines, especially those delicious **hole-in-the-wall**<sup>340</sup> restaurants in Flushing, Queens—an area in New York City where many Chinese immigrants reside. Also, he would cook me Sichuan dishes that set our taste buds ablaze and left us gasping for relief yet craving more. The fiery spices ignited a dance

of sweat on our brows, our faces turning red as we reached for water. In his **shoebox**<sup>341</sup> apartment shared with three other roommates, we laughed through the tears provoked by the spicy condiments, our voices filled with a mix of delight and a hint of masochistic pleasure. When it came to handling spicy food, no one could **give Allen a run for his money**<sup>342</sup>.

I lost count of how many times I **crashed**<sup>343</sup> at Allen's place. He and his roommates **took me under their wing**<sup>344</sup> like a brother. For someone trying to blend in, being accepted **meant the world to me**<sup>345</sup>. We had a lot of fun together. They took me to my first rock concert, where we danced crazily in the **mosh pit**<sup>346</sup>, and my first football game, where we **tailgated**<sup>347</sup>. They were up for anything during spring breaks, from skydiving, swimming with sharks, to **skinny dipping**<sup>348</sup> along the pristine shores of the Caribbean—**you name it**<sup>349</sup>. They also showed me how to **skip rocks**<sup>350</sup> and introduced me to the game **Spin the bottle**<sup>351</sup>. Call me old-fashioned, but just the idea of kissing someone who wasn't a love interest **made my skin crawl**<sup>352</sup>. **Suffice to say**<sup>353</sup>, I haven't played the game since.

One time, we played Truth or Dare, a classic American party game where people take turns asking someone in the group to answer a question or do a dare. As the game unfolded, things got pretty wild. I was surprised by the intensity of the questions and dares, some of which were invasive and tested our comfort zones. We were asked things like, "When was the last time you picked your nose and ate it?" "What are your secret fetishes?" and even "Have you ever cheated on someone?" Despite the awkwardness, there was a sense of amusement while we navigated through these boundary-pushing inquiries,

sharing glimpses of our hidden sides and vulnerabilities. It pushed us to reveal ourselves in unexpected ways, creating a strange sense of camaraderie. Laughter echoed off the walls, and the tension in the air was palpable as each person awaited their turn, unsure of what they might be asked to divulge or do next.

Allen and his roommates were **big on**<sup>354</sup> Halloween. During our sophomore year, he showed up in this crazy **getup**<sup>355</sup>, complete with a rainbow wig for his costume. He never took himself too seriously, a trait I wish I had. While their antics occasionally left me **scratch-ing my head**<sup>356</sup>, being around them exposed me to different ways of living, teaching me to appreciate the diversity in human connections and the element of surprise in life. In that testosterone-filled apartment, it came as no surprise that they were constantly pulling pranks on one another. So many drunken escapades **went down**<sup>357</sup> there. The crudest things I had witnessed were probably **upper deckers**<sup>358</sup> and instances of **butt-chugging**<sup>359</sup>. **Boys will be boys**<sup>360</sup>.

But it wasn't all play for them. They lived by the motto "work hard and play harder." Surprisingly, most of them graduated top of their class. Whenever midterms and finals came around, they'd shut themselves in their rooms, burying themselves in books for hours on end. After exams, they'd let loose and party **like there was no tomorrow**<sup>361</sup>. This cycle of work and fun not only kept them motivated and balanced but also forged their bond, creating an unforgettable college experience.

Throughout college, Allen always had me over at his place and **fixed**<sup>362</sup> me food without ever letting me **chip in**<sup>363</sup>. In return, I'd



often bring him to my grandparents' place out in Long Island, where they welcomed him like family. Each time, my grandparents greeted us with an extravagant feast, leaving us completely **stuffed**<sup>364</sup>.

Before I moved to the U.S., my mom had painted a picture of my grandparents as narrow-minded and old-fashioned, claiming they preferred her marrying a Greek guy instead of an Asian. But boy, was I wrong! According to my grandmother, my grandfather was **game**<sup>365</sup> for just about anything in his younger days. They were well-traveled and deeply curious about other cultures, particularly Chinese culture. For years, my grandfather shuttled between New York and China for his textile trading business, **picking up**<sup>366</sup> some Mandarin and becoming **well versed**<sup>367</sup> in Chinese history.

Whenever Allen saw my grandfather, he'd say something in Mandarin, knowing that my grandfather would **get a real kick out of**<sup>119</sup> it. Allen knew how to **read the room**<sup>368</sup>. He never brought up my dad in front of my grandparents because he could sense their lingering disapproval despite the passing years. With his perceptiveness and **smarts**<sup>369</sup>, Allen **was a hit with**<sup>370</sup> my grandparents.

Throughout the rest of college, they witnessed Allen's unfaltering devotion to Teresa. It reminded them of their daughter's determination and the hurdles they could only imagine she had to face in marrying someone outside her race. During these visits, they saw Allen as a hopeless romantic, faithfully writing Teresa a letter every week **without fail**<sup>371</sup>, from the summer they met until he graduated college. This recognition helped them understand that while love can overcome racial barriers, it is the profound connection between two

people that truly bridges any differences.

My grandparents rarely discussed the past, but in one conversation, they candidly shared their regrets. They believed they were **looking out for**<sup>372</sup> my mom when they discouraged her from marrying someone of a different race, as they were concerned about the challenges of blending two distinct cultures. Regrettably, my mom, being young at the time, couldn't fully grasp their viewpoint and felt attacked. My grandparents never got the chance to know my dad, even though they wanted to. Reflecting on their past actions, they questioned whether granting their daughter the same blessing and support they had given Allen would have prevented their relationship from becoming so estranged. It saddens me to think that my mom had to raise us alone for so many years because she couldn't see things from my grandparents' perspective. I wonder if she has forgiven them now that she is a mother herself.

A week after graduation, Allen married Teresa, and I had the honor of being his best man, witnessing their beautiful wedding. Although we had shared dreams of becoming entrepreneurs together, life had different plans for us. I was unexpectedly recruited to work at a prestigious bank in New York and London. It was an opportunity too coveted to resist, so I found myself embarking on a period of intense career growth. With Allen moving to Asia, starting a business together became a **pipe dream**<sup>373</sup>.

While my career trajectory showed promise, I never lost sight of my obligation to seek justice for my father. I **bided my time**<sup>374</sup>, waiting for the perfect opportunity to exact my revenge. That day finally

came years later when I learned of Darian's employment at Centri Bank, where my dad was framed. It felt like a sign, a chance to reclaim what was rightfully mine and return to the place where everything started. I was determined to work at Centri Bank by any means necessary, sticking to the old saying: "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

## FIVE

### *The Encounter*

A few years before Darian's disappearance, Darian and John met for the first time at Centri Bank. Before **setting foot in**<sup>375</sup> the bank, John was worried about being recognized—if his **cover was blown**<sup>376</sup>, his plan to avenge his dad would **go up in smoke**<sup>377</sup>. But his worries were soon put to rest. After all, it had been years since his family fled town.

“Hey man, nice watch,” Darian said as they met in the lobby.

“Thanks. Got it at a flea market for practically nothing, believe it or not,” John replied, proud of his bargain.

“That’s a **steal**<sup>378</sup>.” Darian extended his hand for a handshake. “Darian Hwa.”

“John Tang,” John replied, firmly shaking Darian’s hand.

“What brought you to our little town?” Darian asked. “Everyone here is trying to get out, and you chose to come to this shithole.”

“Some unfinished business for my dad,” John replied, his voice carrying a hint of sadness and determination. “It’s personal. And I

wouldn't call this place a shithole."

"I'm just **messing with you**<sup>379</sup>. Today is your first day working at Centri Bank?" Darian asked, wanting John to feel welcome.

"Second day, actually ... still trying to **learn the ropes**<sup>380</sup>," John replied.

At this moment, Harvey, the senior manager, appeared in the lobby and interrupted their conversation. His tone was rushed, and his movements were quick, displaying a sense of anxiety that Darian had never seen before. Something was **weighing on him**<sup>381</sup>.

"Great, you two have met," Harvey said, almost breathlessly. "John used to work for a big bank in New York. He is **bringing a lot of skills and experience to the table**<sup>382</sup>. Darian, help John feel at home. I will be out of the office for a few hours. Can you **hold down the fort**<sup>383</sup> until I get back?"

Darian noticed the worried look on Harvey's face and wondered what could be making him so flustered. "Yes, sir," Darian replied sharply, snapping his hand up to his brow in a crisp military salute.

"Show John around and let him take a look at the case you've been working on. Also, don't forget to confirm with HR about the new payroll policy and procedure we discussed earlier," Harvey instructed before hastily walking out of the building.

"No problem. I'm **on top of**<sup>384</sup> it," Darian said loudly to Harvey, who was exiting the building.

Darian and John made their way to the conference room. With Harvey's unusual behavior still weighing on Darian's mind, he wondered if something had gone wrong. Maybe there was a security breach or a fraud case. Whatever it was, it was clearly serious enough to shake Harvey's usual composure. This piqued Darian's curiosity, but he knew better than to pry.

In the conference room, Darian and John had a long conversation. Darian spoke with a sense of admiration as he recounted the story of how Harvey had **turned their bank around**<sup>385</sup>. His eyes sparkled with pride as he talked about the company's impressive performance.

"I've got to hand it to Harvey<sup>386</sup>. With him at the helm<sup>387</sup>, the bank has really **turned the corner**<sup>388</sup>," he said. "The other two banks in town couldn't **ride out**<sup>389</sup> the last recession. Our bank was the only one that didn't **go under**<sup>390</sup>, although we did have to **lay off**<sup>391</sup> a handful of employees to survive. Back then, the question on everyone's mind was who would be the next to be let go. Thankfully, our bank **beat out**<sup>392</sup> the competition. Harvey single-handedly put our business back **on an even keel**<sup>393</sup>."

John, who was listening attentively, asked, "How did he do it?"

"He **left no stones unturned**<sup>394</sup>," Darian responded with enthusiasm. "For example, during the economic downturn, when all the other banks were cutting their marketing budgets, trying to **keep their heads above water**<sup>395</sup>, Harvey **doubled down on**<sup>396</sup> our marketing efforts, which drew in a ton of new customers. It took **balls**<sup>397</sup> to do that."

John noticed the way Darian spoke about Harvey and said, “Sounds like you really **look up to**<sup>398</sup> Harvey.”

Darian smiled widely and replied, “When I interviewed for the company, the CEO was trying to build his team. The other senior manager, Paul, felt disinclined to hire me, saying I was still **wet behind the ears**<sup>399</sup> and questioning if I was the right fit for the company. Harvey took a risk in backing me and **gave me a shot**<sup>400</sup>.

“I was second to last going in for the interview. The interviewers **pulled no punches**<sup>401</sup>. They asked tough questions to assess everyone’s skills and knowledge. Each time another candidate came out of the conference room, my heart would **skip a beat**<sup>402</sup>. I was so nervous that I felt like I didn’t **do myself justice**<sup>403</sup>. Other candidates probably **had the edge over me**<sup>404</sup> in experience, but Harvey saw something in me. I **owe him one**<sup>405</sup>.”

Darian’s voice softened as he continued, “**That said**<sup>406</sup>, he also **threw me in at the deep end**<sup>407</sup>, putting me on challenging projects right away to help me grow. I don’t blame him. He put his reputation **on the line**<sup>408</sup> for me. I had to constantly **step up my game**<sup>409</sup> to impress him. At one point, I took on many projects but soon realized I had **bitten off more than I could chew**<sup>410</sup> and had to take a step back and **pace myself**<sup>411</sup>.”

John then asked, “Are you **on good terms with**<sup>412</sup> that guy Paul?”

Darian’s expression turned serious. “It’s quite shocking what happened to him. Last month, he was fired for money laundering.

It turned out he had been receiving **kickbacks**<sup>413</sup> from one of our bank's business clients. It's a shame what happened to him, but his departure opened up an opportunity for me to be promoted to Harvey's **second-in-command**<sup>414</sup>. I've been waiting for a managerial position like this to **come down the pike**<sup>415</sup> for a while now."

Darian's voice became more animated as he continued, "When Paul was still **running the show**<sup>416</sup>, I was constantly **walking a tight-rope**<sup>417</sup> because Paul and Harvey had vastly different, if not opposite, ways of doing things. Harvey doesn't micromanage, but Paul would **weigh in**<sup>418</sup> on all of our decisions and **breathe down our necks**<sup>419</sup>. When we were in meetings together, Paul liked to **score points off me**<sup>420</sup>—actually, not just me but everyone. Many people disliked him, but I was **on the fence**<sup>421</sup> because sometimes, I figured, he was just doing what he thought was best for the company.

"He was a tough manager." Darian's voice **took on**<sup>422</sup> a tinge of frustration. "He would scrap projects at **the eleventh hour**<sup>423</sup> without explanation and make us start over entirely. He also put us **through the wringer**<sup>424</sup> by making us work overtime on short notice. We were constantly pushed to our limits. Many of us felt burnt out by the end of each project, and some even left because of it. As a manager, Paul didn't know how to **rally the troops**<sup>425</sup> or inspire people.

"Many people from the company were surprised to learn about his involvement in money laundering because he used to give lofty speeches about ethics and morality. It's unfortunate that people don't always match up to their words—they **talk the talk but don't walk the walk**<sup>426</sup>." Darian shook his head in disappointment.



“How old is Paul?” John asked.

“Well into his 60s,” Darian responded, leaning back in his chair and running a hand through his hair. “I think even if the board didn’t fire him, they were going to **put him out to pasture**<sup>427</sup> soon.”

John nodded. “Wouldn’t you say that anyone who commits a bad deed should be punished?”

“Yeah, they should be held accountable, sure,” Darian said.

“So you agree with me?” John gave an insincere grin.

Darian furrowed his brow. “Yeah, but what are you **getting at**<sup>428</sup>?”

“Nothing, just want to make sure we **are on the same page**<sup>429</sup>,” John responded with a shrug. “Anyway, how would you describe Harvey as a manager?”

Darian sat up straight and took a deep breath before answering. “He is a **level-headed**<sup>430</sup>, no **BS**<sup>431</sup> kind of guy. He doesn’t sugarcoat things; he tells it like it is. He thrives under pressure and never **throws his weight around**<sup>432</sup>. When he first joined the company, he cut the **red tape**<sup>433</sup> and **trimmed the fat**<sup>434</sup>, making our organization more efficient. He is a man of integrity, never stepping on others to get to the top. Everything he’s built, he has earned **fair and square**<sup>435</sup>. No **dirty tricks**<sup>436</sup>, no backstabbing. He doesn’t tolerate **free riders**<sup>437</sup> or **loose cannons**<sup>438</sup>. If you make mistakes, he **holds you to account**<sup>439</sup>, but if you are responsible for a project’s success, he gives you credit. He makes sure that no one ever feels like a **mere cog in the ma-**

**chine**<sup>440</sup>.”

“Wow, that was a mouthful. You’ve really thought about this, haven’t you?” John remarked with forced enthusiasm.

Darian nodded, a hint of a smile on his face. “Want to hear more?”

“Shoot,” John replied with a neutral tone.

“Harvey also values talent and **goes the extra mile**<sup>441</sup> to seek it out, even if it means convincing people to **jump ship**<sup>442</sup>. He **plays hardball**<sup>443</sup> when needed and respects those who can **stand their ground**<sup>444</sup> because it shows conviction. Under his leadership, most people in the firm **fall in line**<sup>445</sup>. Oh, and one more thing: he is impatient, so he appreciates people who can **think on their feet**<sup>446</sup>.”

“I have to admit, Harvey does sound like someone worth emulating. I’d want to be like him,” John said, showing a hint of genuine admiration.

Darian chuckled. “Don’t we all. But he **works like a dog**<sup>447</sup> ... I’m not sure if I want that kind of life.”

John leaned in and said, “If you **play your cards right**<sup>448</sup>, you could be the next Harvey when he retires.”

“I mean I work hard, but I also want a life. Harvey is a workaholic. He couldn’t keep a steady relationship,” Darian explained, rubbing his chin. “Anyway, I shouldn’t be talking about my boss like that. By the way, this is a small town; no one wears a three-piece suit here. Do

yourself a favor, ditch the suit and just put on some khaki pants and a clean shirt.”

John raised an eyebrow. “When I worked in New York City, I had to wear suits to work.”

Darian grinned mischievously. “I bet New Yorkers **turn their noses up**<sup>449</sup> at everything.”

John laughed, his face relaxing into a smile. “There are people like that everywhere.”

“You won’t get fired for what you wear here, but you might **raise a few eyebrows**<sup>450</sup>.” Darian leaned forward, eyes widening. “Did you enjoy working in New York City?”

“New York City attracts the best people, **the cream of the crop**<sup>451</sup> in each field,” John replied evenly. “You meet all sorts of people and can get anything at any hour. The city offers an impressive variety of restaurants, galleries, musicals, fashion retailers, **the whole nine yards**<sup>452</sup>. But the downside is that the competition is fierce, and the pressure runs high. I had to **burn the midnight oil**<sup>453</sup> on a regular basis. I started getting the **Sunday scaries**<sup>454</sup> six months into my last job.”

Darian raised his eyebrows. “The Sunday scaries?”

John nodded. “It’s a term used to describe the anxiety people feel on Sunday evenings when they realize they have to go back to work the next day.”

Darian frowned. "Sounds rough."

"It was," John agreed. "I also realized that I don't enjoy **rubbing elbows with**<sup>455</sup> folks always chasing power and money. They would do whatever it takes to **get ahead**<sup>456</sup>, even stabbing others in the back. I got tired of constantly proving myself, sometimes at the expense of my integrity and mental well-being. To survive that kind of work, you need to have a **strong stomach**<sup>457</sup>; otherwise, you'll get sucked into the whole money and power game."

Darian nodded sympathetically. "Sounds like it was pretty toxic."

"It's not always like that, but it can be, depending on whom you surround yourself with," John replied.

"So now getting off at 6 p.m. is like a vacation to you," Darian commented.

John laughed. "You bet. Definitely a more balanced life."

"Which city do you prefer, New York City or here?" Darian asked.

"It's like **comparing apples to oranges**<sup>458</sup>," John said. "Each offers a unique blend of enjoyment and fulfillment for me. If you asked me which city I enjoy more, London or New York, I would say that's a fairer question."

Darian's eyes sparkled with interest. "Have you worked in London?"

"I did for a couple of years," John said, his expression turning serious. "But I quit after my boss **passed me over**<sup>459</sup> for a promotion and gave it to his nephew."

Darian winced. "Nepotism is hard to beat. Did you **throw a fit**<sup>460</sup>?"

"No," John said, shaking his head with a sigh. "Even though I deserved the promotion, I didn't want to **burn bridges**<sup>461</sup> with my ex-boss. You never know if it might one day **come back to bite you**<sup>462</sup> in the ass. But what really **got to me**<sup>463</sup> was that when I tendered my resignation, he **didn't bat an eye**<sup>464</sup>, as if I were of little value to the company."

Darian leaned back in his chair. "Would you say London is a less stressful city to work in compared to New York?"

John shrugged. "For the stress level, London is **on par with**<sup>465</sup> New York City, at least for me."

"I see." Darian nodded.

"So, I heard I'm here to replace someone who recently **got the ax**<sup>466</sup>. Any idea what happened?" John asked.

"Not sure," Darian replied, "but if you **step out of line**<sup>467</sup>, you are out of here. Harvey doesn't exactly **run the company with an iron fist**<sup>468</sup>, but he does **run a tight ship**<sup>469</sup>. One time, a coworker was involved in some shady business and getting paid by our competitor. Harvey made sure that he never worked in this town again. Another time, when a guy from Legal was getting a bit **too big for his britch-**

es<sup>470</sup> after a promotion, Harvey quickly **put him in his place**<sup>471</sup>.”

John’s eyes widened. “**Good grief**<sup>472</sup>.”

“Harvey wasn’t always like that,” Darian continued. “He had more of a **laissez-faire**<sup>473</sup> approach before, but in the end, there was more **lip service**<sup>474</sup> than **elbow grease**<sup>475</sup>. When one of his most trusted bank clerks—a typical **brown-noser**<sup>476</sup>, by the way—was caught stealing money from the bank, low morale and dissent among employees followed. Harvey had to turn the company culture around. After giving that guy **the boot**<sup>477</sup>, he became more cautious about hiring the right people. He **subscribes to**<sup>478</sup> the **school of thought**<sup>479</sup> that when you hire the right people, things will **fall into place**<sup>480</sup>.”

John nodded. “I agree with that perspective.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll have some freedom. He won’t be constantly **checking up on**<sup>481</sup> you,” Darian said reassuringly.

“That’s good to know,” John said.

Darian showed John out of the conference room and made a quick stop at his office, where John noticed some contracts on his desk. “Do you want me to give you a hand with those?” John offered.

“I do have a huge pile to **plow through**<sup>482</sup> by the end of the day, but I don’t want to give you too much responsibility before you **get into your stride**<sup>483</sup>,” Darian responded.

“That’s considerate of you.” John forced a smile, concealing his

true feelings toward Darian.

“You will **have your fair share of**<sup>484</sup> late nights here. Long hours **are par for the course**<sup>485</sup> at the end of each quarter. Right now, there are many projects **in the works**<sup>486</sup>. As soon as you **get your bearings**<sup>487</sup>, I will **fill you in**<sup>488</sup> on where we stand,” Darian said. “Actually, there is something you could help me with. I need to update Harvey on the progress of our retail division, but my report still needs to be **fleshed out**<sup>489</sup> with some more figures. Can you **do me a solid**<sup>490</sup> and take a look at it?”

“Sure thing. I will get on it right away,” John responded with pretend enthusiasm.

“I also need to **pick your brain**<sup>491</sup> about something ... but that can wait. Let’s **switch gears**<sup>492</sup>,” Darian said. “So, **what’s your deal**<sup>493</sup>? Are you married?”

John smirked. “Wow, you just cut to the chase ... **Long story short**<sup>494</sup>, I’m not **seeing**<sup>495</sup> anyone at the moment.”

Darian leaned back in his chair, crossing one leg over the other. “Then I’ve got to take you out. Let me be your **wingman**<sup>496</sup> this weekend,” he offered, a mischievous glint in his eye. “Come to think of it, did you sign up for the company’s social night? Who knows, you might meet someone there.”

“Not sure if office romance is a good idea,” John responded with a hint of skepticism.

Darian waved a hand dismissively. “It’s just a social event for people to mingle,” he assured, leaning forward eagerly.

“Thanks, but I’ll pass,” John said, his lips curling into a small smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“No problem. Let me take you out to some bars this weekend for a celebratory drink for moving here and joining the firm,” Darian offered.

“I’m down to **paint the town red**<sup>497</sup>, but another time. This weekend is tough. I just moved here, so there are still a few **odds and ends**<sup>498</sup> left to pick up at my new place. We will definitely do that soon,” John replied, trying to appear grateful.

Darian nodded understandingly. “Let me know if you need a hand with the move.”

“I’m good, thanks,” John reassured him. “My house is kind of **out of the way**<sup>499</sup>. Plus, I am taking a day off from work to get everything done. I packed up everything quickly and had everything shipped from New York, so I need to sort through my things.”

“Not a problem ... By the way, it’s tradition here for any newbie to give a short speech. They like to **put people on the spot**<sup>500</sup>, but not in a mean way. Do you have your speech prepared?” Darian asked.

“I think I am just gonna **wing it**<sup>501</sup>,” John admitted, a playful spark in his eye.



“All the **higher-ups**<sup>502</sup> in the company will be there. Just **giving you a heads-up**<sup>503</sup>,” Darian warned.

“Don’t worry. I can always **ad-lib**<sup>504</sup> my way through a speech,” John said confidently.

Later that day, in the conference room, John found himself surrounded by the management team, all eyes eagerly fixed on him, waiting for his speech. He knew the importance of making a solid first impression, but what **caught him off guard**<sup>505</sup> was spotting Peter among the crowd. Peter, who had occupied a significant space in John’s thoughts for much of his life, completely **threw him off his game**<sup>506</sup>. Somehow, it **slipped John’s mind**<sup>507</sup> that Peter was going to be there. As their eyes met, it felt like time froze. John’s adrenaline **went through the roof**<sup>508</sup>, and soon enough, his pristine shirt was drenched in sweat. His colleagues **chalked it up to**<sup>509</sup> first-week **jitters**<sup>510</sup>, a common experience for anyone stepping into a new role.

From Peter’s perspective, attending such events was routine, a part of his managerial duties. He didn’t recognize John as Bill’s boy, whom he remembered as chubby and short. John had undergone quite a transformation, **shooting up**<sup>511</sup> in height and sporting a new hair color. There was no way Peter could have made the connection.

Three weeks later, Darian took John out to a bar to welcome him to Centri Bank. When they stepped inside, all eyes turned toward them, drawn in by their presence. John spotted a woman at the bar, who seemed to have been waiting for him. Decked out in a ruby necklace, a fully flooded diamond watch, and a **fascinator**<sup>512</sup>, the woman

looked completely **out of place**<sup>513</sup> in a small-town bar. Her blonde ringlets made her stand out, and her appearance screamed money. John chatted with her briefly before rejoining Darian, who was transfixed by a tennis game on the TV screen across the bar. Later, John casually mentioned the woman was his aunt, but Darian, judging by her appearance, took it as a **tongue-in-cheek**<sup>514</sup> remark and thought little of it.

As the night went on and the drinks flowed, John found himself **swept up**<sup>515</sup> in the bar's lively atmosphere. Conversations buzzed around him, blending with the clinking of glasses and the laughter of patrons. Gradually, the TV screen, once a source of distraction, faded into the background as John wrestled with his emotions, torn between fully diving into the moment and feeling apprehensive about how things would **pan out**<sup>516</sup> with Darian.

Amidst his mixed emotions, John found comfort in rounds of drinks, a coping mechanism he'd perfected during college, where he had built up his tolerance for alcohol. Back then, he had plenty of alcohol **at his disposal**<sup>517</sup>, **courtesy of**<sup>518</sup> his roommate whose father was a European winemaker. By junior year, he had fully embraced the typical American college lifestyle of heavy drinking and partying.

On the other hand, Darian struggled to **hold his liquor**<sup>519</sup> but pushed through, driven by his competitive streak. Since neither of them bothered to **line their stomach**<sup>520</sup> with much food, they were both **hammered**<sup>521</sup> by midnight. Deep down, John found himself enjoying Darian's company, knowing that they were **cut from the same cloth**<sup>522</sup>, sharing a competitive nature, a similar sense of humor,

and even intelligence. And yet, throughout the night, despite chances to form a real connection with Darian, he **held back**<sup>523</sup>, letting the past stand between them.

*Tina*

Peter and I **got off on the wrong foot**<sup>524</sup> when we first met. It was on the main street in front of a busy bakery where I accidentally bumped into him on my way out. As is customary in such situations, I promptly offered my apologies. But he just **brushed me off**<sup>525</sup>. I didn't know what his deal was—maybe he was trying to play it cool—but his dismissiveness stung, bruising my youthful pride. From that point on, we were **like oil and water**<sup>526</sup>, unable to stand each other's presence. Yet fate would have us meet again and again.

One evening, after an early dinner with my parents, I drove to a movie theater in the next town over to catch a seven o'clock indie film with Joanna. We'd met at a music festival a while back and bonded over our shared passion for indie films. Coming from a missionary family, Joanna had a nomadic childhood that cultivated her eclectic taste.

By 7:30 p.m., Joanna was still nowhere to be found. I tried calling her, but she didn't pick up. I grew **rattled**<sup>527</sup> because she wasn't the kind of person to **blow people off**<sup>528</sup> at the last minute. With no sign of Joanna and no desire to watch a movie alone, I drove home in my dad's **beat-up**<sup>529</sup> old car, which broke down in the middle of the

county highway. To add to my frustration, when I tried to call for help, my phone decided to **act up**<sup>26</sup>—talk about bad timing. This left me no choice but to hitchhike home.

Meanwhile, Peter was returning from an evening wake held for his recently departed aunt. Losing his aunt was **a heavy cross to bear**<sup>530</sup> and a sobering thought for Peter, who had always taken his own health for granted. Under normal circumstances, he would have driven past me, given our history. But that day, he **pulled over**<sup>531</sup> and offered me a ride, which led to a heart-to-heart conversation that forever changed our relationship. If Joanna hadn't **bailed on**<sup>532</sup> me, Peter and I might never have discovered the true depths of our connection.

In the car, Peter opened up about the profound impact his aunt had on his life. "She was like a mother to me and **thought the world of me**<sup>533</sup>. When she fell ill and became bedridden, I **tended to**<sup>534</sup> her needs."

As he spoke, I could sense his vulnerability. "I lost both my parents when I was young. My aunt stepped in as my caretaker, becoming my anchor and molding me into the person I am today. Even though there was **bad blood**<sup>535</sup> between my aunt and my dad, she never **took it out on**<sup>536</sup> me. Her love for me was deep, evident in the smallest gestures. I remember how she would kneel down and tie my shoelaces, even when I was old enough to do it myself."

Even with her own battles, Peter's aunt never let life's challenges **harden her heart**<sup>537</sup>. Peter shared, "I still remember the moment when the doctor told her she couldn't have children; for the first

time, I saw heartbreak written all over her face. She tried various unconventional fertility methods, but nothing worked. Still, she kept her spirits up. Unfortunately, her inability to give my uncle children **drove a wedge between them**<sup>538</sup>.

“My uncle was a **real deadbeat**<sup>539</sup>. He could never hold a steady job and just squandered his inheritance on vices. When he blew through all his cash, he’d **sponge off**<sup>540</sup> my aunt, even though she was barely **getting by**<sup>541</sup> as a hairdresser. He ignored her sacrifices and taunted her about not being able to have kids, inflicting constant torment and emotional abuse on her. Still, she stayed committed to him, putting his needs above her own.”

Things took a darker turn as Peter revealed his uncle’s affair. Because it was an open secret, his aunt had to face the painful reality of his unfaithfulness while enduring the whispered gossip among townsfolk. Yet, she carried herself with remarkable strength and grace. However, karma had its way. One night, after meeting his mistress, his uncle died in a drunken car crash.

Peter recalled attending his funeral and seeing his aunt’s tears pouring down her face. “It surprised me to see her cry like that because my uncle had been a toxic presence, causing nothing but harm and destruction for her. But my aunt’s grief was a testament to her capacity for love and forgiveness.”

When I heard that, I couldn’t help but wonder how much of her tears was genuine sorrow for her husband, and how much was simply the release of years of pent-up anguish and resentment.

I felt bad for Peter, for what he had to endure as a child. Our connection might have **gotten off to a rocky start**<sup>542</sup>, but a seed of love was planted that night when he **poured his heart out**<sup>543</sup> to me. When he dropped me off, he said I could always rely on him for a ride. Taking his words to heart, I **took him up on**<sup>544</sup> that offer multiple times before we officially became **an item**<sup>545</sup>.

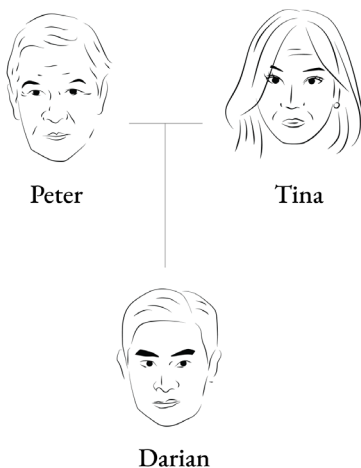
After the wake, Peter decided to become a vegetarian for a year, a practice that many adopt to pay respect to the deceased. Cutting meat **cold turkey**<sup>546</sup> wasn't easy for Peter, but to honor his **late**<sup>547</sup> aunt, he **stuck it out**<sup>548</sup>. It took almost the whole year for Peter to **come to terms with**<sup>549</sup> his aunt's death. For a while, Peter was withdrawn, sheltering himself from the world. His family and I tried to **rally around him**<sup>550</sup>, but he didn't **let anyone in**<sup>551</sup>.

**In the thick of**<sup>552</sup> his depressive episode, he would lock himself in his room. Days would go by when he didn't exchange a word with anyone. One time, he didn't return my calls for days or answer the door when I came by. I was sick to my stomach, worried he had done something to hurt himself. Different scenarios **played out**<sup>553</sup> in my head: maybe he choked or slipped and became unconscious, or maybe he ended his life, unable to cope with grief and loss. Thank the Lord he was just taking a few days grieving somewhere out of town.

During those few days, he kept his whereabouts a secret, seeking solace to declutter his mind, silence the inner chaos, and confront his pain. Gradually, he emerged from his cocoon of isolation and eventually **came out of his shell**<sup>554</sup>. Breaking free from seclusion was a process, during which he realized the importance of acknowledging

the multitude of things and people he still had to be grateful for. With this pivotal realization, a positive shift began to **take root**<sup>555</sup>. Peter started to feel that things were **looking up**<sup>556</sup>.

Peter had always been a **wild card**<sup>557</sup> with a penchant for colorful language. You never knew what he would do or say next. His spontaneity drew me to him but also terrified me. Despite the uncertainty, I took a **leap of faith**<sup>558</sup> to be with him. We had one of those “can’t live without each other yet want to strangle each other” types of relationships. Just when I was about to **call it quits**<sup>559</sup> on our five-year on-again, off-again relationship, I discovered I was pregnant, which changed everything. Until now, we hadn’t planned on **getting hitched**<sup>560</sup> but considered **shacking up**<sup>561</sup> together. When our parents found out I was **with child**<sup>562</sup>, they pressured us to marry, calling it “doing the right thing.” For them, having a **shotgun marriage**<sup>563</sup> beat bringing a child into the world as unmarried parents.





Surprisingly, Peter didn't **get cold feet**<sup>564</sup> when **the big day**<sup>89</sup> came. He embraced our wedding day with unwavering enthusiasm. Our early days of marriage were wonderful. We settled into a charming little house just a few blocks down from his parents' place. I can still fondly recall those cherished moments when we sat on our cozy porch, enjoying each other's company as newlyweds. Peter even promised to take me to see dolphins one day. Despite the promising start, everything changed with Darian's birth.

...

Before Darian was born, I had **mixed feelings**<sup>565</sup> about **starting a family**<sup>566</sup> because I was afraid that it might **tie me down**<sup>567</sup>. Ever since I was a little girl, I dreamed of becoming a businesswoman, but no one took me seriously, not even my folks. They would say things like, "Women belong in the kitchen, not in business." It was frustrating being born at a time when women's worth in the workforce was unappreciated, and women's domestic and reproductive responsibilities were expected. Although there weren't explicit rules dictating women's roles, societal expectations were rigid, confining women to the roles of self-sacrificing mothers and subservient wives. I refused to accept the notion that my purpose in life was solely to bear children and **submit to**<sup>568</sup> my husband. Surely, God must have a bigger plan for me.

**Against all odds**<sup>569</sup>, I landed a respectable position in a local trading company. I **went all out**<sup>570</sup> to secure the job, knowing I had to be twice as good as the men. Obtaining the position was one thing; keeping it was another. I had to be perfect, always prepared for the

next task. If I **dropped the ball**<sup>571</sup>, someone could hold that against me. I wondered if I could live to see the day when men and women would live and compete **on an equal footing**<sup>572</sup>.

...

Marriage felt constraining for a career-driven woman like me. It made me **lose sight of**<sup>573</sup> my happiness. The birth of Darian thrust me into motherhood, forcing me to leave my job to **look after**<sup>574</sup> him. Meanwhile, Peter took on additional work, **moonlighting**<sup>575</sup> as a bartender in a neighboring town. Although he never disclosed his reasons for working in another town, I assumed he wished to avoid judgments on his ability, or lack thereof, to satisfy his wife with one job or provide for his family.

Soon after Darian was born, Peter's dad developed Alzheimer's. The burden of caring for his father fell heavily on my shoulders. The daily grind soon **wore me down**<sup>576</sup>. At times, I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs, overwhelmed by the weight of the responsibility. As someone who preferred office work to domestic pursuits, I felt deprived and began to resent Peter for putting me in the position of looking after his father and Darian alone. Given our situation at home, I knew returning to my old job anytime soon was **out of the question**<sup>577</sup>. Yet despite many moments on the verge of a mental breakdown, I **stuck with it**<sup>578</sup>.

When Darian was a bit older, I got a part-time job. One day, I was held up by work and arrived ten minutes late to pick up Darian at his preschool. Some mothers made snide remarks about my decision

to work outside the house, implying that I neglected my duty as a mother. Their comments made me feel terrible because I didn't want to give working mothers a bad **name**<sup>579</sup> or give anyone a reason to condemn my choice.

I had hoped that mothers would **stick up for each other**<sup>580</sup>. Boy, was I wrong! I faced more judgment from mothers than fathers. Being one of the few working moms at Darian's school, I often felt like a **fish out of water**<sup>581</sup>, under constant scrutiny. To **add insult to injury**<sup>582</sup>, when I brought it up to Peter, he did not **have my back**<sup>583</sup>. Instead, he got all **worked up**<sup>584</sup> and questioned my motive for working outside the house. Maybe my job made him feel emasculated. I noticed that the more successful I became, the more distant we grew. By the time Darian turned five, our marriage was **on the rocks**<sup>585</sup>.

For years, I tried to meet society's expectations, believing that things would improve if I just **toughed it out**<sup>586</sup>. To save our marriage, I let Peter think he **had me in his pocket**<sup>587</sup>. I downplayed my career aspirations in front of him, even dumbing myself down at times, but I was losing myself in the process. For over a decade, even though my marriage to Peter was **hanging by a thread**<sup>588</sup>, I did my best to be a good mother and wife. Some women are content being stay-at-home moms, but not me—**different strokes for different folks**<sup>589</sup>.

Motherhood **held me back**<sup>590</sup>, making it hard for me to explore my identity and self-worth. The compromises I made to maintain the illusion of a functional marriage **wore away**<sup>591</sup> at my spirit, leaving me feeling trapped. Deep down, I knew leaving Peter was the only way

to reclaim my own voice. It was a difficult decision that filled me with guilt and fear. I constantly questioned whether I was doing the right thing, but I was becoming a mere shadow of myself. It may seem heartless to leave Darian without saying goodbye, but if I had spoken to him, I wouldn't have had the strength to **follow through**<sup>592</sup>. No mother willingly abandons her child.

As I left behind my old life, carrying bittersweet memories of motherhood and my love for Darian, I was convinced that leaving was about self-preservation. Though the road ahead was uncertain, I embraced it, believing that by following my heart, I would become—if not a better person—more whole.

## SEVEN

### *A Journey into the Unknown*

Darian crept through the house, silently gathering cash and valuables. His mind raced with thoughts of what to take. In the midst of his frenzy, he remembered the watch his grandfather had given him on his 18th birthday. It wasn't worth much, but as a family heirloom, it held immense sentimental value. On its backside, the watch had an engraving of a stylized tree with intertwining branches and roots, symbolizing the family's deep connections across generations. He tried searching the house for it but **came up empty**<sup>593</sup>. With time running out, he had to let it go.

Under the cloak of darkness, Darian snuck out of the house to the town's bus station. Just as the bus was about to **pull off**<sup>594</sup>, he approached the ticket booth, pulling on a baseball cap and glasses to disguise himself. Though the ticket agent noticed something odd, the moment passed in a flash, leaving little time for suspicion to **take root**<sup>595</sup>. With adrenaline coursing through his veins, Darian managed to slip away without trouble. As the bus drove away and vanished into the night, his mind raced with thoughts of what lay ahead.

A few days later, rumors circulated that Darian had lost his mind and left town **on a whim**<sup>595</sup>. This couldn't have been further from

the truth. The idea of leaving town had been brewing within him for some time. Since Darian was never one to **wear his heart on his sleeve**<sup>596</sup>, the true reason for his departure remained his own secret.

After months of moving around, Darian settled in a community 200 miles north of his hometown. He lived **incognito**<sup>597</sup> for the first couple of years, thinking people would come searching for him. During this time, he barely interacted with anyone, trying hard to **keep a low profile**<sup>598</sup>. Even though this solitary life quickly grew frustrating, he **kept at it**<sup>599</sup> to maintain his anonymity, often running along the riverbank to **let off steam**<sup>600</sup>.

One day, after his usual run, Darian stopped by a local café for a **cup of Joe**<sup>601</sup> before **going about**<sup>602</sup> his day. While waiting for his coffee, he met Louisa, a woman whose lustrous black hair matched her sensual voice. Darian had planned to go home and dive into a new book but found himself captivated by Louisa. **Out of character**<sup>603</sup>, he summoned the courage to strike up a conversation, feeling a magnetic pull toward her. Typically, Louisa would **shy away from**<sup>1</sup> strangers, but something about Darian put her **at ease**<sup>604</sup>. They **hit it off**<sup>605</sup> **right off the bat**<sup>606</sup>. During their conversation, they both experienced a strong sense of **déjà vu**<sup>607</sup>. The instant connection made Darian lower his guard and temporarily set aside the worries about exposing his identity.

Louisa had an uncanny ability to **tickle Darian's funny bone**<sup>608</sup> like nobody else. Every time they hung out, she had him **in hysterics**<sup>609</sup> within minutes. They could easily lose track of time, talking **for hours on end**<sup>610</sup> like two long-lost best friends. The fun never wore

**thin**<sup>611</sup>.

Six months after their first encounter, Darian finally found the courage to **throw caution to the wind**<sup>612</sup> and disclose his past to Louisa. Hiding his identity had been **weighing on his conscience**<sup>613</sup>, a burden he could no longer bear. To his surprise, Louisa wasn't upset. She understood how life could be full of unexpected twists and turns. Her empathy warmed Darian's heart, making their connection even stronger.

Feeling that trust, Louisa opened up about her own divorce. For a long time, she had carried shame about her failed marriage, especially because she had taken her wedding vows seriously. It wasn't like Louisa didn't try hard to save her marriage. Her husband became physically abusive soon after they got married, so she had to leave him for her own safety and peace of mind. The divorce felt like **a slap in the face**<sup>614</sup> to Louisa because she had to **jump through hoops**<sup>615</sup> to gain her mom's approval of her ex-husband in the first place. It wasn't Louisa's fault, but her mom **never let her live it down**<sup>616</sup>, constantly bringing up the poor choices she had made.

During this heartfelt exchange, Darian and Louisa shared their deepest secrets and drank **to their hearts' content**<sup>617</sup>. While societal taboos frowned upon **airing one's dirty laundry in public**<sup>618</sup>, they found it easy to **bare their souls**<sup>619</sup> to each other. After that night, they leaned on each other, knowing they could always be vulnerable without having to **put on a brave face**<sup>620</sup>, free from judgment.

## EIGHT

### *New Friendships*

**D**ivorce did not shatter Louisa's faith in love; she saw it as a chance to build resilience and grow. She knew that life's challenges were multifaceted, bringing both joy and sorrow, and a setback wasn't going to dampen her optimism. Even during the most trying times, Louisa still **looked at life through rose-tinted glasses**<sup>621</sup>, unafraid to embrace new relationships and adventures, firmly clinging to the hope of her **happily ever after**<sup>622</sup>.

Louisa **was the total package**<sup>623</sup>: she had the looks men **swooned**<sup>624</sup> over, the smarts to achieve anything she set her mind to, and **a heart of gold**<sup>625</sup>. Standing tall at five feet nine inches, she rocked a model's figure. Her beauty might be intimidating at first, but her sunny disposition quickly won people over. Yet, beneath her near-perfect exterior, she carried insecurities, especially from her ex-husband's constant digs at her appearance. Even with all her talents and beauty, Louisa often felt like her own worst critic.

Louisa's wicked sense of humor was part of what drew Darian to her. Darian always **had a soft spot for**<sup>626</sup> funny women, and while he shared a genuine connection with Louisa, their relationship was purely platonic, founded on mutual respect and honesty. They

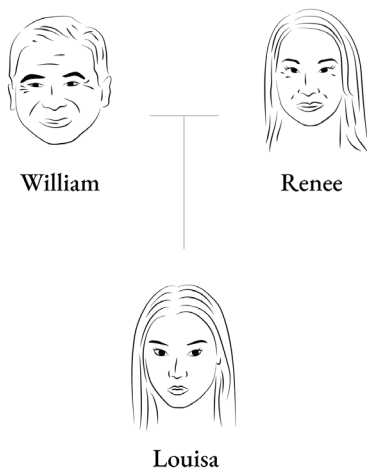


avoided **pushing each other's buttons**<sup>627</sup> to preserve their cherished friendship. Although their friendship never blossomed into romance, it exemplified a pure form of love.

Louisa was an unabashed food enthusiast with an insatiable **sweet tooth**<sup>628</sup>. Each evening, she indulged in a single piece of chocolate, savoring its velvety sweetness while **binge-watching**<sup>629</sup> her favorite **lowbrow**<sup>630</sup> TV shows—a ritual that helped her unwind. Despite her love for food, her culinary skills **paled in comparison**<sup>631</sup> to Darian's. Darian could **whip up**<sup>632</sup> delicious meals **on the fly**<sup>633</sup>, improvising with whatever ingredients on hand. Perhaps it was Louisa's mother, Renee, who shaped her poor cooking skills. After all, Renee had never ventured far into the kitchen, having been raised in privilege.

Renee was an overbearing mother, exercising **high-handed**<sup>634</sup> authority at home to **keep Louisa in check**<sup>635</sup>. Under her watchful eye, Louisa was a straight-A student, **measuring up**<sup>636</sup> to Renee's every expectation until she eventually rebelled. Renee's rigidity **stemmed from**<sup>637</sup> her fear that Louisa's scrappy nature as a kid might turn her into a troublesome teen. Though her concern was genuine, her extreme measures sowed the seeds for their contentious relationship.

Renee had always longed for a son, but after Louisa's birth, she contracted a rare disease that made it dangerous for her to have more children. Going against the doctor's advice, Renee insisted on bearing a male heir. Realizing he could never convince her otherwise, Renee's husband, William, made the tough decision to undergo a vasectomy but kept Renee **in the dark**<sup>638</sup>. Renee never found out the truth and eventually accepted her fate of never having a son.



When Louisa was born, Renee's friends tried to console her by saying that daughters often stay close to their parents when they grow up. Although their words held some truth, they offered little comfort to Renee. Having grown up in a patriarchal society, Renee believed that sons were inherently superior to daughters. With that, Renee raised Louisa as if she were a son. Her blatant preference for male heirs gave Louisa a constant feeling of failure. It made Louisa believe she could never **live up to**<sup>639</sup> Renee's expectations. As a result, Louisa **busted her butt**<sup>640</sup> to earn Renee's approval, graduating **summa cum laude**<sup>641</sup>, **sweeping the board**<sup>642</sup> in national debates, and even involving herself in charitable work in her free time.

Renee hid her own vulnerability and imperfection from Louisa. She saw tears as a sign of weakness and wanted Louisa to grow up strong so that no one could **push her around**<sup>643</sup>. But this **did Louisa a disservice**<sup>644</sup>. When parents aim for perfection, they inadvertently convey the message that mistakes are unacceptable. How can a child

find happiness when perfection is the goal?

On several occasions, Renee offered to pay for Louisa's college tuition, but Louisa refused, convinced that Renee would later take credit for her success. She didn't want to give Renee the satisfaction. Despite Renee's persistence, Louisa did not budge. After college, Louisa had a massive **falling-out**<sup>645</sup> with Renee, and for a couple of years, they weren't **on speaking terms**<sup>646</sup>. In the meantime, Darian tried to get Louisa to **make amends**<sup>647</sup> with Renee, but she wasn't open to the idea. Like her mother, Louisa was **as stubborn as a mule**<sup>648</sup>.

As much as Louisa **put Renee on a pedestal**<sup>649</sup>, she secretly wanted a different mother—one who could teach her about **the birds and the bees**<sup>650</sup> without passing judgment and one who she could share secrets with. Because of their strained relationship, Louisa only briefly mentioned Renee to Darian **in passing**<sup>651</sup> during their first year of friendship.

...

Three years after her divorce, Louisa found herself in another **serious**<sup>652</sup> relationship. When her boyfriend **popped the question**<sup>653</sup>, Louisa didn't want to share the news with Renee, **let alone**<sup>654</sup> invite her to the wedding. William had to **step in**<sup>655</sup> to get one of them to make a **peace offering**<sup>656</sup>. Usually, Renee was the one **wearing the pants**<sup>657</sup>—William rarely had any say—but this time, he was uncompromising in his stance. He knew that one day, Renee would regret missing her own daughter's wedding.

William was adamant about tradition and held a strong belief in signs, omens, and superstitions. To him, a marriage without a proper ceremony was destined for failure. Moreover, Renee's absence from Louisa's wedding would be seen as ominous. Reflecting on Louisa's elopement with her first husband and its unfortunate outcome, William felt compelled to **stand his ground**<sup>658</sup> this time. Ultimately, for her father's sake, Louisa decided to **bury the hatchet**<sup>659</sup> with Renee after years of estrangement.

Once Renee learned more about her future son-in-law, she wasn't exactly **jumping for joy**<sup>660</sup>. She made backhanded remarks about him and offered unsolicited advice to Louisa, **shoving her opinions down Louisa's throat**<sup>661</sup>. In Renee's eyes, no one was ever going to be good enough for her daughter.

Renee's criticism of her future son-in-law seemed **rich**<sup>662</sup>, considering she had suffered the same fate from her own mother, who disparaged William. Like Louisa, Renee eloped with William, going against her mother's wishes. Back then, William was still a poor but dignified, loving man. It appeared **the apple didn't fall far from the tree**<sup>663</sup>. It was only after reflecting on these similarities that Renee realized she needed to **patch things up**<sup>664</sup> with Louisa if she wanted any relationship with her daughter. Reluctantly, she **gave in**<sup>665</sup> to Louisa's wish for a second marriage, knowing that Louisa would go ahead with the wedding anyway.

...

When Louisa met her second husband, Edward, for the first time, he

**hit all the right notes**<sup>666</sup>. It had been a while since she **had butterflies in her stomach**<sup>667</sup> on a date, so she knew she was in trouble—the good kind. Because Edward had never been married but didn't mind that she had, Louisa had a good feeling about Edward **right out of the gate**<sup>668</sup>. After the date, she couldn't wait to share every detail with Darian. When they finally talked, Louisa mentioned that Edward might be “the one.” Darian was **taken aback**<sup>669</sup> because Louisa wasn't usually one to throw around such heavy statements early in a relationship, especially given how sensible and picky she usually was.

A few weeks later, Louisa introduced Edward to Darian over a casual Sunday brunch on a beautiful yet chilly day. The sun beat down strongly that morning, teasing people with its deceptive warmth amidst the mountain breeze. All three of them were bundled up in cozy sweaters and chunky scarves, prepared for the crisp air. The restaurant stood next to a small quaint neighborhood park on the top of a hill where the trees displayed vibrant shades of green, their leaves rustling in the breeze. Small birds flitted among the branches, their melodies filling the air with a natural symphony. Occasionally, a light mist rolled in, adding an ethereal touch to the scene.

Uncharacteristically, Darian was late. His alarm hadn't **gone off**<sup>670</sup> that morning. As he rushed through the door, his cheeks flushed with embarrassment. He fumbled with apologies, hoping Edward wouldn't think poorly of him on their first meeting. Darian knew Louisa was a **stickler**<sup>671</sup> for punctuality, so he apologized profusely.

Immediately after they sat down, Darian slipped into protective mode and began to grill Edward with questions to **pin down**<sup>672</sup> his

intentions with Louisa. It was as if he had completely forgotten his tardy arrival. He threw a barrage of tough questions at Edward throughout their two-hour brunch, to which Edward responded with grace, even though he did feel, at times, like he was being put on trial for murder.

Most people might have taken offense at Darian's semi-aggressive questioning, but Edward was unfazed by it because he understood that Darian **had Louisa's best interests at heart**<sup>673</sup>. There was an appealing calmness about Edward that made him likable. He was unassuming and borderline shy.

When Edward excused himself to go to the washroom, Louisa and Darian seized the opportunity for a quick exchange.

"Quick, tell me what you think," Louisa whispered.

Darian leaned in and lowered his voice. "I had my doubts when you said he might be the one. I thought you were **out of your mind**<sup>674</sup>. Now that I've met him, I'll **eat my words**<sup>675</sup>. It doesn't take a genius to see that there is something special between you two."

Louisa smiled with relief. "That means a lot coming from you."

Darian shrugged. "I am no expert in reading people, but he seems like a good guy, a **keeper**<sup>676</sup>. Probably the best guy I've seen you with."

Louisa nodded. "Remember the **douchebag**<sup>677</sup> I dated last year? I am **drawing a blank**<sup>678</sup> on his name."

“You mean the guy who claimed the girl he kissed on the street was his cousin?” Darian replied with a grimace.

“Yup, that one.” Louisa shook her head, her face showing ironic disbelief at the now somewhat comical memory. “He had a reputation as **a ladies’ man**<sup>679</sup>. You have no idea how many times he lied to me. And remember how he’d **make a scene**<sup>680</sup> and **talk down to**<sup>681</sup> the waitstaff at restaurants if they didn’t meet his standards?”

Darian frowned at the mention of such behavior. “I remember. I hate when people do that. How someone treats a server reflects their true character.”

Louisa nodded. “It’s one thing to **have a short fuse**<sup>682</sup>. We’re only human. But blatantly shaming others to feel superior is a major character flaw and a total **red flag**<sup>683</sup>.”

Darian leaned back in his chair, arms crossed. “An oversized ego is a sign of deep-rooted insecurity.”

“Totally,” Louisa agreed, taking a sip of her mimosa.

“Don’t worry. He will **pay for it**<sup>684</sup> one day. **You mark my words**<sup>685</sup>. **Karma is a bitch**<sup>686</sup>,” Darian said with confidence.

Louisa leaned in with a sly smile. “He already did. A friend told me he recently lost nearly all his money after several business deals he **banked on**<sup>687</sup> **fell through**<sup>688</sup>. A lot had to go wrong for that to happen.”

Darian raised his eyebrows. “Looks like karma caught up to him.”

Louisa nodded. “Anyway, he wasn’t even the worst guy I’ve dated. I once caught a boyfriend cheating in the act, and he **flat-out**<sup>689</sup> denied it. He said he was **roofied**<sup>690</sup> by the woman lying naked next to him. Like I was gonna **buy**<sup>691</sup> that. Some men would use every excuse in the book to get out of trouble.”

Darian leaned back, a look of disgust on his face. “What a scumbag ... Hypothetically, if you had to choose between a guy who disrespects restaurant servers and a guy who cheats, which one would it be?”

“Basically, choose **the lesser of two evils**<sup>692</sup>?” Louisa asked.

Darian nodded his head.

Louisa’s face twisted in distaste. “They are both a **no-no**<sup>693</sup> for me. If I had to pick one, I’d rather end my own life.”

Darian laughed at her dramatic response. “I hear ya. I must say, before coming here, I was afraid I might have to **bite my tongue**<sup>694</sup> if I didn’t like Edward.”

Louisa’s eyes widened in surprise. “I would expect you to tell me the truth, even if it stings.”

Darian nodded thoughtfully. “Edward seems like a good guy.”

“He does, doesn’t he?” Louisa smiled warmly.



Darian's expression turned serious. "Let's hope he is not just trying to **worm his way into your heart**<sup>695</sup> by pretending to be a gentleman. I do get a good feeling about this one, though."

Louisa nodded in agreement, but a hint of doubt lingered. "Even if this relationship doesn't work out, it won't end **on a sour note**<sup>696</sup>. I'm confident of that." She glanced over Darian's shoulder. "Okay, stop! He's coming back."

Darian turned around to see Edward approaching. "**Speak of the devil**<sup>697</sup>," he muttered, giving Louisa a knowing look.

When the check came, Edward insisted on paying, wanting to **put his best foot forward**<sup>698</sup>. It might have been a strategic move to present himself **in a good light**<sup>699</sup> in front of Louisa's friends. Only time would reveal if Edward was a true gentleman.

Over the next few months, Darian grew closer to Edward. However, the fact that he had never seen Edward lose his **cool**<sup>700</sup> only gave him all the more desire to be **a fly on Edward's wall**<sup>701</sup>. As their friendship deepened, it became clear that Edward's public persona matched his private character—**what you saw was what you got**<sup>702</sup>. Edward was a **straight arrow**<sup>703</sup> who valued people's time and was always willing to meet up at a moment's notice. **Every now and then**<sup>704</sup>, he and Edward would get together to **shoot hoops**<sup>705</sup>. Although basketball wasn't Darian's forte, he enjoyed challenging Edward to a game, even though he usually found himself outmatched.

Edward had amassed a fortune before turning 30, yet at his core, he remained unchanged. For example, frugality was a virtue instilled in him at a young age by his parents, who grew up in an impoverished community where people couldn't afford meals. Because of that, **living within one's means**<sup>706</sup> had always been a rule he abided by<sup>707</sup>. Money was never going to change that.

Edward grew up in a **close-knit**<sup>708</sup>, demonstrative family with liberal parents who generously expressed their love through verbal affirmation and physical affection. His childhood overflowed with joy and laughter, giving him the resilience to navigate the challenges of adulthood. His only flaw might be that he **had two left feet**<sup>709</sup> when he danced—if one could call that a flaw. Darian and Louisa saw Edward dance for the first time at a house party held in honor of Edward's grandma's 85th birthday. When the music started, Edward eagerly hit the dance floor with feet seemingly having a mind of their own. Louisa cringed while she watched with amusement, her laughter filled with endearment. Unfazed by any embarrassment, Edward laughed along, playfully exaggerating his lack of coordination. From that moment on, it became a **running joke**<sup>710</sup>, with Darian teasing Edward about his two left feet.

Edward's dancing skills may have been lacking, but he more than made up for it with his many other gifts. In his hometown, he was the go-to person for fixing household appliances, troubleshooting computer issues, repairing furniture, and even doing brickwork—earning him the title of **jack-of-all-trades**<sup>711</sup>. It wasn't just his versatility that drew people to him; it was his genuine character. Edward offered reassurance to those around him and approached life with a sense of

humor, often making jokes **at his own expense**<sup>712</sup>. He embraced his imperfections and never took himself too seriously.

Every year, Edward made substantial donations to charity, primarily targeting people who lived below the poverty line and those who had **slipped through the cracks**<sup>713</sup> in the healthcare system. Having grown up in an inner-city slum where access to quality healthcare was a luxury that few could afford, Edward watched many people die from easily treatable diseases. This fueled his passion for addressing healthcare disparities in marginalized communities.

Darian's upbringing was quite a departure from Edward's. He grew up in a household where tactile affection was received with discomfort and awkwardness. While his accomplishments were seldom acknowledged, his mistakes were met with stern gazes from his father. During his turbulent teenage years, Darian struggled with anger brought on by his mother's abandonment and intensified by typical **teenage angst**<sup>714</sup>. Though affection was scarce in his childhood, he held onto the love he knew his father had for him.

The scars of childhood trauma **spilled over**<sup>715</sup> into Darian's adulthood, leading him to become a health fanatic. Without even realizing it, he became fixated on staying healthy as a way to cope with his troubled past. This fixation drove him to fervently adhere to a regimented exercise and dietary routine. As Darian stepped further into adulthood, his perfectionist tendencies began to **take over**<sup>716</sup>, dictating every aspect of his life and often leaving him feeling inadequate. Unaware of the strain it was placing on his well-being, he pushed himself to mental exhaustion. But meeting Edward made him look at

life through a different lens. Edward's relaxed attitude made Darian reassess the value of his relentless pursuit of perfection and realize that life was more of a marathon than a sprint and that everyone was a work in progress on their own path.

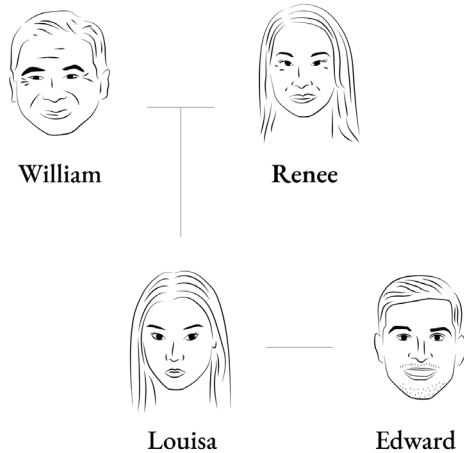
Understanding that taking a positive approach would spare him a lifetime of low self-esteem and disappointment, Darian began to appreciate the simple things in life and **loosen his grip**<sup>717</sup> on being a perfectionist. It wasn't natural for him to embrace his flaws or find joy in the moment, as he had grown accustomed to seeing everything in black and white. But meeting Edward got him thinking: would it be better to spend life chasing the unattainable or embracing the imperfect beauty of the present? After all, life is too short. Since then, Darian saw things more in shades of gray, allowing for more flexibility and understanding for himself and others.

...

Edward proposed 10 months after his first date with Louisa. He had planned to do it sooner but **chickened out**<sup>718</sup>. When Darian heard the news, he was **floored**<sup>719</sup>. Even though Edward had won him over, he worried Louisa might be acting impulsively, like a love-struck teenage girl, without considering how marriage could significantly change her life. After all, it had only been 10 months. However, knowing Louisa, Darian was certain that nothing he could say would change her mind.

After the proposal, Edward moved in with Louisa, and they adopted a rather rambunctious French Bulldog puppy, which turned out

to be quite a handful. Whenever unleashed at the park, it would **run amok**<sup>720</sup>, restless and uncontrollable. Inside the house, it was equally unruly: tearing up throw pillows, gnawing on table legs, scratching the couch, and chewing on shoes. Its energy was **off the charts**<sup>721</sup>. After three trying months, Louisa couldn't take it anymore. She worried that Edward would be upset about parting ways with the pup but was relieved to learn he felt the same.



Just shy of one year after the proposal, Louisa and Edward exchanged their vows in an idyllic, ancient villa nestled amidst the Tuscan hills. As it turned out, the villa had once been the residence of the mother of the legendary Mona Lisa—the woman immortalized in one of the most renowned works of art in history. The villa might have been old, but it was, **in and of itself**<sup>722</sup>, enchanting and needed little embellishment.

The wedding celebration was an intimate affair, attended by 53 of Louisa and Edward's closest friends and family. Louisa and Edward **went out of their way**<sup>723</sup> to ensure a joyful and memorable wedding for their guests. Being a typical Virgo, Louisa was involved in every aspect of the planning process, from the nearly invisible embroidered patterns on the coasters, to the colors of the votive candles, to the texture of the **place cards**<sup>724</sup>. She believed that **the devil is in the details**<sup>725</sup>.

Edward **spared no expense**<sup>726</sup> on the wedding; he wanted to give Louisa a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Many were surprised to learn that Edward **went above and beyond**<sup>727</sup> for their **big day**<sup>89</sup>, given his reputation for financial prudence. However, those close to him knew that Edward fell head over heels in love with Louisa from the moment he laid eyes on her, so money **was no object**<sup>728</sup> when it came to making her happy.

Having attended many weddings, Louisa and Edward had seen some unbelievable wedding **hiccups**<sup>729</sup>. For example, at a wedding, the **ring bearer**<sup>730</sup> lost the rings right before the exchange of vows, only for the guests to find them **in the nick of time**<sup>731</sup>. At another wedding, the cake toppled over just as the couple was about to cut it. Knowing that weddings can be full of surprises, Louisa ensured plenty of rehearsals and instructed the officiant to keep the speech short to avoid boring the guests.

Louisa had considered wearing her grandmother's wedding dress as a tribute. But after all these years, the dress **had seen better days**<sup>732</sup>. To preserve the memory, she hired someone to design her wedding

gown **along the lines of**<sup>733</sup> her grandmother's dress, paying homage to the past. The result was a masterpiece—with a 10-yard train, intricate hand-embroidered flowers, and a corset back—making it a true labor of love and a costly endeavor. The design team worked **against the clock**<sup>734</sup> to ensure its completion before the wedding.

When Louisa walked down the flower-strewn aisle, the guests gasped in awe of her radiant glow. The sheer beauty of the gown evoked an immediate and visceral response from everyone. Louisa's father walked her down the aisle and **gave her away**<sup>735</sup>. As Louisa and Edward stood at the altar, surrounded by their closest family and friends, they promised to love and support each other through life's ups and downs. Then, they exchanged rings and sealed their union with a kiss, prompting the guests to erupt into applause.

Everyone was **dressed to the nines**<sup>736</sup> for this **black-tie**<sup>737</sup> event. Even Edward's brother, known for his relaxed attire bordering on disheveled, **spruced himself up**<sup>738</sup> in an Italian suit and a **spiffy**<sup>739</sup> haircut.

As the evening progressed, the reception transitioned into a lavish sit-down banquet in a breathtaking Tuscan garden. The soft lamp-lights created a romantic ambiance among the lush greenery, with tables decorated with crisp white linens and delicate floral centerpieces inspired by Tuscan landscapes. Under the garden's canopy, the candlelight added an intimate glow, casting a magical atmosphere, while guests **basked in**<sup>740</sup> the culinary delights of traditional Italian flavors, serenaded by a live band. Meanwhile, waiters roamed the crowd, offering delectable treats that tantalized the taste buds. To complement

the food, the guests were served **top-notch**<sup>741</sup> wines, handpicked by Edward, who had worked as a sommelier at Michelin-starred restaurants to pay his way through college.

Amidst clinking glasses and laughter, toasts were raised to the newlyweds. Guests shared stories and treasured memories. Usually shy of the spotlight, Darian said a few words **off the cuff**<sup>742</sup>, expressing his deep gratitude for Louisa as a cherished friend and injecting levity with playful jabs and jokes. His speech was short but **packed a punch**<sup>743</sup>, eliciting tears and laughter from the crowd, even moving Louisa's usually emotionally withholding mother to tears. Louisa's father, unsurprisingly, got all **choked up**<sup>744</sup>, unabashedly crying with joy.

Entering the wedding, Darian **felt under the weather**<sup>745</sup> due to food poisoning from contaminated oysters he had eaten the night before at a local **joint**<sup>746</sup> in Florence. After his heartfelt speech, he left to rest at the hotel, missing the part when the newlyweds **broke into**<sup>747</sup> a dance routine, followed by the rest of the guests dancing the night away. When the clock struck midnight, the atmosphere grew wild, with nearly everyone fully immersed in the jubilant celebration.

From start to finish, the wedding **went off without a hitch**<sup>748</sup>. When the night ended, Louisa and Edward retired to their villa, completely **wiped out**<sup>749</sup> for the night but still excitedly discussing the adventures they would embark on as husband and wife.

Two days later, Edward and Louisa **headed off**<sup>750</sup> to Spain for their two-week honeymoon. Their trip went smoothly, filled with exquisite



cuisine, historic landmarks, and pristine beaches. Their initial worries about the country's rampant pickpocketing proved unnecessary as they encountered no mishaps along the way.

Upon their return, Louisa hired a lawyer to **draw up**<sup>751</sup> a postnuptial agreement, wanting to dispel any perception of financial motivations in their relationship. Initially, Edward had reservations, but he came to understand its significance for Louisa and embraced the idea. On the day after they signed the agreement, they walked out of the lawyer's office hand in hand, relieved and reassured, ready to **forge ahead**<sup>752</sup> with their future together.

*Eating For Two*<sup>753</sup>

Louisa had always identified as a career woman, never expecting to settle down and start a family so soon. But when she met Edward, she knew he was the one to build a life with. Men with brawn, brains, and charm were **few and far between**<sup>754</sup>, and Edward embodied all of these qualities.

After Louisa and Edward tied the knot, Darian and Louisa **kicked around**<sup>755</sup> the idea of **going into**<sup>756</sup> business together. But those plans **fell through**<sup>757</sup> when Louisa found out she was pregnant. When her period was a week late, Louisa's nerves went into overdrive. She rushed to the pharmacy and bought several test kits, feeling a mixture of dread and anticipation. Pacing the room, she anxiously waited for the results. When each test confirmed her pregnancy, she was **taken aback**<sup>669</sup>, since she had been diligent with contraception. Her initial shock quickly turned into apprehension as she contemplated the enormous responsibilities of motherhood. She couldn't shake the fear of becoming like her distant mother.

Reflecting on her own upbringing, Louisa knew she had to break the cycle to establish a healthier relationship with her child. While she didn't agree with her mother's strict disciplinary approach, she saw

the value of setting boundaries in raising children. With this in mind, she planned to adopt a middle ground, mixing **carrot and stick**<sup>758</sup> to encourage positive behavior and instill a sense of responsibility in her future child.

For a while, Louisa harbored doubts about keeping the baby, but the reality of **her ticking biological clock**<sup>759</sup> pushed her to embrace motherhood. She planned to keep her pregnancy quiet for a few months, but Edward's excitement **got the better of him**<sup>760</sup>. He **let many people in on**<sup>761</sup> the secret, including Darian, who couldn't resist a sly remark during a phone call.

"**A little bird told me**<sup>762</sup> that you've **got a bun in the oven**<sup>763</sup>," Darian teased.

"I know Edward told you. He **can't keep a secret to save his life**<sup>764</sup>. He promised not to tell anyone until we passed the three-month mark." Louisa sighed.

Darian chuckled. "You've got to **let this one slide**<sup>765</sup>. He is just **over the moon**<sup>766</sup> about becoming a father."

"Well, it's **water under the bridge**<sup>767</sup> now. What can I do? He'll just give me those **puppy-dog eyes**<sup>768</sup> if I yell at him. You know I can't stay mad at him for long when he does that."

"He totally **has you wrapped around his little finger**<sup>769</sup>" Darian teased. "Do you guys have a name yet?"

"If it's a girl, it will be Apple, and if it's a boy, it will be Lemon,"

Louisa joked.

“Well, those names definitely **roll off the tongue**<sup>770</sup>.”

“I’m kidding. If I named my kid either of those, they’d get bullied for sure. It’d be social suicide.”

“**Preaching to the choir**<sup>771</sup>,” Darian agreed. “Kids used to call me ‘Durian’. You know, the fruit with a pungent smell?”

“Of course,” Louisa replied.

“So, what are you really going to name your kid?” Darian asked.

“We have a few ideas, but nothing is **set in stone**<sup>772</sup> yet,” Louisa replied, showing her hands with palms up in a shrug.

“I’m so thirsty,” Darian interjected, shifting the conversation. “Are you **in the mood**<sup>773</sup> for a snack or a drink—non-alcoholic, of course?”

Louisa’s eyes lit up. “I’ve been craving some wine lately.”

Darian rolled his eyes playfully. “Remember our drinking spree and **pigging out**<sup>774</sup> at your apartment? Seems like a lifetime ago.”

“Now it’s just mocktails and a bit of coffee for me.” Louisa sighed. “Pregnant or not, I need a **pick-me-up**<sup>775</sup> snack to get me through the **afternoon slump**<sup>776</sup>. I’ve been trying to **wean off**<sup>777</sup> caffeine by switching to decaf.”

“How about we meet at the café down the street from your place in, **say**<sup>778</sup>, 30 minutes?” Darian suggested.

“You mean the one with that beautiful cerulean blue cobbled floor?”

“That’s the one,” Darian replied enthusiastically.

“You’re **reading my mind**<sup>779</sup>,” Louisa said with a smile. “I was just thinking of going there. It’s always packed though. Let me go and grab us a table first. I am **famished**<sup>780</sup>.”

“In that case, could you order something for me first?” Darian asked. “I’m **fresh out of**<sup>781</sup> eggs and need to grab some organic ones before they sell out at the grocery store.”

“Sure. What would you like?” Louisa asked.

“I’ve heard their banana bread is tasty,” Darian replied with a hint of curiosity in his voice.

“Are you sure?” Louisa cautioned. “It’s **hit or miss**<sup>782</sup> ... **Don’t get me wrong**<sup>783</sup>; they **knock it out of the park**<sup>784</sup> with most foods there.”

“I see. What would you recommend instead?”

“If you want something savory, go for the tuna sandwich with two **over-easy**<sup>785</sup> eggs,” Louisa suggested. “You can swap sunny-side-up eggs for over-easy ones. For something sweet, their brownies and fruit

tarts are delicious, though a bit pricey.”

“I’ll go with the brownie. I’ve been craving chocolate,” Darian decided.

Louisa nodded, pleased with his choice. “You can’t go wrong with that. Trust me, you will **get your money’s worth**<sup>786</sup>. Their brownies are **out of this world**<sup>787</sup>.”

At that moment, Louisa’s phone vibrated. She glanced down at the screen. “A friend just texted me. If she stops by, would you mind?”

“Not at all. **The more the merrier**<sup>788</sup>. Who is this friend?” Darian asked.

“A college friend. Her mom is sick, so she’s been going to the hospital every day. She’s on the way there and will pass by the café. I’ve been bugging her to meet for coffee, but she said she’d just be a **downer**<sup>789</sup>. I told her today that I wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

“I hope everything is okay with her mom,” Darian said with concern.

Louisa’s expression turned somber. “Last time I spoke to her, her mom wasn’t **out of the woods**<sup>790</sup> yet. The doctor said it was uncertain if she would have a full recovery, so my friend has been feeling down.”

“Let’s pray that her mom **pulls through**<sup>791</sup> in the end,” Darian said.

“Of course,” Louisa said with a nod. “Anyway, I’ll see you in a bit.” She put her phone back in her pocket.

When Louisa arrived at the café, the hostess had just given away the last table. With some time to kill, she put her name on the waiting list and went to check out a nearby antique shop. Louisa was an avid collector of antique mirrors, so the shop’s furniture was right **up her alley**<sup>792</sup>. As soon as she stepped inside, an early 18th-century mirror caught her eye. Despite its old age, the mirror was **in mint condition**<sup>793</sup>. Without even checking the price, Louisa asked the owner to **ring it up**<sup>794</sup>, only to find that it was much more expensive than she had anticipated.

Although she couldn’t afford the mirror, she didn’t walk away empty-handed. She **picked up**<sup>795</sup> a modern-antique armchair from the 1950s, a cased glass vase, and a quirky-looking sculpture shaped like a male torso made of copper.

After her shopping spree, Louisa hurried back to the café, eager to join Darian and her friend, who had already been waiting. Inside, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and pastries filled the air. Darian, Louisa, and her friend settled into a cozy corner table decorated with a vase of vibrant flowers and a basket of freshly baked bread rolls with herbed butter. A trio of elegantly folded cloth napkins rested neatly beside each place setting, showcasing the attention to detail in this café.

As they sipped their drinks, the conversation flowed effortlessly. Louisa’s mind, however, wandered back to the antique mirror she

had passed up. Its image lingered in her thoughts. In the midst of the lively chatter, Louisa's friend opened up about her mother's condition, filling the air with concern. Louisa listened with a compassionate heart, offering words of support, but the weight of her friend's worries tugged at her heart.

Meanwhile, Darian eagerly reached for the freshly served brownie, which had arrived last. The dessert delighted the senses with its rich, fudgy texture and a decadent chocolate aroma that wafted through the air. Darian gave a good whiff before taking a huge bite, and then his eyes lit up with delight as the luscious sweetness danced on his taste buds. "This brownie is to die for," he said. At this bustling café, they savored their snacks, delved into life's challenges, and enjoyed occasional light-hearted banter.

Louisa's mind drifted back to the mirror once more when Darian was speaking to the friend, a wistful smile playing on her lips. Surrounded by the warmth of the café and the company of her friends, she found comfort, thinking that true treasures **lie in**<sup>796</sup> the connections formed between people.

When the afternoon gathering ended, Louisa felt an irresistible urge to revisit the antique shop, and this time, Darian came with her. Staring at the empty space once occupied by the mirror, Louisa felt a pang of sadness. "If we let opportunities **slip through our fingers**<sup>797</sup>, they may never come around again," she said quietly. Her words struck Darian, evoking a shared regret. As he stood beside her, he couldn't help but draw a faint parallel between the lost mirror and his lost connection with his mother. Unbeknownst to him, a seed was



planted that day, one that would soon whisper to him in quiet moments, stirring a growing need to seek understanding and reconnect. Together, they left the shop, each carrying a silent weight. Louisa's regret and Darian's emerging introspection formed an unspoken bond, a shared recognition that the paths they had walked, though different, held valuable lessons about seizing opportunities and seeking closure.

...

Hiding her pregnancy had been emotionally draining. Now that **the cat was out of the bag**<sup>798</sup>, Louisa felt relieved. She had grown tired of making up lies about why she suddenly stopped drinking or wearing heels, both of which she used to love. She had tried to keep the baby news **under wraps**<sup>799</sup> to be sensitive to her friends who had difficulty conceiving or had recently miscarried. Balancing work and family life was stressful enough without added layers of secrecy. She didn't want to be insensitive but knew that once you start lying, it's a **slippery slope**<sup>800</sup> to more lies.

**By and large**<sup>801</sup>, Louisa had an easy pregnancy, but her delivery wasn't exactly **smooth sailing**<sup>802</sup>. After 10 hours of labor, she underwent an emergency **C-section**<sup>803</sup>. At one point during the procedure, the situation was **touch-and-go**<sup>804</sup>. Thankfully, both she and baby came out okay. Louisa and Edward had planned a relaxing weekend at a nearby bed and breakfast, but the baby's early arrival **threw a wrench into**<sup>805</sup> their plans, putting their mini **staycation**<sup>806</sup> **on hold**<sup>807</sup> indefinitely.

Three months before her due date, Louisa had **baby-proofed**<sup>808</sup> ev-

ery corner of her house to ensure a safe environment. After the baby came into the picture, she stayed vigilant, constantly removing objects with sharp edges to keep her **little one**<sup>809</sup> **out of harm's way**<sup>810</sup>. Edward found her precautions a bit excessive, thinking that she might be too **hung up on**<sup>811</sup> safety measures, but she believed **it's better to be safe than sorry**<sup>812</sup>.

Preparing for the baby's arrival also meant Louisa needed to **get behind the wheel**<sup>813</sup>. She had always relied on her bike to get around town but realized the dangers of biking on the unpaved streets near her home. With a baby on the way, she began to view her own mortality in a new light, making getting her driver's license a top priority. After several driving lessons, she aced the test.

Parenthood brought Louisa and Edward a mix of excitement and trepidation. Late nights filled with feeding and diaper changes became their new reality. Even with their careful planning and extensive reading, the **emotional roller coaster**<sup>814</sup> of parenthood, fueled by fatigue and self-doubt, swallowed them at times. Breastfeeding proved to be a different story altogether from what Louisa had envisioned. It wasn't the bonding experience she had read about or hoped for; instead, it brought discomfort and frustration, pushing her determination to its limits. Louisa learned firsthand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to caring for a baby and that not everything can be learned from books alone.

The demands of motherhood kept Louisa **on her toes**<sup>815</sup>, but even her constant exhaustion did not deter her from keeping her job. However, it did mean putting the idea of going into business with

Darian **on the back burner**<sup>816</sup>. Darian totally understood. He saw how tough it was for Louisa to balance work and family, so he was **on board**<sup>817</sup> with her decision to focus on her existing responsibilities.

One day, during a coffee meet-up, Darian asked, “Ever thought about taking a couple of years off from work?” Louisa explained why that wouldn’t work for her. She stressed how important her career was to her identity and financial independence. She pointed out the obstacles many women face when reentering the workforce after a break to be a full-time mother and the importance of **staying in the loop**<sup>818</sup> with industry changes. Their conversation delved into the challenges of work-life balance and the value of maintaining professional networks.

Edward also supported Louisa’s career aspirations. In his mid-twenties, he **struck gold**<sup>819</sup> with a startup investment. While the investment had been a risky move **on his part**<sup>820</sup>, it **paid off**<sup>821</sup>. His newfound fortune allowed him to **pick up the slack**<sup>822</sup> at home, freeing Louisa to focus on her career. He even ventured into entrepreneurship, founding a consulting firm to expand his business network.

However, Louisa had reservations about some of Edward’s new business acquaintances, who seemed to be opportunists benefiting from his success and shamelessly **mooching off**<sup>823</sup> him. She believed that true friends stand by you **through thick and thin**<sup>824</sup>, not just when you have attained success. But she admitted that their presence motivated Edward to become more active again, coaxing him off the couch where he used to spend all day answering business calls. Edward’s newfound energy improved his domestic skills, and he even

surpassed Louisa in tasks like diaper changing. Before they showed up in Edward's life, Edward had been so out of shape that he would have gotten winded after a short run. Usually, Louisa would've had to **twist his arm**<sup>825</sup> to get him to the gym.

Gradually, the demands of the consulting firm began to consume more of Edward's attention, pulling him away from other aspects of his life. Parenthood, with its constant juggling act between caring for children and attending to other obligations, only exacerbated the situation. The mounting responsibilities at home and work **took a toll**<sup>826</sup> on their marriage. Whenever they teetered on burnout, Louisa would confide in Darian about the challenges of balancing marriage, motherhood, and career.

One night, after their get-together, Darian lay in bed, reflecting on their conversation; tears suddenly welled up in his eyes. It struck him deeply that even under tremendous stress, Louisa remained dedicated to her career because it was central to her identity. He saw how unhappy she'd be if she had to give it up to become a stay-at-home mom.

At first, he couldn't comprehend his sudden surge of emotion, but he soon realized it was about his own mother. Louisa's experiences opened his eyes to the grind of working moms and how incredibly demanding it could be to raise a child while pursuing career aspirations. This realization grew deeper as he thought about the broader societal context in which his mother made her decisions. Back in the day, it wasn't common for women to work outside the home, so she likely faced external pressures, limited options, and even ridicule for her

ambitions. This new perspective sparked a revelation, helping Darian untangle the knots of decades-long resentment. He began to view his mom's choices through a lens of empathy and respect, imagining the battles she must have fought to live life **on her own terms**<sup>827</sup>.

*Meeting his BFF*<sup>828</sup>

For a long while, Darian **kept to himself**<sup>829</sup>, barely interacting with anyone. Then, **out of the blue**<sup>830</sup>, Louisa showed up, and things took a turn. Weekly meetups with Louisa became routine, even after she married Edward. But when Louisa became a mom, everything changed, leaving Darian feeling adrift. For a while, she was the only ray of light in his lonely life. Now, without Louisa's constant presence, Darian decided to take matters into his own hands and find new ways to fill his time. He **dabbled in**<sup>831</sup> a few activities before deciding to **brush up on**<sup>832</sup> his French, having **picked up**<sup>833</sup> some basics from a French coworker.

Finding a language school wasn't much of a challenge, since there was only one place in town offering French lessons. With confidence, Darian skipped the beginner level and dove straight into intermediate, expecting it to be a **breeze**<sup>834</sup>. But he quickly realized he was **out of his depth**<sup>835</sup>.

As fate would have it<sup>836</sup>, he got moved down a level and **crossed paths with**<sup>837</sup> Allen Baker, an old friend of John's from college. Allen, who taught part-time at the language school, recognized Darian from a picture John had shown him. He **did a double take**<sup>838</sup> when

he saw Darian walking into class but kept quiet about his connection to John, knowing of John's deep animosity toward Darian's family.

After their first class, Allen approached Darian to learn more about him. But Darian, clearly guarded, dodged the questions, leaving Allen with more curiosity than answers. Allen didn't want to risk **turning him off**<sup>839</sup> with overt aggression, so he refrained from pushing too hard, remembering the old saying, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." He figured he'd have plenty of time to break down Darian's defenses.

Over the next few months, Allen made every effort to earn Darian's trust. Gradually, he came to see Darian as a genuinely good guy with a strong **moral compass**<sup>840</sup> and concluded that John's deep-seated animosity toward Darian's father had clouded his judgment. Despite this insight, Allen kept his knowledge of Darian to himself.

Although Allen and Darian didn't instantly **click**<sup>841</sup>, they found **common ground**<sup>842</sup>. They shared similar values and a mutual appreciation for sarcastic, self-deprecating humor. Even with different upbringings, they **spoke the same language**<sup>843</sup>. In their predominantly Asian town, Allen sometimes felt like an outsider and faced snide comments and occasional hostility for being different. **Time and again**<sup>844</sup>, Darian **stuck his neck out**<sup>845</sup> to defend Allen, becoming the steadfast support Allen could **count on**<sup>846</sup>. As their friendship flourished, so did their bond, reinforced by each act of loyalty.

...

A native New Yorker, Allen had spent much of his teens in France, where he gained his command of the French language. In addition to teaching, he managed a bookstore specializing in imported publications. During one of Allen's lunch breaks at the bookstore, Darian **popped in**<sup>847</sup> for a chat. The sunny afternoon provided a relaxed setting as they **kicked back**<sup>848</sup> in the bookstore's cozy backroom, sipping their favorite oat milk lattes at a small table near the window, catching up on their lives.

"You don't seem like yourself today," Darian said, his forehead creased with concern.

"I'm not feeling well. I've got a sty," Allen let out a heavy sigh and pointed to his left eye.

Darian's forehead furrowed. "Have you been a **peeping Tom**<sup>849</sup>?"

"What?" Allen's eyes widened in surprise. "No! Why would you think that?"

"In some cultures, a sty is thought to come from being a peeping Tom," Darian explained.

Allen shook his head. "I think it's from staying up late lately."

Darian's eyebrows raised in curiosity. "Doing what?"

"Teresa has been upset with me," Allen confided. "She won't tell



me what I did wrong and wants a divorce. It's been keeping me up at night."

Darian's expression softened. "I'm sorry to hear that, man. You should try talking to her and see if you can work things out."

"I've tried," Allen said, frustration creeping into his voice. "But she won't talk to me. She just wants to end things."

"I'm sure it's just a misunderstanding. Women throw the 'D' word around more often than they mean to. Get her a nice piece of jewelry or something."

"She seems serious this time, and jewelry isn't really her thing. I'm already **in the doghouse**<sup>850</sup>. Getting her jewelry would only **add fuel to the fire**<sup>851</sup>," Allen explained.

"It's true that you don't want to **bark up the wrong tree**<sup>852</sup>, although **retail therapy**<sup>853</sup> usually works for women," Darian said with a smirk.

"You've met her. It's pretty clear she doesn't care about material stuff. Even at fancy parties where everyone is **dressed to kill**<sup>854</sup>, she shows up in some frumpy, shapeless dress that doesn't flatter her figure."

"You're right. I don't remember seeing her in anything slightly revealing or form-fitting. Have you tried apologizing?" Darian asked.

"No. I'm trying to **stay out of her hair**<sup>855</sup> until she **cools off**<sup>856</sup>.

Plus, how can I apologize when I have no clue what I did? If I apologize first, she'll have **the upper hand**<sup>857</sup>," Allen explained.

"Dude, a relationship isn't a **zero-sum**<sup>858</sup> game. Either you both win, or you both lose. Have you heard of 'Happy wife, happy life'?" Darian asked.

"Yes," Allen said, rolling his eyes.

"I read that marital problems usually **boil down to**<sup>859</sup> miscommunication. Apologize to her; maybe she'll tell you why she's so upset. There's no harm in apologizing first, even if you don't think you're wrong. I know it's tough, but you've got to **bite the bullet**<sup>860</sup> this time," Darian advised.

"I'm not sure what is going on with her. She wasn't this **high-strung**<sup>861</sup> before. Lately, she gets upset easily. When she starts to nag, I just **check out**<sup>862</sup>," Allen sighed.

"Every couple **goes through rough patches**<sup>863</sup>. It's normal; **hang in there**<sup>864</sup>," Darian reassured him.

Allen looked worried, his eyes fixed on the table like he was searching for answers. Suddenly, he looked up, still looking unsure. "Teresa tends to **sweep problems under the rug**<sup>865</sup>, but the good thing is that she doesn't threaten to break up just to get her way," he said.

"People who threaten to break up never actually do it. They're **all bark and no bite**<sup>866</sup>. But avoiding problems only makes them worse. Having disagreements is healthier than having no communication,"

Darian shared.

“I feel like I’m the only one who wants to talk about problems. Teresa is always in denial. She’s all about **the silent treatment**<sup>867</sup>,” Allen admitted.

“The silent treatment can be worse than yelling. You just can’t **bury your head in the sand**<sup>868</sup> when there’s a problem,” Darian noted.

“Man, I just can’t let this marriage fail. Both my parents and my grandparents have wonderful marriages. But okay, enough of this depressing talk,” Allen said softly. “Let’s talk about something more uplifting.”

“So, how is business?” Darian asked, **picking up on**<sup>869</sup> Allen’s cue.

“Not exactly an uplifting subject ... it’s the same old same old. I feel like I’m **going in circles**<sup>870</sup>; the business seems to be going nowhere. If things don’t **turn around**<sup>871</sup> soon, I’ll need to **tighten my belt**<sup>872</sup>,” Allen said, looking worried.

“Every business has its peaks and valleys,” Darian reassured him.

“I might have to let one of my employees go. His work hasn’t been **up to par**<sup>873</sup>,” Allen said, feeling the weight of the decision.

Allen sneezed suddenly.

“**Bless you**<sup>874</sup>!” Darian exclaimed.

“I was **tossing and turning**<sup>875</sup> all night. Didn’t really get much sleep. Probably caught a cold,” Allen said, casually wiping his nose with the back of his hand.

“Dude, for the love of God, get away from me. I don’t wanna catch whatever **bug**<sup>876</sup> is going around,” Darian joked, taking a step back.

“I don’t have the flu. Don’t worry. I just haven’t been getting good sleep for a few nights,” Allen reassured.

“Maybe try counting sheep ... Oh, just a reminder, don’t forget about our boys’ night out thing on Friday,” Darian said, smiling.

“What thing?” Allen asked, looking confused.

“Seriously? We talked about it on the phone. A bunch of us are going to the corner dive bar to hang out after work. You said you would join,” Darian said, raising an eyebrow.

Allen laughed. “Oh right, that thing! I almost forgot. Count me in.”

Allen took the last sip of his latte and set the mug down next to a stack of books waiting to be shelved. “Sorry man, I must’ve been absent-minded when we talked. You know, the whole Teresa’s thing has been keeping me up at night. I’d usually **sleep like a log**<sup>877</sup> if it weren’t for her.”

“You really **luck out**<sup>878</sup> if you’re a deep sleeper. Most people I know experience some level of insomnia. I’m a light sleeper myself,” Darian

commented, leaning back on the couch and shooting Allen a sympathetic look. “I get that it’s been tough, but don’t lose hope. Keep trying to talk things out with her.”

Chats like this with Darian gave Allen a boost in **weathering the storms**<sup>879</sup> in his marriage time after time. However, the **breaking point**<sup>880</sup> came when Allen and Teresa couldn’t **see eye to eye**<sup>881</sup> on having kids. Teresa was all for starting a family, but Allen wasn’t **sold on the idea**<sup>882</sup>. Throw in their different ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs, and it became **a recipe for**<sup>883</sup> constant misunderstandings and clashes. In the end, those irreconcilable differences sealed the fate of their once-promising love story.

When they realized their romance had **run its course**<sup>884</sup>, Allen and Teresa went their separate ways with **no hard feelings**<sup>885</sup>. They were grateful that their split did not **descend into**<sup>886</sup> acrimony or bitterness. Even though their romantic relationship had dwindled over time, their respect for each other stood. They remained friends and showed up for each other when needed.

Throughout the highs and lows of his marriage, Allen found comfort in his friendship with Darian, who always helped lift his spirits. As they grew closer, Allen considered opening up about his connection with John, who had spoken negatively about Darian’s family on several occasions. Yet, he struggled with the decision, fearing that it could change the dynamics of their friendship and make Darian question his honesty. He didn’t want to jeopardize the trust they had built.

*Who Is Allen Baker?*

Allen came from a **long line of**<sup>887</sup> lawyers. His old man, Patrick, had him late in life and **doted on**<sup>888</sup> him. Patrick wasn't just a **big-shot**<sup>889</sup> lawyer who **knew the law inside out**<sup>890</sup>; he was also a political pundit with a bi-weekly op-ed column, writing incisive opinion pieces to expose political misconduct. He wasn't afraid to **ruffle some feathers**<sup>891</sup>.

Patrick carried himself with a hint of arrogance, having attained success at a young age. As a former judge, he was known for his no-nonsense approach. Standing apart from some of his colleagues who catered to unscrupulous politicians, **pandering to**<sup>892</sup> big corporations, Patrick was **by all accounts**<sup>893</sup> a man of integrity. He was proud and tough, but also honorable and upstanding.

Patrick had a dry sense of humor, telling jokes with a straight face, rarely cracking a smile even at the funniest jokes. Allen was the only person who could break through Patrick's tough exterior and bring a smile to his face. Many who knew Patrick would attest that fatherhood had softened him.

When Allen dropped the **bombshell**<sup>894</sup> about his decision not to

pursue law, Patrick surprised many by supporting Allen's decision. In well-established families like theirs, such deviations from tradition were rarely tolerated. Although Patrick valued tradition, he trusted that Allen would work hard to chart his own path. Besides, Patrick assumed that when Allen turned 21, he would **come into**<sup>895</sup> a trust fund set up by Allen's grandfather, so money would be a non-issue.

But, when the day came, Allen refused the inheritance, **handing the entire trust fund to his cousins on a silver platter**<sup>896</sup>. He made the decision after discovering the unsettling news about his grandfather's business practices. Apparently, Allen's grandfather had built his wealth by helping big corporations **get away with**<sup>897</sup> exploiting **sweatshop**<sup>898</sup> workers in Southeast Asia. This was information even Patrick wasn't aware of. Since the accusation **checked out**<sup>899</sup> after some digging, Allen wanted no part in his grandfather's tainted inheritance. The decision had Patrick worried about Allen's financial future, but at the same time, it made him feel a swell of pride for his son because Allen not only took after his looks but also his uncompromising moral character.

Patrick didn't care whether Allen would **follow in his footsteps**<sup>900</sup> as long as he was a productive member of society. However, Allen's decision to move to Asia didn't **sit well with**<sup>901</sup> him or Allen's mother, who wanted him nearby. Eventually, they came around because they understood the wonderful gift of falling in love and wanted their little Allie to live without regrets. They cherished his enduring innocence and idealism, knowing that these qualities would diminish with time. Reflecting on their own youth, they recalled times of being unjaded and perhaps even foolish—and how wonderful those times

were.

...

One evening, Allen and Darian went on a **bar crawl**<sup>902</sup>, **hitting up**<sup>903</sup> different **joints**<sup>746</sup> in Allen's neighborhood. Their final stop was owned by one of Darian's buddies, who played the generous host by serving them **stiff drinks**<sup>904</sup>. By the time they left, they were pretty **wasted**<sup>905</sup>.

As they stumbled out, a drunken man bumped into Allen, knocking him off balance and rudely **flipped him off**<sup>906</sup> without apologizing. Normally, Allen would have **shrugged it off**<sup>907</sup> and walked away, **being the bigger person**<sup>908</sup>. But this guy had been making **off-color**<sup>909</sup> remarks to other people at the bar all night, and it got to the point that Allen couldn't **look the other way**<sup>910</sup>. After having a few too many drinks, Allen snapped and **sucker punched**<sup>911</sup> the guy.

From there, **all hell broke loose**<sup>912</sup>. The altercation escalated quickly, with the guy landing a solid **right hook**<sup>913</sup> on Allen, giving him a black eye and a busted lip. Darian, trying to intervene, was also dragged into **the fray**<sup>914</sup> and ended up taking a hit. As tensions continued to rise, the police showed up, **rounding up**<sup>915</sup> everyone involved in the fight and taking them into custody.

Meanwhile, Teresa received a call from a friend who had witnessed the incident unfold. The concerned friend alerted her about Allen's involvement and the subsequent arrest. **Without a second thought**<sup>916</sup>, Teresa rushed to the police station. She was on a mission



to **bail Allen out**<sup>917</sup>. However, a sudden downpour turned the streets into a slippery mess. In her rush, Teresa slipped and twisted her ankle, but she soldiered on, limping through the drenched streets. When she finally reached the police station, she was soaked to the bone, wincing with every step from her throbbing ankle. But seeing Allen behind bars wiped away her own discomfort. Married or not, she cared deeply for him.

As she exited the police station, with emotions running high, Teresa couldn't hold back her frustration. She started **going off on**<sup>918</sup> Allen for his reckless behavior. Even though Allen felt unfairly accused, he admitted that he shouldn't have **stooped to**<sup>919</sup> the drunk's level. Teresa knew she was being hard on Allen, but she wanted him to always **take the high road**<sup>920</sup>.

Allen was released without charges, but he feared bringing shame to the Baker family and pleaded with Teresa to keep the arrest **under wraps**<sup>799</sup>. Although the accident did not leave Allen **out of commission**<sup>921</sup> for work, he needed time to recover, relying on his injury insurance. He had been **saving money for a rainy day**<sup>922</sup>, so **if push came to shove**<sup>923</sup>, he could tap into his savings.

During the adjustment period, Allen **moped around**<sup>924</sup>, feeling **down in the dumps**<sup>925</sup>. The bruises and cuts from his injury made him look quite beaten up for a while, and at first, Teresa didn't even **have the stomach**<sup>926</sup> to look at his face. But as they say, time heals all wounds. The good news was that the doctor assured Allen of a full recovery with time, though he might need to undergo reconstructive surgeries. But Allen, being the tough guy that he was, refused to **go**

**under the knife**<sup>927</sup> for cosmetic reasons and **made a fuss**<sup>928</sup> about it when the doctor brought it up.

In contrast, Darian, who thought he'd pulled a muscle, had suffered severe kidney damage from a punch in the back during the fight. The doctor warned him to avoid all strenuous activities until he was **back on his feet**<sup>929</sup>, or he would risk serious long-term issues. Allen felt guilty about the whole situation, wishing he could **trade places**<sup>930</sup> with Darian. After all, he was the one who instigated the fight.

Two weeks after the bar incident, Allen's face still showed some lingering swelling when Teresa joined him to visit Darian in the hospital.

**"How are you holding up**<sup>931</sup>, buddy?" Allen asked.

Darian smiled. "Hey man, the medication just **kicked in**<sup>932</sup>. I am feeling amazing. Shouldn't you be home resting?"

"These cuts are nothing." Allen pointed to his face. "Plus, you know me. I'm like a frisky dog. I can't stay **cooped up**<sup>933</sup>."

Teresa walked into the room, holding a coffee she had retrieved from the hospital vending machine. "Don't listen to him. He popped some painkillers to **take the edge off**<sup>934</sup> right before coming here. Let's see if he is still this tough when the drugs **wear off**<sup>935</sup>," Teresa chimed in.

Allen rolled his eyes. "She loves to give me a hard time."

Darian chuckled. “Some people find joy in teasing those they care about.”

Allen and Teresa exchanged a subtle glance, a hint of awkwardness lingering between them.

Allen turned to Darian and said, “Did the doctor say when you can be discharged?”

“I have a minor surgery tomorrow, but I should be **up and about**<sup>936</sup> in three weeks,” Darian replied. “Man, staying in the hospital really **puts things in perspective**<sup>937</sup>. It’s given me a new outlook on life.”

Allen pulled up a chair and sat down, leaning forward. “How so?”

Darian sighed. “It gave me lots of time to think about my place in the world, my purpose. What am I doing here? How can I help others?”

“What are you saying?” Allen questioned.

“I think I want to get off this island and explore the world to find my passion and calling,” Darian said. “You’ve lived on the other side of the world before moving here, but I haven’t seen much beyond this island.”

“**Hold your horses**<sup>938</sup>; let’s **talk this out**<sup>939</sup>,” Allen cautioned. “Are you sure this isn’t the drugs talking? What about your friends, your job, your family? Take some time to **mull it over**<sup>940</sup>. This is a big decision.”

Darian looked at Allen. "Was it hard for you to leave everything in New York and move here?"

After a moment of reflection, Allen shook his head. "No, I knew in my heart I had to move for the love of my life, no matter the obstacles, even though we both know how that turned out. But I have no regrets."

Darian leaned in. "So, you're at peace with your decision?"

"For the most part, yes," Allen replied. "I don't get to see my folks much, but they understand."

This piqued Darian's curiosity. "Have your parents ever been to this part of the world?"

Allen nodded. "Yes, my mother has come here for business."

"Interesting," Darian said. "What does she do?"

"Well," Allen continued, "she's in the diamond business. There's a diamond mine not far from here."

Darian nodded, intrigued. "What is she like?"

Allen smiled. "She came from nothing but loves to dress lavishly. You can't miss her in a crowd. She loves to wear fascinators and is always bejeweled with precious stones. Some might see her as the classic **nouveau riche**<sup>941</sup>. Wanna see a picture of her?" Allen offered.

“Sure,” Darian replied, though his tone didn’t quite match his enthusiasm. Allen reached into his wallet, pulled out a photo, and handed it over.

“She **guilt-tripped**<sup>942</sup> me into carrying her picture,” Allen said, a bit embarrassed.

“Your mom looks awfully young to have a son your age,” Darian commented, looking at the photo.

Allen laughed. “She’d be the first to admit she’s had a few **nips and tucks**<sup>943</sup>. She spends a lot on her appearance—it’s part of her self-care.”

Darian squinted his eyes, closely examining the photo. “I feel like I’ve seen her somewhere,” he said before shifting the conversation. “Anyway, how often do you talk to her?”

“She was in a car accident last year, but she’s **on the mend**<sup>944</sup> now,” Allen explained. “Ever since she moved back home from the hospital, I’ve been **checking in with her**<sup>945</sup> almost every day. Every time we talk, she **rattles on**<sup>946</sup> and on. It used to annoy me, but now I’m just grateful to still be able to hear her voice. I mean, my phone bill gets pretty crazy, but it’s a small price to pay to make her happy.”

Darian nodded, admiring Allen’s devotion. “She sounds like quite a woman.”

“She is,” Allen said, smiling widely.

Darian leaned back, pensive. “Was she alone in the accident?”

“No,” Allen replied, his smile diminishing. “She was with her driver, who luckily survived unscathed.”

Darian nodded sympathetically. “That must have been scary for her.”

“It was,” Allen agreed. “It made me realize how important it is to cherish the people in my life. But enough about my family. Tell me about yours.”

Darian hesitated, feeling a familiar knot in his stomach. Until now, he had remained guarded about his past. Louisa was the only one who knew the **skeletons in his closet**<sup>947</sup>. But he couldn’t avoid the topic this time. He opened up about his mother’s abandonment and his father’s struggle to raise him.

“My dad was so **shaken up**<sup>948</sup> when my mom left. He never wanted to remarry because he felt it would be too much for him to go through if it didn’t work out again,” Darian explained.

Allen listened attentively, his expression softened with sympathy. “I’m sorry. I can’t imagine what that does to a child,” he said in a compassionate voice. Darian waved off Allen’s concern, dismissing it as ancient history, but Allen insisted that such wounds run deep, no matter how much time has passed. The conversation then shifted to Allen’s own unexpected life path, as he recounted how he never envisioned himself marrying an Asian woman or moving overseas.

“You flew across the world for love. Your mother travels the world for her business. So why shouldn’t I go find my calling?” Darian argued.

Allen didn’t try to dissuade Darian. Instead, he showed him a picture of a man, whom Darian instantly recognized as a former colleague.

“His name is Tommy Tanjung. Does that **ring a bell**<sup>949</sup>?” Allen asked Darian, holding up the picture so that Darian could get a closer look.

After a long pause, Darian responded, “I know a Tommy Tanjung who moved out of my hometown years ago. We called him T’T, but I’m sure the man in the picture is John Tang, who I used to work with.”

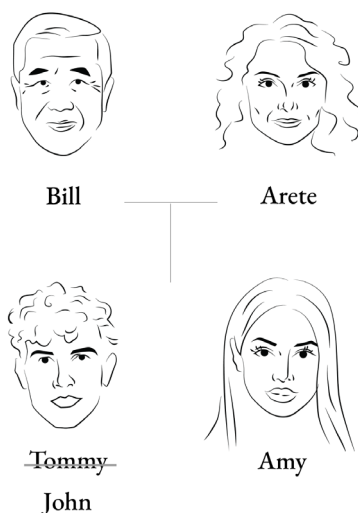
“Why are you suddenly showing me this?” Darian asked, curious.

Allen took a deep breath, **bracing himself**<sup>950</sup> for what he needed to say. “It’s because of the fight that landed you in the hospital. It hit me hard, Darian. I realized I could’ve lost a friend, a brother. I just couldn’t keep this from you anymore.”

Darian looked confused. “What are you talking about? Keep what from me?”

Allen hesitated, then plunged ahead. “John told me things about your family that made me question whether I should be your friend. But I didn’t **buy into**<sup>951</sup> it. I didn’t want to judge you based on

someone else's words. And now, after everything we've been through together, I know I made the right **call**<sup>952</sup>. You're a good man, Darian. I'm sorry I ever doubted that." He revealed that Tommy Tanjung was actually John Tang, an old college friend who had altered his name to seek revenge for his father.



Allen continued, "I had an **ulterior motive**<sup>953</sup> when I first approached you, but after getting to know you better, I realized John was wrong about you. He's so **hell-bent on**<sup>954</sup> revenge that he couldn't see how great a friend you are. I've always believed in judging people by their actions. I felt that we'd be friends from the moment we met."

Darian finally shared his own secret: his father had done something unspeakable to John's father, causing a rift between the two families. He had planned to tell Allen, but Allen **beat him to the punch**<sup>955</sup>.



Darian's voice was barely above a whisper as he shared his past. He avoided Allen's gaze, feeling a mix of shame and sadness. He knew his past was dark, filled with secrets and lies, and he wasn't sure if he was ready to face it again.

Allen nodded. "I see," he said softly, "but you don't have to face it alone. I'm here for you, no matter what."

When Darian expressed that his father needed to **face the music**<sup>956</sup> for what he had done, Allen offered condolences for Darian's father's passing.

"What do you mean? What happened?" Darian asked, nearly breaking into a sweat.

"Your father had a heart attack," Allen explained sympathetically. "I'm sorry. I had no idea you didn't know."

Allen's words hung heavily in the air. Darian felt as though the world had come to a halt. His mind raced as he **grappled with**<sup>957</sup> the news. How could his father be gone? Why hadn't anyone told him? As the shock gave way to grief, Darian felt overwhelmed. It was like a part of him had been ripped away, leaving a gaping hole.

But amidst the pain and confusion, a thought **took hold**<sup>958</sup>. Darian recalled his father's constant reminders about the importance of family, of spending time with loved ones while they're still around. Reflecting on his father's sacrifices, he realized how much he had **taken for granted**<sup>959</sup>. Regret crashed upon him as he thought of all

the missed opportunities when he could have picked up the phone and reached out.

Taking a deep breath, Darian wiped away his tears and made a solemn vow to return home, pay respect to his father, and confront his past. The pain of his father's passing would stay with him for a while, maybe even forever, but he refused to let it paralyze him. He owed it to his father to honor his memory.

Darian looked down at his hands, fidgeting with his fingers. He had been apprehensive about revealing his past to Allen, but now that the truth was out, he no longer had to carry the burden of secrecy.

"It's time for me to return home," Darian said firmly.

"Okay ... are you ready to face Maria and John?" Allen asked.

Darian paused, taking a moment. "You know about Maria?"

"John talked about her, referring to her as his childhood crush and the woman of his dreams," Allen revealed.

Darian's expression turned sour. "He must **hate my guts**<sup>960</sup>. My dad ruined his father's life, and I ended up with the woman he loves."

Allen shook his head. "You are not to blame for Maria's choices or your father's actions. His anger is misplaced."

Darian looked up, a glimmer of relief shining in his eyes. "Thanks, man. That means a lot."

“You don’t have to face them alone,” Allen said, placing a reassuring hand on Darian’s shoulder.

Darian felt relieved by Allen’s words. **If it weren’t for**<sup>961</sup> him, he would have been in the dark about his father’s passing.

Before heading back to his hometown, Darian hosted a farewell party. He invited all the friends who had brought joy and purpose to his life. It was a night filled with mixed emotions. The uncertainty of when they would reunite made the farewell bittersweet, especially for Louisa, who had grown incredibly close to Darian.

When it came time to say goodbye, Darian pulled everyone tightly into his chest before handing them a parting gift—a heartfelt thank-you card paired with a homemade trinket. These people had helped him **get in touch with**<sup>962</sup> his emotions, given him courage, and made him feel alive again. Saying goodbye was difficult, but Darian knew that **all good things must come to an end**<sup>963</sup>. With a **heavy heart**<sup>964</sup>, he watched them leave.

Closing the door, he felt a profound sense of loss because each of them had left an indelible mark on his heart and had become his chosen family. Though leaving them was unbearable, he knew it was time to confront the inner demons that had long haunted him. In the face of an uncertain future, Darian found comfort in Allen’s support. His reassuring words—“I’m here for you, no matter what”—echoed in Darian’s ears, lending him strength as he went on to face his past.

## TWELVE

### *A New Chapter in Life*

Several years after Darian's disappearance, Tiffany, Maria's best friend, packed her bags and **set out**<sup>965</sup> to see the world. This gave her the chance to live a nomadic lifestyle and meet people from different **walks of life**<sup>966</sup>. Her travels took her from small indigenous tribes on the African continent to bustling metropolises like London and Paris. Traveling alone to unfamiliar places wasn't for **the faint of heart**<sup>967</sup>. Most of the time, she **lived hand to mouth**<sup>968</sup>, not at all glamorous, **getting by**<sup>969</sup> on money from temp jobs.

Occasionally, she slept under the stars in parks infested with rodents, next to people **reeking of**<sup>970</sup> alcohol. Often, she **freeloaded**<sup>971</sup> off acquaintances or **couch-surfed**<sup>972</sup> at strangers' homes. When things got desperate, she **dumpster-dived**<sup>973</sup> for food, pickpocketed in busy streets, **stiffed**<sup>974</sup> cab drivers, **panhandled**<sup>975</sup> for money, and even **dined and dashed**<sup>976</sup>. She would have preferred a more honorable living, but **beggars can't be choosers**<sup>977</sup>. She had to **make do**<sup>978</sup> with what cards life dealt her, clinging to whatever she could get her hands on with jobs, food, and lodging. She was fighting to survive—any sense of honor and decency **went out the window**<sup>979</sup>.

As a woman, Tiffany had her share of moments with **the male**

**gaze**<sup>980</sup>. She was **catcalled**<sup>981</sup> countless times, especially in the West. Even walking down the street, minding her own business, she would have cars **pull up**<sup>982</sup> beside her, with drivers shouting inappropriate comments or engaging in **locker-room**<sup>983</sup> talk with other men nearby. At first, she found their remarks offensive, but after a while, she grew a thick skin and would retaliate with even more vulgar words to shut them up.

Despite the obstacles, Tiffany never **lost her heart**<sup>984</sup>. After years of aimlessly roaming the globe, she ended up in the Lower East Side of New York City. With its towering skyscrapers and densely populated streets, New York City was unlike any place she had ever seen. She was awestruck by the realness of its people. Their unfiltered, to-the-point, unapologetic way of living made her feel like she had finally found her people.

However, the city was notorious for its crimes. People constantly had to **keep a lookout for**<sup>985</sup> a host of underhanded lowlifes: robbers, pickpockets, schemers, and burglars. At first, the city's dangers didn't register with Tiffany. But it didn't take long before she **fell victim to**<sup>986</sup> several **catfishing**<sup>987</sup> scams. Then came the night she was held **at gunpoint**<sup>988</sup> by a dangerous criminal **on the loose**<sup>989</sup>. The experience shook Tiffany to her core. In the aftermath, she **counted her blessings**<sup>990</sup> for having survived and attributed her successful escape to the pepper spray she carried. From then on, she never left the house without it.

Danger wasn't confined to the streets alone. During her first year in the city, Tiffany made friends she considered family and saw drugs

and crime snuff out their lives too soon. The heart-wrenching loss of her friends plunged Tiffany into grief for years. In processing their deaths, she turned to alcohol and wild nights out, numbing her pain to avoid sinking into deep depression.

During one of those drunken nights, she ended up **hooking up**<sup>991</sup> with a man and later found out she was pregnant. She contemplated keeping the baby, but when the baby's father went **MIA**<sup>992</sup> on her, she knew she had to give it up. The harsh reality of her child growing up fatherless was too much for her to stomach. Without giving it too much thought, Tiffany **went through with**<sup>993</sup> an abortion. Unfortunately, it turned out to be one of the rare botched abortions, robbing Tiffany of her chance to conceive a child in the future.

Realizing she could never have kids of her own hit Tiffany like a lightning bolt. She didn't fully grasp the depth of her desire to be a mother until that chance had slipped away. The loss sparked an intense empathy for other women going through similar struggles. So, when the opportunity to work at the Center for Reproductive Rights presented itself, it felt like destiny knocking on her door. Tiffany felt compelled to fight for women's rights and help them find safer alternatives. She didn't know it at the time, but her work at the center would surpass all her wildest expectations.

Before joining the center, Tiffany lacked a clear purpose in life, drifting without direction. A good part of her 30s was squandered on indulgence, seeking temporary thrills and distractions. Her life took a 180-degree turn when she began working at the center. Both inside and out, she underwent a remarkable transformation, saying goodbye

to vices such as smoking and drinking.

At the center, Tiffany **sank her teeth into**<sup>994</sup> work, focusing on helping vulnerable adolescent girls in need of abortion services and those coerced into unprotected sex. Abortion had long been a political **hot potato**<sup>995</sup> in the United States. Having undergone the procedure herself, Tiffany held the issue close to her heart, making it her life's mission to provide a **security blanket**<sup>996</sup> to help young pregnant women abandoned by their families lead a dignified life. She understood their misery, having been in their shoes, and since she could not have children of her own—**that ship had sailed**<sup>997</sup>—the young women coming through her door at the center were like her children.

In just a few years, Tiffany gained a wealth of experiences—both blissful and heart-wrenching. Having endured all the hardships and heartbreaks of living in a city filled with transient residents, she managed to **put down roots**<sup>998</sup>, establishing a supportive network of friends and carving out a meaningful life. She was here to stay.

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Tiffany shared an apartment with her roommate Kate, a struggling actress trying to **make it big**<sup>999</sup> in show business. While waiting for her big **break**<sup>1000</sup>, Kate worked as a waitress at a diner down the street from their one-bedroom-turned-two-bedroom apartment. A waitress's salary could be scandalously low, but luckily, she had a boss who appreciated the arts and would often advance her pay when times got rough.

One afternoon, trudging home from yet another disappointing audition, Kate felt a subtle unease. Something about her body **felt off**<sup>1001</sup>. It had an odd mix of fatigue, heightened sensitivity, and lingering nausea. At first, she brushed it off as stress, but the nagging feeling persisted. In the back of her mind, a whisper grew louder and louder: “I am pregnant.”

Approaching the 30-year-old milestone, Kate felt a flicker of anxiety. The idea of motherhood, once a distant concept, now placed her at a daunting crossroads. The news brought both wonder and apprehension. Having a child could jeopardize her acting career and put her dreams **on hold**<sup>807</sup>, perhaps indefinitely. This unexpected twist of fate left Kate **at a loss**<sup>1002</sup>. Kate adored children, but the timing could not have been worse. She found herself torn between her love for a baby and the reality that her boyfriend didn’t share the same sentiment. The conflicting desires created a **tug-of-war**<sup>1003</sup> inside her.

Raised in a religious family in Georgia, deep within the **Bible Belt**<sup>1004</sup>, Kate **grappled with**<sup>957</sup> her upbringing. Her parents had always taught her that abortion went against their Christian faith. This clash between her personal desires and upbringing intensified her inner turmoil. Not knowing what to do, she confided in Tiffany, who empathized deeply, having walked her own path of abortion and infertility.

“I don’t know what to do, Tiffany,” Kate said, her voice filled with doubt. “I want to have this baby, but I don’t know if I can do it alone. He doesn’t want to be a father, and I understand that, but it’s so hard.”



Tiffany listened attentively. "It's a tough situation, Kate. I know how conflicted you must feel. Have you thought about what it would take to raise a child alone?"

Kate sighed, her voice tinged with unease. "I have, but I worry about what it would do to my career and if I'd be able to provide everything a child needs. My boyfriend asked me to get rid of the child, but the thought of having an abortion goes against everything I've been raised to believe."

"I understand ... Have you considered other options, like adoption?" Tiffany asked, her eyes filled with empathy.

Kate's gaze met Tiffany's as the question hung in the air. Tears welled up in her eyes. "I have," she said, "but it's hard to imagine giving up my own child."

As Tiffany watched Kate wrestle with her inner conflict, she realized that her friendship with Kate had stirred up feelings of motherhood she had long suppressed. Years ago, when she discovered she could no longer bear children, the idea of motherhood faded from her mind. Now, witnessing Kate's dilemma, those dormant desires resurfaced with unexpected intensity. Tiffany saw Kate's situation as an opportunity to fulfill her maternal longings and help a friend at the same time.

"Kate," Tiffany said gently but firmly, "I want you to know that I'm here for you, no matter what you decide. And if adoption is something you are considering, I would be honored to provide a

loving home for your child.”

Kate was moved by Tiffany’s offer and felt a deep sense of gratitude, but it wasn’t something she could decide **on the spot**<sup>1005</sup>. She needed time to **wrap her head around it**<sup>1006</sup>, to process, and to weigh her options. So, she took a few days, giving herself space for some soul-searching.

One evening, Kate made her way to Tiffany’s door, her hand slightly trembling as she reached for the handle. As the door swung open, before any greeting could be exchanged, Kate blurted out, “I’m in.” The anticipation, uncertainty, and doubt had all **culminated in**<sup>1007</sup> this single, euphoric declaration. It was as if she couldn’t contain the words any longer.

Immediately, they embraced, **caught up in**<sup>1008</sup> the moment, not realizing how long they stood there. Their silence **spoke volumes**<sup>1009</sup>, conveying emotions words couldn’t express. As they pulled apart, tears of happiness glistened in Kate’s eyes. “Everything will be fine,” Tiffany said, her voice thick with emotion. Kate nodded, unable to form words around the lump in her throat. In that moment, Kate felt grateful for the supportive friend that Tiffany had been.

However, not everyone in Kate’s life shared her enthusiasm. When her boyfriend learned that she was going to keep the baby, he chose to leave her, ending their relationship abruptly. While Kate found his decision cruel, she was at peace with it, realizing that they were meant to go their separate ways. She accepted the idea that sometimes letting go made room for something better to come along.

Fast forward nine months to Tiffany's 40th birthday. While Tiffany was engrossed in giving a talk at a women's reproductive rights and health conference, Kate welcomed a new life into the world. Tiffany, caught up in the conference's hectic schedule, completely forgot about her own birthday. Little did she know, the surprise waiting for her at home would be the best gift she could've ever imagined.

After her speech, a sharply dressed man in a crisp, slightly form-fitting black shirt approached Tiffany. He exuded an air of sophistication and success—the gray streaks in his sideburns gave him a distinguished look. The man came from a family of great wealth, but he wasn't one to **coast**<sup>1010</sup> on privilege alone. He had worked hard to **make a name for himself**<sup>1011</sup> in journalism.

Intrigued by Tiffany's impassioned address on teenage pregnancy, he requested an interview on the spot. Eager to promote the cause, Tiffany accepted. However, his interest in her extended beyond professional curiosity. At the end of their conversation, he used follow-up questions as a pretext to get Tiffany's contact information, mindful not to **come on too strong**<sup>1012</sup>. Since he was a reputable journalist, she did not **think twice**<sup>1013</sup> before obliging.

Though Tiffany wasn't immediately struck by Cupid's arrow, love found its way to her heart. Following the interview, she stayed in touch with the journalist through phone calls and texts, gradually developing a more personal connection. Tiffany admired his intellect, ambition, and compassionate nature and appreciated how he used his platform to **shed light on**<sup>1014</sup> important issues. As their bond deepened, they spent more time together, discussing **everything under**

**the sun**<sup>1015</sup>, from politics and current events to their favorite childhood memories and quirky hobbies.

When things began to get serious between them, it scared Tiffany. The complexities of their situation weighed heavily on her mind—her inability to provide him with biological children and her recent adoption of Kate’s child. It was a conversation she dreaded having, fearing that it would drive him away. In her youth, she might have considered hiding the truth or concocting a lie, but now that she was older and wiser, she knew **honesty was the best policy**<sup>1016</sup>.

When it came time for the talk, she took a deep breath to summon her courage, bracing herself for their potential fallout. To her surprise and relief, he didn’t even flinch at the news but instead listened with understanding and compassion, giving her the reassurance that she needed.

“Tiffany, I’ve always believed that family is defined by love, not blood. Kate’s child is as much a part of you as if you had given birth to him yourself,” he said gently and sincerely. “I’m excited about being a father, no matter how it happens. And knowing that you’ve opened your heart to this child makes me love you even more.”

Tiffany’s infertility didn’t faze him one bit. To him, what really counted was their shared commitment to building a loving family. United by their determination to embrace Kate’s child as their own, they were ready to face any challenges together for the **long haul**<sup>1017</sup>.

With Tiffany’s support, Kate found a way to balance her career and

motherhood, giving her son the gift of having two devoted mothers and one loving father who **showered him with**<sup>1018</sup> affection in a family that defied traditional norms. As the boy grew, their unique family structure became a cornerstone of resilience, molding him into an individual with confidence and empathy. Together, they marked milestones, creating a collection of cherished memories that bound them as a true team.

## THIRTEEN

### *Going Home*

On his way to his father's gravesite, Darian stopped by the town's cathedral, a historic building with a solemn stone-clad façade—the only one of its kind still standing on the island. Just a few blocks from the town square, the cathedral was decked out with wreaths and poinsettias for Christmas, adding a festive touch to the path leading to the altar. With the holiday **around the corner**<sup>1019</sup>, the town square was buzzing with festivities. Holiday shoppers filled the streets while children chased each other around the gazebo in the center. The joyous noise of the crowds starkly contrasted with the cathedral's serene silence.

Inside the cathedral, Darian felt a rush of nostalgia, having spent hours and hours within these walls as a young boy. He immediately noticed the transformation the cathedral had undergone. The pews had been refurbished and adorned with plush velvet cushions, and the altar had been updated with intricate gold-plated candlesticks and a vibrant display of freshly cut flowers in shades of red, pink, and white. The overall effect was breathtaking, adding a majestic touch to the historic building. The polished marble floor gleamed under the glow of the new chandeliers, while the intricate frescoes on the ceiling **came to life**<sup>1020</sup> with the improved lighting.

The vaulted ceiling and marble floor amplified the sound of each step taken by visitors with an echo, urging a walk with extra caution and stealth. While slowly making his way through, Darian paused in the middle of the cathedral, praying to a marble statue of a crucified Jesus situated at the far end of the hall. A profound sense of calm washed over him, something he had not felt in a long time.

Still suspended in the peaceful state, he took a stroll in the beautiful, well-tended gardens surrounding the cathedral, taking the time to reflect on his life. He then noticed a man who looked like a pastor from afar, working among the irises that had just come into bloom. As he approached the man, he could see more clearly that the man was wearing a black robe. Introducing himself as Father Gomez, the man revealed a surprising connection to Darian's past. "Peter was your father, right?" he said, offering a warm smile. "I have been waiting for you all these years."

Father Gomez had moved here from the city of Malong before Peter's passing. He shared that Peter had **repented**<sup>1021</sup> of his sins and been baptized into the Church of Christ just weeks before his death. This revelation shocked Darian, who had always known his father as a fervent atheist that dismissed all religions as cults. As Father Gomez recounted Peter's change of heart, Darian struggled to reconcile his father's former staunch skepticism with his near-death spiritual awakening. Father Gomez believed that no person was **beyond redemption**<sup>1022</sup>, regardless of their previous religious affiliations or lack thereof.

The exchange with Father Gomez brought Darian some comfort,

affirming the belief that his father had found peace in the afterlife and was **in the company of**<sup>1023</sup> God. Then, Father Gomez led Darian back to the church, guiding him through the quiet corridors to his office. There, amidst the calm and reverent atmosphere, he handed a box to Darian, acting as though he knew more than he was willing to **let on**<sup>1024</sup>. The box, crafted from rich mahogany, had a glossy finish and intricate carvings. Its smooth edges were reinforced with metal. The top of the box was secured by a series of interlocking flaps, and the interior was lined with soft, protective material. It had **held up**<sup>1025</sup> quite well even though it had **been subjected to**<sup>1026</sup> a lot of use and abuse.

Inside, Darian found a corduroy lumber jacket. It was the last gift Darian's mother had given his father. The jacket showed signs of constant **wear and tear**<sup>1027</sup>, leaving it threadbare and barely able to keep out the cold. Even though the tattered sleeves, frayed cuffs, and faded collar had betrayed its age, Peter refused to part with it.

In the jacket's pockets lay a watch and a letter addressed to Darian by his mother and dated the day she left. Overwhelmed by the situation, Darian hadn't even noticed them until Father Gomez pointed them out. When Darian saw the watch, he immediately turned it over, his eyes locking onto the engraved symbol of a stylized tree. "There you are," he thought to himself, a wave of memories flooding back. It felt like reconnecting with an old friend, just as he had searched for it many years ago on the night he left home.

Next, he carefully unfolded the letter. He noticed that the paper had a distinct yellow tinge, as well as faint creases, suggesting that



it had been crumpled up and then flattened. With his heart racing, Darian began reading the letter that had arrived many years too late. “Dear son,” it began, “I know my departure will cause you pain and confusion. Please know that I will always love you. You are the light of my life, and I carry your memory with me every step of the way. I ask for your forgiveness. I hope that one day, you will find it in your heart to understand my decision.”

As Darian read the letter, a mix of emotions swirled inside him. On one hand, he was awestruck to learn that his mom hadn’t left without a word, but on the other, he was mad at his dad for hiding the letter, letting him resent his mother all these years. Holding the letter, Darian felt a flood of questions racing through his mind, each one urging him to confront his father for what he perceived as cruelty. One question kept repeating in his mind: “What kind of a person does that ...?! What kind of a person does that ...?!” Darian struggled to hold himself together as his emotions were **all over the place**<sup>1028</sup>. Worried he might **lose it**<sup>1029</sup> in front of Father Gomez, he thanked Father Gomez and made a quick exit, feeling heavy-hearted.

As Darian rushed out of the cathedral, Father Gomez noticed the anguish on his face. He followed Darian, knowing he had to set the record straight about Peter’s intentions. Had he not done that, Peter would have surely **turned over in his grave**<sup>1030</sup>.

“Your father loved you deeply, Darian,” Father Gomez explained softly but firmly. “He thought it would protect you from pain, from reliving those memories over and over again.”

Darian's shoulders sagged as he processed Father Gomez's words. "But why would he do that?" he murmured.

"Because he was afraid," Father Gomez replied gently. "Afraid of what the truth might do to you. He wanted to spare you from more hurt."

A heavy silence settled over them. Finally, Darian looked up at Father Gomez, his eyes filled with gratitude. "Thank you, Father," he said quietly. "I ... I need some time to think."

"Take all the time you need, my son," Father Gomez said.

...

Walking through his hometown filled Darian with nostalgia. So many firsts had **taken place**<sup>1031</sup> here: the first taste of a **banana split**<sup>1032</sup> at the corner diner, the stolen kisses behind the town theater, and the wild antics of youthful adventures, like running down the main street **buck naked**<sup>1033</sup> at midnight or, to fulfill a dare, pulling a harmless prank on a neighbor's front lawn—the list went on. Every corner held a memory. With each memory resurfacing as he passed these once-familiar streets, Darian felt an inexplicable excitement coursing through his veins.

On the way to Peter's gravesite, Darian passed by a park cloaked in mist. The park came alive with the vibrant fluttering of butterflies, whose wings reflected the soft light filtering through the mist. They gracefully danced and frolicked from leaf to leaf, relishing the mo-

ment. The sight brought Darian a fleeting moment of delight on his somber journey to his father's final resting place, but the unexpected chill in the air carried with it a trace of gloom. The park was home to a rare breed of indigenous butterflies that thrived in cool mountain air, and their vibrant hues harmonized with the serene scenery. Memories of chasing these beautiful creatures and riding the swings with his mom flooded Darian's mind.

Next to the park stood an array of storefronts. Among them, Darian found a flower shop. Wanting to leave a token of remembrance at the gravesite, he ventured inside, only to come face to face with **none other than**<sup>1034</sup> his estranged wife, Maria. After all these years, Maria thought she would never see Darian again, but **lo and behold**<sup>1035</sup>, he stood before her very eyes. Like seeing a ghost, she was shaken **to the core**<sup>1036</sup>.

For a moment, they both stood frozen, the weight of a decade's silence and past wrongs hanging in the air between them. Darian's heart pounded as he wrestled with the guilt that had plagued him for years. Slowly, he took a tentative step forward, realizing that this might be his only chance to make things right and offer the apology that had been long overdue.

Meanwhile, John entered from the back, holding a plant pot in each hand. The sight made him **jump out of his skin**<sup>1037</sup>. "What the hell are you doing here? You **have no business**<sup>1038</sup> being here," he shouted.

Darian's shoulders slumped, and his face fell. "I don't want any

trouble. I'm just here for some flowers," he said quietly.

"You are a **bald-faced**<sup>1039</sup> liar," John growled.

Maria, who was arranging bouquets in the back, could see that Darian was genuinely contrite. "John, I know **your heart is in the right place**<sup>1040</sup>, but please let me handle this," she said, pretending to be calm.

John scowled at Darian but reluctantly stepped away. "He's lucky I didn't punch him," he muttered, giving Darian a side-eye before exiting through the backdoor.

Darian was unsure if Maria had forgiven him—probably not, judging from her look—but he was glad to see that Maria had someone who cared for her.

"How have you been?" Darian asked, breaking the awkward silence.

"You owe me an explanation," Maria replied coldly.

"You're right," Darian admitted. "It is inexcusable for me to leave you like that."

Maria's eyes narrowed. "Do you have any idea how tough life has been for me? Don't you feel guilty?"

"Of course, I do. I'm sorry," Darian said sincerely.

"When you left, I was devastated," Maria continued, her voice

cracking. “I nearly **took my own life**<sup>1041</sup>.”

Darian’s eyes widened in shock. “I’m glad you didn’t,” he said.

“After you left, there was so much gossip,” Maria went on. “People made up lies about us. It really **got under my skin**<sup>1042</sup>.”

“I can’t imagine how difficult it must have been for you,” Darian said, his heart aching.

“Difficult? Try impossible,” Maria spat. “I fought my parents for our marriage. Do you know how it felt when you disappeared? It was **a slap in the face**<sup>1043</sup>. Why did you leave? Was it what happened at my bachelorette’s party?”

Maria’s marriage to Darian had initially caused a rift between her and her father, who disapproved of the union. Despite his doubts, her father eventually gave his blessing. It hurt Maria to see her father’s smug “I told you so” expression when Darian disappeared.

However, Darian’s sudden disappearance had an unexpected effect: it brought Maria’s family closer together. But it also set off a flurry of rumors. Whispers of Darian’s infidelity, questions regarding Maria’s infertility, and speculation surrounding Peter’s untimely death quickly surfaced. To Maria’s parents, their daughter was **out of Darian’s league**<sup>1044</sup>. Nevertheless, they presented **a united front**<sup>1045</sup> against anyone who dared to badmouth their family. While Maria wanted to ignore the gossip, her parents refused to overlook the baseless accusations. They even considered taking legal action for defamation.

Back in the store, Darian looked at Maria with deep remorse. “Maria, I’m sorry for causing you so much pain. I failed you as a husband.”

“Then answer me,” she demanded.

Darian took a deep breath. “You know, Maria, **for what it’s worth**<sup>1046</sup>, even though things seemed good on the outside, deep down, I felt like something was missing. I was moving up at work, but it felt like I was just going through the motions. I tried to be the perfect husband, but I felt lost.”

Maria listened intently. “I had no clue you were feeling that way,” she admitted. “You always seemed so **put together**<sup>1047</sup>, like you had it all figured out.”

“Well, I got really good at putting on a show. I was unhappy, but I **played along**<sup>1048</sup> because I didn’t want to **screw up**<sup>1049</sup> our marriage. But looking back, I realize I should have been upfront with you.”

Tears welled up in Maria’s eyes. “Are you saying you never loved me?”

“No, Maria, that’s not it,” he reassured her. “I did love you. It’s just ... I was struggling with my own stuff. I was so busy trying to make everything perfect that I forgot to take care of myself.”

She listened attentively. “Why didn’t you love yourself?” she asked curiously.

Darian frowned. "It's complicated, Maria. A lot of it goes back to my parents."

Maria's expression softened. "What about them?"

"I think my parents' constant fighting and my mother's leaving had a huge impact on me. When she left, a part of me went with her, leaving behind a void that could never be filled. This emptiness made it hard to enjoy life. I didn't want to repeat their mistakes, which was why I hesitated to have a baby. I did everything to keep our marriage going, even if it meant losing myself. If I could turn back time and change things, I would. I'm sorry for **letting you down**<sup>1050</sup>."

Tears flowed freely down his cheeks as Darian spoke those heartfelt words. His raw display of emotion miraculously lifted the veil of darkness that had enveloped Maria since the night Darian left. It was as if a part of her that she had long thought lost was reawakened through their exchange. Maria let out a sigh, and her anger slowly dissipated.

"I appreciate your honesty, Darian. It's a start," Maria said, looking away briefly, creating a quiet pause in the conversation. In an instant, Maria's lingering resentment toward Darian was overshadowed by a growing sense of pity and sorrow for him.

Maria took a deep breath and looked straight into Darian's eyes. "You know, **it takes two to tango**<sup>1051</sup>. Looking back, I realize I missed the signs that you were unhappy. I was so caught up in my own world, and I should have been more attentive."

Darian acknowledged her words, his face somber. “You’re right. But it’s not your job to look after my happiness. Still, thank you for saying that. It means a lot. If there is one thing I have learned from all of this, it’s never to let negative feelings **fester**<sup>1052</sup> inside.”

The conversation **cleared the air**<sup>1053</sup> and gave Maria a sense of closure. She knew that the responsibility of maintaining a relationship shouldn’t fall on one party. During Darian’s absence, she **was no stranger to**<sup>1054</sup> difficult life circumstances. She had to face financial struggles, health issues, and emotional hardships, but she didn’t let bitterness define her.

While Darian listened to Maria’s words, his eyes softened, taking in her forgiving nature. “Maria, I am glad that you’ve found peace. I know I hurt you, and I regret that more than anything. But I also know I can’t change the past. All I can do is work to be a better person going forward.”

Maria gave a slight nod. “I believe you,” she said. Sensing that Darian still had some bridges to mend, she gently suggested he speak with John and went to retrieve him from the backroom where he had been pacing restlessly.

John wanted nothing to do with the son of a criminal, but he knew he had to talk to Darian to **put things behind him**<sup>1055</sup>. As he walked out of the backroom, his voice was tight and controlled, but his eyes blazed with a cold fury that Darian couldn’t ignore. “Did you know what your father had done to my family?” John asked.



Darian locked eyes with John, feeling the weight of John's accusation like a physical blow. "My father had an addictive personality that he wasn't aware of," he said softly. "He didn't think his gambling was a problem until it landed your dad in jail. Back then, he really **had his back against the wall**<sup>1056</sup>. After that, he **swore off**<sup>1057</sup> gambling. Your dad was practically family to him."

John's jaw tightened. "He threw my dad behind bars for something he didn't do."

Darian took a deep breath, knowing the truth had to be faced. "You're right, and I'm sorry. When management at Centri bank discovered that someone was embezzling money from the accounts that only he and your dad had access to, he panicked."

Darian's voice trembled as he went on, "My words probably don't **hold much water**<sup>1058</sup> to you. But please understand, my dad felt really guilty about making your dad the scapegoat for his actions. After your dad went to prison, my dad **came to grips**<sup>1059</sup> with what he had done and checked himself into rehab. After he got out of rehab, he **turned over a new leaf**<sup>1060</sup>. Many years later, he told me the whole story, bawling his eyes out. I had never seen my old man so raw."

John snorted. "A little too late, don't you think? Why didn't he confess to the cops sooner?"

Darian met his gaze squarely. "He said that if he told the cops that your dad **took the rap for him**<sup>1061</sup>, he would have wrecked my life. He said he was **first and foremost**<sup>1062</sup> a dad. When I learned about

this, your dad had already passed away, and the rest of your family had moved away. I am truly sorry, John. If it's any consolation, my dad put your family in his will."

"That was a cheap shot. If you think for a second that throwing his dishonorable cash my way could undo his wrongs, you **have another thing coming**<sup>1063</sup>." John **didn't mince words**<sup>1064</sup> about his long-standing grudge against Darian's family.

Darian held up his hands, palms out, acknowledging the gravity of the situation. "I get that no amount of money can offset the pain my father has caused you and your folks, but I can say that he would've wanted to look you in the eye and say sorry if he had known you were Tommy. How can I help **smooth things over**<sup>1065</sup> and find a path forward?"

For years, John had been hostage to his vengeance, obsessed with **bringing Peter to justice**<sup>1066</sup>. Unfortunately, before he could put his plan into action, Peter had passed away. Struggling to accept this turn of events, John had redirected his anger toward Darian. This long-standing vendetta had clouded his judgement, causing him to **lose his way**<sup>1067</sup> and squander valuable opportunities in both his professional and personal life. For as long as he could remember, his thoughts and motivations were consumed by this **ax to grind**<sup>1068</sup> with Darian's family.

As John listened to Darian **own up**<sup>1069</sup> to Peter's wrongdoings, he felt a shift within himself. There was a refreshing honesty in Darian's words, a directness that cut through the layers of resentment

John had harbored for so long. The fact that Darian did not **skirt around**<sup>1070</sup> or **gloss over**<sup>1071</sup> his father's misdeeds made John realize that all he had ever wanted was the acknowledgment of the pain and loss his family had suffered. At the core, he had no **beef**<sup>1072</sup> with Darian. He knew Darian was a decent man, but it had been so long since he had built the stone walls around his heart that he had forgotten how to see the good in people.

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Darian's unexpected return jolted John's world over the next few months, triggering a deep reevaluation of life that John hadn't seen coming. Initially, he had thought that their chance encounter at Maria's shop would help him leave the past behind **once and for all**<sup>1073</sup>, but instead, it dredged up old emotions, reopening wounds that had festered in his mind. Each replay of their conversation formed an incessant loop, alternating between fleeting comfort and smoldering resentment. He found himself going down the **rabbit hole**<sup>1074</sup>, mulling over his reasons for working at Centri Bank and pursuing Maria. It turned out that both were rooted in his desire to **get back at**<sup>1075</sup> Peter and **settle the score**<sup>1076</sup>.

As he revisited Darian's candid admission, John was reminded of the person he used to be—optimistic, hopeful, always seeing **the glass as half full**<sup>1077</sup>. But somewhere along the way, his father's downfall had tainted his outlook, turning his optimism into cynicism. It dawned on him that holding onto anger had only served to alienate him from those he cared about. It was a sobering realization, a reminder that life is too short to waste on grudges. Gradually, he

managed to **lay his resentment to rest**<sup>1078</sup>. While he never truly forgot about the past, he learned to forgive, ultimately setting himself free.

Shortly after their encounter, John left Centri Bank and teamed up with Allen to launch a new venture focused on technology and innovation. Allen had been tossing around investment ideas with John for years before finally **putting his money where his mouth was**<sup>1079</sup>. When they finally went into business together, John offered Allen the option of investing without putting up his own money, given their close bond. However, Allen declined, insisting on **having real skin in the game**<sup>1080</sup> to fully commit. Despite the risks of mixing business with friendship, both remained strong in their belief that their brotherly bond would always prevail over money.

In the initial stages, their business **took a beating**<sup>1081</sup>. The unfavorable economic climate made investors hesitant about putting money into their ambitious ideas. As a result, John and Allen had to closely monitor expenses and scale back operations to secure their **bottom line**<sup>1082</sup>. On top of that, their main competitor, backed by a well-established conglomerate with a ton of cash to burn, added to their already mounting pressure. To withstand the competition, John and Allen had to **think outside the box**<sup>1083</sup> and put in long hours. Their rival constantly **threw curveballs**<sup>1084</sup>, trying to knock them out of business, but as the saying goes, **“God helps those who help themselves**<sup>1085</sup>.” After five years, their efforts gained momentum, and their business began to **take off**<sup>1086</sup>.

## FOURTEEN

### *Second Chances*

After settling back in his hometown, Darian went on a mission to find his mother. Weeks passed with no leads, but finally, with the help of a friend who used to be a cop, he received the devastating news of her tragic passing in a helicopter accident a few months earlier. Just when he was **gearing up**<sup>1087</sup> to reconnect with his mom, life threw him another curve ball. The news **sent chills down Darian's spine**<sup>1088</sup>, filling him with an avalanche of regret. "If only I had come back sooner," he thought, "maybe I could've had the chance to save her."

The weight of the news initially overwhelmed him, leaving him numb and consumed by sorrow. But instead of **wallowing in**<sup>1089</sup> self-pity, Darian drew upon his inner strength. He knew that those who can take life's punches and keep on going often come out **on top**<sup>1090</sup>. It's like they say, "**If life gives you lemons, make lemonade**<sup>1091</sup>." His time away and the hardships he had faced had given him wisdom and resilience he wouldn't have gained otherwise.

After a decade away and the loss of both his parents, Darian found himself in deep reflection, **taking stock of**<sup>1092</sup> the paths that had led him back to his roots and the ones that lay ahead. As he wandered

through the familiar streets, memories of Maria flooded his mind—specific snapshots of their relationship. He remembered their first date, a picnic in the town park surrounded by ancient oaks, where they laughed until their sides hurt and stayed until the sun dipped below the horizon. He recalled the night they danced under the stars at the town’s annual festival, lost in each other’s arms and oblivious to the world around them. And he couldn’t forget the quiet moments they shared, sitting on the porch swing his father had built, talking about their hopes and dreams. These memories were a bittersweet reminder of the love they once had—the tie that bound him to Maria no matter how far apart they had been.

After his heartfelt conversation with Maria at the flower shop, Darian realized that his love for her had never truly faded—it had only been buried beneath layers of pain and insecurity. Now, **in the wake** of<sup>1093</sup> their reunion, that love was reawakened.

When he learned about John’s persistent pursuit of Maria in his absence and how Maria had never let John into her heart, he felt a burning desire to reclaim her love, laying his heart on the line. Even though **picking up**<sup>1094</sup> where he **left off**<sup>1095</sup> with Maria seemed like a **long shot**<sup>1096</sup> given their past, he felt compelled to try, leaving the outcome to fate.

Meanwhile, Maria had spent the past decade rebuilding her life, finding solace in her work, her friendships, and her own inner strength. She had never forgotten about Darian, the man who had captured her heart all those years ago. But she had learned to live without him, to find happiness **on her own terms**<sup>827</sup>. With Darian

reappearing in her life, Maria was thrown **off balance**<sup>1097</sup>, feeling as if everything she had painstakingly built during his absence was being tested. She knew that letting him into her life meant risking her heart once more, but she also couldn't deny the love that still burned brightly inside.

When Darian finally asked Maria out, he did so not with grand gestures or empty promises, but with a humble sincerity that deeply moved her. He laid bare his heart, confessing his regrets and his hopes for the future. In his eyes, Maria saw the man she had once fallen in love with—the man who had always been there for her, even when he couldn't be there for himself.

Still, she couldn't say yes right away. She needed time to think, to make sure she wasn't jumping back into the cycle of pain. Saying yes required her to be vulnerable and brave, and she wasn't ready to risk feeling betrayed again. But as she looked back on their shared history and saw the person Darian had become, she couldn't deny that she still loved him. She thought she could outsmart love, but who was she kidding?

When they finally **got together**<sup>1098</sup>, they kept their reconciliation discreet, knowing how quickly gossip would circulate in their small town once the news **came to light**<sup>1099</sup>. Maria's decision to give their love another shot wasn't an instant leap back into their old relationship; rather, it marked the beginning of a patient journey toward rebuilding trust, brick by brick. As the days turned into weeks and then months, they grew stronger as a couple. Reunited a decade later and equipped with more maturity and wisdom, they learned to commu-

nicate openly and honestly, to forgive each other's past mistakes, and to cherish the love that had brought them back together.

Once they felt settled in their relationship, they started looking for a place to move in together. One day, they **stumbled upon**<sup>1100</sup> a neglected **fixer-upper**<sup>1101</sup> that would soon become their home. They saw it not just as a house, but as a symbol of their second chance at happiness. Nestled in a secluded, tranquil part of town, the house didn't initially **fit the bill**<sup>1102</sup>, but both Darian and Maria saw its potential to become their dream home, where they could build a future together. With each swing of the hammer and stroke of the paintbrush, the house transformed from a rundown property into a cozy haven that reflected their personalities and shared dreams.

Two blissful years flew by, and the idea of expanding their family felt like the next logical step. They envisioned a nursery filled with laughter and tiny footsteps echoing through the halls. But the road to pregnancy presented unexpected hurdles, making them wonder if parenthood was still **in the cards**<sup>1103</sup>. Just when they were about to lose hope, Maria discovered the joyful news—she **was expecting**<sup>1104</sup>.

Maria's pregnancy brought unforeseen complications. Frequent hospital visits and constant monitoring became the norm, filling her days with fear and uncertainty. Sometimes, her discomfort was so overwhelming that she **took it out on**<sup>536</sup> Darian. Yet through it all, Darian stood by her side, supporting her **every step of the way**<sup>1105</sup>. His presence was a constant source of comfort, a reminder that they were in this together.



Following childbirth, Maria experienced the baby blues, which progressed into postpartum depression, as she felt the weight of motherhood pressing down on her shoulders. Once again, Darian remained her **rock**<sup>214</sup>. Whenever she needed him, he held her close, offering a shoulder to lean on and a listening ear to ease her mind. His commitment to her was palpable, and he was more emotionally present than ever before.

After her recovery, Maria returned to her flower shop, finding solace and purpose in her daily tasks. While she trusted Darian to stick around this time and provide for the family, she believed in making something of her own. Owning a flower shop had been a childhood aspiration, and she wasn't about to let go of that dream. She had poured her heart and soul into making the shop a success, and her natural talent for flower arrangement was undeniable. Even without formal training, she could **put people with far more experience to shame**<sup>1106</sup>. Darian was thrilled to see that Maria hadn't let her dream **fall by the wayside**<sup>1107</sup>.

However, her success hadn't come without its challenges. Before reuniting with Darian, Maria had faced financial difficulties as her shop struggled to turn a profit. Despite her best efforts, she had found herself **in the red**<sup>1108</sup>, wrestling with the daunting task of **keeping her business afloat**<sup>1109</sup>. Negotiating lower interest rates on her business loans had provided temporary relief, but many times she had considered **closing up shop**<sup>1110</sup> altogether. In the midst of these challenges, Maria's talent hadn't gone unnoticed. Through **word of mouth**<sup>1111</sup>, many customers had traveled **far and wide**<sup>1112</sup> to see her exquisite window displays, which had been renowned as the best on the island.

Slowly but surely, business had begun to **pick up**<sup>1113</sup>.

Darian might not have witnessed the challenges Maria had faced in the early stages of her business, but he saw the sacrifices she continued to make after becoming a mother. Maria had to give up precious time with her child to keep the shop running, a difficult choice that weighed on her heart. Darian admired her ability to juggle her flower business and motherhood. Observing her dedication, he knew he had to do whatever it took to support his wife and family.

With Darian's understanding and encouragement, Maria felt liberated from the weight of expectations tied to motherhood and marriage, allowing her to immerse herself more deeply in her work while embracing her roles as a devoted wife and mother. To expand her business, Maria **tested the waters**<sup>1114</sup> with different products, including vases and chocolates, both of which **sold like hotcakes**<sup>1115</sup>. The vases even became the shop's **cash cow**<sup>1116</sup>.

Maria **broke the mold**<sup>1117</sup> by creating decorative vases and experimenting with new shapes and materials, straying from the simple, traditional vases. Her innovative ideas were well-received by customers, completely **blowing her competition out of the water**<sup>1118</sup>. Naturally, not all of Maria's ideas were successful. Many of them never even **saw the light of day**<sup>1119</sup>. But as is often the case in life, **you win some, you lose some**<sup>1120</sup>.

Maria also ventured into new territory by adding handmade, fragrance-infused candles and soaps to her product lineup. The new products **flew off the shelves**<sup>1121</sup> on their market debut, proving that

her intuition was **right on the money**<sup>1122</sup>.

With the success of her shop, Maria grew bold and decided to **try her hand at**<sup>1123</sup> another business venture. However, this time, it was a flop. Within three months, cash flow problems hit hard, nearly wiping out the earnings from the flower shop. Darian had warned Maria to **crunch the numbers**<sup>1124</sup> beforehand, but she didn't listen and ended up **kicking herself**<sup>1125</sup>.

The failure was a tough **reality check**<sup>1126</sup> for Maria. Her finances **took a hard hit**<sup>1127</sup>, but she wasn't one to stay down for long. Thanks to the loyal customer base she had built over the years, she was able to bounce back. Although it **set her back**<sup>1128</sup> a couple of years when the bank **pulled the rug out from under her feet**<sup>1129</sup>, Maria saw it as a **blessing in disguise**<sup>1130</sup>—a chance to learn and grow. Instead of **throwing in the towel**<sup>1131</sup>, she **chalked it up to experience**<sup>1132</sup> and used it to plot a smarter course for the future.

Maria had **come a long way**<sup>1133</sup> since the day Darian left her on that fateful night. She had ditched the **damsel in distress**<sup>1134</sup> act, no longer **holding out**<sup>1135</sup> for a **knight in shining armor**<sup>1136</sup> to rescue her. Instead, she took charge of her destiny, becoming the captain of her own ship. With Darian by her side, Maria **hit her stride**<sup>1137</sup>, turning her flower shop into a booming chain in just a few years. As for their marriage, forgiveness, perseverance, and mutual respect helped them **find their groove**<sup>1138</sup>. They both felt supported and fulfilled in their own pursuits, all while thriving as a couple.

*Boys Do Cry*

When their daughter, Tina Natalia (named after Darian's mother), was born, Darian's joy was tinged with sorrow because his parents did not live to see the new addition to the family. It **cast a shadow**<sup>1139</sup> over the momentous occasion. One night, cradling Tina Natalia in his arms, Darian glimpsed an old picture frame on the table beside the sofa. Inside, a faded family portrait showed him standing between his parents, their happy smiles forever captured. Overcome with emotion, he began to weep, as years of harbored longing for them came gushing out.

Darian's tears **were a far cry from**<sup>1140</sup> the emotional restraint expected of his upbringing. As a child, he was told to "**man up**<sup>1141</sup>". Although suppressing his emotions felt inherently wrong when they bubbled up so naturally, he was constantly reminded that tears were a sign of weakness. He couldn't grasp why expressing his feelings was so frowned upon.

He vividly remembered his dad's harsh remarks whenever he fell and cried. "Real men don't cry, Darian. You need to toughen up," his father would say. It wasn't just his father; other parents echoed similar sentiments at playgrounds. "Be a man, son. Men don't cry," or

“Toughen up, boy. Crying won’t solve anything.”

These words, repeated by different voices, carried the same weight of expectation, instilling in Darian the belief that expressing vulnerability was synonymous with failure. With each repetition, Darian internalized the notion that emotions should be buried deep. But as he stood there, holding his newborn daughter and feeling the ache of his parents’ absence, he questioned these ingrained lessons.

Darian’s perspective on vulnerability had long begun to shift when he joined an anonymous support group. In one session, a man, whom Darian had come to respect, shared a deeply personal story about losing his younger brother to a tragic accident. As the man recounted the story, tears streamed down his face. Instead of feeling shame, he experienced a profound sense of liberation. “I kept it all inside for years,” he said, his voice breaking. “I thought showing my pain to anyone would make me seem weak, so I suppressed it, but that only made me feel isolated.”

Seeing the man cry openly and without embarrassment stirred something within Darian. For the first time, he saw a man embody true strength by embracing his vulnerability. The room was silent, not out of discomfort, but out of respect and empathy. It was a powerful moment for Darian.

After the meeting, Darian approached him. “I’ve never seen any man talk about their feelings like that, **much less**<sup>1142</sup> cry in front of others. How do you do it?”

The man smiled, placing a hand on Darian's shoulder. "It wasn't easy at first, but I realized that hiding my emotions was destroying me, making me physically sick. Real strength comes from being honest with yourself and others. It's okay to cry. It's okay to feel. You're not weak for showing emotion; you're human."

That conversation was a pivotal moment for Darian. It almost gave him the license to cry, express his feelings, and seek support without shame. Gradually, he began to view his emotions not as weaknesses to be hidden but as integral parts of his humanity.

As he stood cradling Tina Natalia, remembering his parents' smiles in the old photograph, Darian felt the full weight of his grief and love. The tears that flowed were not just for the pain of loss but for the acceptance of his emotional self. He knew his parents would be proud of the man he had become—a man who understood that true strength lies in the courage to be vulnerable.

This wasn't the only experience that contributed to his growth and changing beliefs. One sunny day, while strolling through a distant city, Darian came across a weathered red brownstone covered in a vibrant green overgrowth. He noticed a signboard attached to the building advertising an acupuncture clinic inside. Despite some trepidation, he found himself drawn to the cool air emanating from inside the building, a comforting contrast to the warmth of the sun beating down on the pavement.

As Darian ascended the stairs, the smell of herbs and smoky incense guided him to the second floor, where he found an intricately sculpt-

ed wooden door bathed in tranquil light. Inside, Darian was greeted by an old man with a calm demeanor and kind eyes, instantly putting him at ease.

“Welcome,” the old man said, “have a seat, please.”

Darian settled into the chair, noticing a framed picture of a Tibetan monk on the acupuncturist’s desk.

“I found this place by chance,” Darian admitted. “I’ve heard about acupuncture’s transformative effects, how it can heal the body and provide clarity for the mind. I am looking to understand myself better.”

“You’ve come to the right place,” the acupuncturist reassured him. “Acupuncture can help restore balance. Let’s begin by exploring the concept of yin and yang energies.”

“In Chinese philosophy,” the acupuncturist explained, “yin represents feminine traits, and yang represents masculine traits. Excessive yang can lead to aggression and a lack of empathy, whereas too much yin can result in passivity and difficulty **standing up for**<sup>1143</sup> yourself.”

The clarity of these words hit Darian hard. “So, it’s about finding balance within ourselves?” he asked.

The acupuncturist nodded. “Exactly! It’s about embracing our true selves, allowing strength and vulnerability to coexist.”

“But how can men feel comfortable expressing emotions openly,

like crying?” Darian asked, aware of the unconventional nature of such a question.

“Crying is a natural and healthy way to express emotions—a powerful act of strength and self-care,” the acupuncturist replied. “Even babies understand that. Imagine all that pent-up yang energy that never gets released. Compassion and empathy aren’t weaknesses; they are powerful sources of connection and understanding. They **pave the way**<sup>1144</sup> for personal growth, healthier relationships, and harmonious societies.”

Darian internalized these words, feeling a renewed sense of purpose. He thanked the acupuncturist, reaching into his pocket for payment, but the acupuncturist gently signaled him to stop, shaking his head with a reassuring smile.

As Darian exited the building, the acupuncturist’s wise words still echoed in his mind. Stepping onto the street, Darian glanced back, a gentle smile spreading across his face.



*The Mystery Woman*

Arthur was a self-made multimillionaire from the outskirts of London. Despite humble beginnings, he relied on sheer merit and determination to forge his path to success. His journey, however, was strewn with challenges. During his school days, he faced discrimination from peers born into privilege, who secured admission through family connections. Some of these bratty cultural elites even **went so far as to**<sup>1145</sup> throw derogatory insults, calling him a “commoner” or, worse, a “leech.” Nonetheless, Arthur remained resilient, excelling in both academics and his early corporate endeavors. He put in long hours and made smart choices, gradually climbing the ranks and eventually establishing himself as a successful business tycoon in investment banking.

As his career flourished, Arthur began to let his success **go to his head**<sup>1146</sup>. He flaunted his wealth, reveled in the adoration of others, and grew accustomed to an extravagant lifestyle. There was a time when people admired his philanthropic efforts, applauding his rise to success and regarding him as a true beacon of inspiration in his rags-to-riches story. They lauded his dedication to making a positive impact on society and his sworn commitment to **giving back**<sup>1147</sup>.

Over time, the authenticity of his actions **came into**<sup>1148</sup> question. His acts of charity began to appear more like displays of egoism. Rumors circulated about his once genuine interactions turning patronizing, leaving many feeling slighted. Some of his peers distanced themselves, **put off**<sup>1149</sup> by his newfound airs. Yet, others still admired his steadfast drive to achieve business success, recalling the ambitious young man who rose from humble beginnings with grit.

As news of Arthur's startling transformation rippled through the philanthropic community, disappointment and disillusionment followed. His story became a **cautionary tale**<sup>1150</sup>, serving as a reminder that wealth and success should never overshadow basic humanity. True philanthropy must extend beyond monetary contributions, grounded in humility and genuine compassion, and wielded to uplift those less fortunate.

After years of chasing success, Arthur reached a point where he felt something was missing. Looking back, he realized there was a growing emptiness inside him that he could no longer ignore. Growing up poor had given him a burning desire to rise above his circumstances and prove himself. But along the way, that hunger for success had consumed him, **blinding him to**<sup>1151</sup> the things that truly mattered. He had become so focused on his goals that he lost sight of forming meaningful relationships and showing compassion toward others. This neglect of genuine connections and empathy had fueled his egotism, driving him to seek accolades and validation in a desperate attempt to fill the void.

In search of a deeper meaning, Arthur made the bold decision to

step away from the empire he had painstakingly built. During this transition, he found companionship and love with a woman fifteen years his junior from Asia. Together, they entered a new phase, settling in the idyllic paradise of Boracay, Philippines, where they spared no expense in constructing a lavish mansion overlooking the turquoise waters of the Sibuyan Sea.

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When his baby turned two, Darian took the whole family to the Philippines for vacation. It was a sweltering day, and the heat showed no signs of **letting up**<sup>1152</sup>. While Tina Natalia was **catching some Z's**<sup>1153</sup> with the nanny back in the hotel, Darian and Maria took a leisurely stroll along the beach in Boracay, the very spot where they had celebrated their first honeymoon. While locals sought refuge in air-conditioned spaces, tourists eagerly embraced the heat, flocking to the beach to **soak up**<sup>1154</sup> some much-needed vitamin D. They indulged in various water activities: kayaking, paddleboarding, and even jet skiing for an adrenaline rush.

As the day unfolded, a dispute erupted between two neighbors over a property line on the far-eastern side of the island. To mediate the situation, a local police officer was called in. Among the parties involved were Arthur and his neighbor—a formidable Filipina in her late 80s. Having endured unimaginable loss—the death of her husband and son at the hands of three intruders who broke into her house a decade ago—she had grown fiercely protective of her property and privacy. The tragic past had left her paranoid and wary of outsiders, always on the alert for potential threats.

The contention revolved around the natural boundary between their properties: a row of bushes that separated their homes. Arthur, an avid gardener, regularly trimmed the foliage, claiming it was for aesthetic enhancement. However, the elderly lady perceived his actions as an invasion of her privacy. Both parties refused to **back down**<sup>1155</sup>, leading to an ongoing feud with no signs of resolution. Walking back to the hotel from the beach, Darian and Maria happened to witness another one of their many **dust-ups**<sup>1156</sup>.

Arthur's mansion, situated far from the front metal-bar gate, was a sight to behold. It was a massive, three-story structure with sleek, modern lines and floor-to-ceiling windows. The exterior was painted gleaming white, and the roof was equipped with solar panels. As Darian and Maria strolled past the mansion, they couldn't resist peeking through the gate, just in time to **catch sight of**<sup>1157</sup> a woman emerging from the grand estate, her long, dark hair cascading down her back. She was clearly of Asian descent—her features reflecting her heritage. Even from afar, Darian couldn't help but be captivated by her, an inexplicable sensation stirring within him so strong that it puzzled him.

Darian observed the woman as she walked away from the mansion and entered what appeared to be a storage shed. Although it was only a brief glance, a sense of familiarity arose within him. He searched his memory, but no recollection surfaced. Before he could ponder further, his thoughts were interrupted by a loud argument escalating on the lawn outside the mansion. Through the gate, he saw Arthur and the Filipina **going at it**<sup>1158</sup>. The distressed old lady flailed her arms around as she spoke, while Arthur attempted to de-escalate the situation, his posture and demeanor conveying his efforts to calm her

down. Nearby, a policeman, who wore a look of unease, also tried to diffuse the situation by offering to intervene.

To avoid **getting mixed up in**<sup>1159</sup> the altercation, Darian and Maria quickly walked away. As they continued on, Darian couldn't ignore his fascination with the woman who had stepped out of the mansion earlier. Hoping to unravel the mystery at a later time, he made a mental note of it.

The following day, Darian tracked down the elderly Filipina woman. To his surprise, she agreed to speak with him, despite a hint of suspicion.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Darian began politely. "I couldn't help but notice the heated exchange yesterday. I hope I'm not intruding, but I was wondering if you could enlighten me about something."

The old woman skeptically gazed at Darian before motioning for him to join her on a nearby bench.

"I saw a woman coming out of the mansion," Darian said, pointing to Arthur's palatial residence. "I was hoping you could tell me a bit about her."

A flicker of emotion crossed the old woman's face, her features softening as she reminisced. "Oh, you mean Sophia. She's with that stupid man Arthur, who owns the mansion." Darian nodded, sensing the change in the old woman's demeanor with the mention of Sophia.

The old woman hesitated, her eyes momentarily lost in the depths of her memories. Then, with a sigh, she continued, her voice carrying a trace of gratitude. “Well, Sophia is Arthur’s wife. They’ve been living in that mansion for quite some time now.”

Darian’s eyebrows raised in surprise. “Married? Do they live here permanently?”

The elderly woman’s gaze softened, and her tone took on a glimmer of fondness. “Yes, they do. Sophia came to Boracay many years ago and met Arthur during one of his trips. They fell in love, got married, and have made that mansion their home ever since.” The elderly lady stopped suddenly and seemed reluctant to share further. Darian tried to get more out of her, but her reluctance eventually took over. Then, he noticed a trace of shame on her face, suggesting deeper layers of emotion surrounding Sophia’s story. Though intrigued by Sophia’s story and sensing more to uncover, Darian respected her boundaries and refrained from prying further. However, he left his contact information just in case she was willing to talk again.

On his way back to the hotel, a sudden bolt of lightning struck the sky. Like a teenager with raging hormones, the weather in Boracay was unpredictable. The sun would shine brightly in the morning, but it would quickly **give way to**<sup>1160</sup> thunderstorms by afternoon. By the time Darian reached the hotel, a gentle drizzle had escalated into a torrential downpour. As the day came to a close, the island breathed a sigh of relief, narrowly escaping a severe thunderstorm.

That night, Darian found himself lying awake in bed, consumed

by thoughts of Sophia, a woman he had never met but had become an enigma in his thoughts. Sleep eluded him as he **tossed and turned**<sup>1161</sup>, his fascination refusing to wane. He knew there would be more sleepless nights ahead if he didn't take action. Without telling Maria, he returned to the mansion the following morning. However, when he arrived, the butler informed Darian that Arthur and Sophia had already left for London for Thanksgiving. With a sigh of resignation, Darian had to accept that his investigation had come to an abrupt end. Sophia would remain an unresolved curiosity. He made a silent promise to leave this obsession behind.

...

Nearly a month had passed since their visit to Boracay. One evening, after Maria and Tina Natalia had gone to bed, Darian retreated to his study, diving into a book to unwind. The quiet was interrupted by a sudden knock at the door. When he opened the door, he was startled to see a woman who looked like a ghost from his past. Darian stared at her, his mind racing with confusion. Suddenly, his eyes widened as a jolt of recognition surged through his body. His heart pounded as he stepped closer, and before he knew it, they were in each other's arms, overcome by a rush of emotions. The unspoken understanding between them affirmed their connection. They didn't need words; their tear-filled eyes said it all.

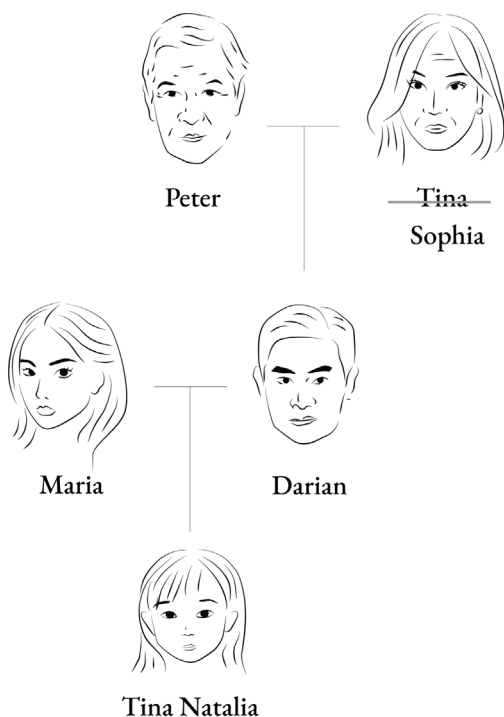
Darian could hardly believe his eyes. He had been told that his mother had died, but here she was, alive and well, standing before him. She explained that the police report had been a mistake. While the helicopter she was on had crashed, she survived and spent the

years after rebuilding her life.

“How did you find me?” he asked, still **grappling with**<sup>957</sup> disbelief.

“Haven’t you been asking about Sophia?” she replied, a warm smile breaking through her nervousness.

Darian paused to process her words while pieces of the puzzle **fell into place**<sup>1162</sup>. “Oh, you are Sophia!” he shouted, realizing his instinct had been right all along.



Sophia and Arthur had stayed in London until the gloomy autumn



became unbearable. It was only after their return to Boracay that Sophia learned of Darian's visit from the elderly Filipina woman, who then shared his contact information and details of their brief interaction.

Settling into a comfortable corner of Darian's home, Sophia took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the moment. She had rehearsed these words countless times since the day she left—words she knew her son deserved to hear directly from her. "Darian," she began, her voice trembling slightly, "I can't express how sorry I am for leaving you when you were still so young. That must have really hurt."

Darian listened intently, recalling the letter she had left him years ago, which he had **put away**<sup>1163</sup> like a treasure. "I read the letter," he said softly. "I understand now how tough it was for you to leave me." As the words flowed from his mouth, he realized that the anger and resentment he once felt had become strangers. Yet, beneath his calm exterior, a storm of emotions was brewing.

"You really do?" she asked, her heart racing.

"Yes. For a long time, I wondered why you left, if it was somehow my fault. But I understand that sometimes, people have to make tough choices to find their own happiness. I've learned that myself," Darian replied, his voice steady but showing a hint of vulnerability, as if he were trying to mask his pain of her absence.

Feeling the weight of his words, Sophia pulled him into an embrace, sensing the depth of his journey. For a fleeting moment, she

wondered what life would have been like had she stayed, a pang of sadness tugging at her heart as she imagined what he must have endured. Holding each other, they let the silence echo the years lost between them.

After a moment of shared silence, Sophia broke the stillness. “It’s been a journey, hasn’t it?” she said softly, pulling back to meet his gaze. “I am truly sorry,” she added, her voice heavy with emotion. Darian nodded a couple of times, tears streaming down his cheeks as the floodgates opened. Her sincerity finally pierced through the calm façade he had put up. He could no longer hold back his emotions; these tears were years of waiting and longing, finally bringing closure.

“For so long,” Sophia continued, “I felt ashamed for leaving you. I carried the burden of being an absent mother, terrified of reaching out and causing you more pain. But when I got your contact information, it gave me the courage to reconnect. I realized I couldn’t keep running from the past. It took a lot of courage to come back.”

“I’m glad you did,” Darian responded earnestly, his voice steadier now. As he dried his eyes, a sense of relief settled in.

“I also want to explain why I changed my name,” Sophia shared. “It felt necessary to reflect the growth I’ve experienced.” She paused, letting her words **sink in**<sup>1164</sup>.

“Over the years,” Sophia continued, “I went through a profound process of self-discovery. My old name no longer felt aligned with the person I’ve become. It was a reminder of a past that didn’t define me

anymore. So, after the accident, it became clear that I needed a new name that felt authentic to who I am now.”

Darian absorbed his mother’s words, moved by her honesty. Her journey of self-exploration and evolution **struck a chord**<sup>1165</sup> with him. He understood that people change and grow, having reflected on his own experiences and his reunion with Maria.

As they continued their conversation, Sophia and Darian shared the emotional scars left by the choices that had shaped their lives. Sophia spoke of the love she had always carried for him, a love so deep that it became tangled with the guilt of leaving. Darian listened, his heart heavy with the understanding that her abandonment was born not of indifference, but of a desperate need to reclaim herself. They acknowledged the pain of their fractured past—the love that was lost, the confusion that followed, and the years spent searching for what could never be replaced. Yet, in this moment, they saw the possibility of healing and felt ready to **turn the page**<sup>1166</sup>, leaving the remnants of their broken history behind.

With much to catch up on and not wanting to waste a single moment, Darian invited Sophia to stay the night, feeling that time had already slipped away with his mother. However, Sophia kindly declined, feeling it was important to give his family the respect and space to adjust to her unexpected return.

Amidst the whirlwind of emotions that accompanied his mother’s homecoming, Darian felt optimistic about the future. Seeing his mother again was surreal, but now that she was back, they could start

anew, mend their broken hearts, and **make up for lost time**<sup>1167</sup>.

With Christmas just days away, their reunion felt serendipitous—a time when families come together to celebrate forgiveness and hope. Darian, having sent his mom away for the night, found himself unable to sleep. Restless, he wandered through the house, trying to hang the red stockings he had prepared for Tina Natalia. The gentle hum of the ceiling fan and the soft glow of the festive lights created a soothing ambiance, wrapping him in a sense of warmth and comfort. In that fleeting moment, he felt at home.

The lights continued to twinkle softly throughout the night, casting a golden hue across the room. As Darian took in the moment, it wasn't **lost on**<sup>1168</sup> him that true happiness wasn't found in distant pursuits but in cherishing the present.





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Thank you all for your assistance in bringing this book to life.





## *Endnotes*

- 1 (To shy away from something) To avoid something because of dislike, fear, nervousness, etc. (因不喜歡、害怕或緊張等原因) 退縮, 躲避
- 2 To show too much interest in a situation that does not involve you 管他人閒事
- 3 To become known or to make something become known 暴露; 傳聞
- 4 To fall in value, deteriorate, or fail 變壞; 失敗
- 5 To confront a problem directly and openly 直接面對問題
- 6 (To get a hold of someone/something) To find someone or obtain something [informal] 找到(某人); 得到(某東西)
- 7 To disappear suddenly and completely 人間蒸發
- 8 Something that is described as smoke and mirrors is intended to make you believe that something is being done or is true when it is not 煙幕彈, 障眼法
- 9 To hold something in your mind or to be willing to consider or accept something [formal] 懷著; 抱有; 心存
- 10 Used to refer to the process by which rumors and gossip are originated and circulated among a group of people 散播謠言者; 流言發源地
- 11 To disappear without notifying anyone 不告而別; 逃跑
- 12 (To stay/steer/keep clear of something) To avoid someone or something that seems unpleasant, dangerous, or likely to cause problems 避開(令人不快或危險的人或事物)
- 13 To be unable to resist someone or something 通常指對不好的東西無法抗拒
- 14 (To leave someone to their own devices) To allow someone to make their own decisions about what to do 讓(某人)自行決定
- 15 During one limited period of time, without stopping 一口氣地
- 16 To allow oneself to relax standards or rules that were previously followed closely 放鬆之前嚴格遵守的標準或規則, 變得鬆懈
- 17 (You had it coming (to you)) If someone had it coming, something terrible

- happened to them that was deserved. [informal] 是...應得的;活該
- 18 To become unconscious for a short time, for example when ill, badly hurt, or drunk (因病痛、受傷或醉酒) 昏迷,失去知覺
- 19 (A brush with something) A situation in which you experience something, or almost experience something, especially something unpleasant 和...的小衝突;與...的摩擦。 (A brush with something or someone) A brief or fleeting encounter with something or someone 擦身而過
- 20 A situation in which something bad, unpleasant, or dangerous almost happens, but you manage to avoid it 僥倖脫險
- 21 To die [informal] 死掉
- 22 Immediately 立即,馬上
- 23 To observe closely 密切留意
- 24 When a period of time is up, it is finished. (一段時間) 結束地,完結地
- 25 To be very surprising and unexpected [informal] 出人意料
- 26 If a machine or part of the body acts up, it does not perform as well as it should. (機器) 運轉不正常; (身體部位) 出毛病
- 27 (To set something off) To cause an activity or event, often a series of events, to begin or happen 引發(常指一系列事件)
- 28 To injure someone or something, or to hurt or embarrass someone 傷害某人;使某人難堪
- 29 Only 只有
- 30 Unsuccessfully 徒勞地;無用地
- 31 (To meet with something) To cause a particular reaction or result 引起...反應;受到...對待
- 32 A situation that causes a lot of problems for you when you start to deal with it [informal] 棘手的問題;複雜而難解決的問題
- 33 To persuade someone not to do something 說服(某人)放棄
- 34 To say things in a confusing way 說話令人莫名其妙,像打啞謎
- 35 (Relating to work that is done, especially by a lawyer) Without asking for payment (尤指律師的工作) 未要求收費的
- 36 If you are on the sidelines or do something from the sidelines, you are not

actively involved in something. 旁觀; 不參與

37 You can do anything or go anywhere that you want to 隨心所欲心想事成, 實現自己的想像

38 (To be (stuck) in a rut) Too fixed in one particular type of job, activity, method, way of living, etc., and need to change (工作、方法等) 刻板乏味, 墨守成規, 一成不變

39 Said to show that something is not important to someone or someone has little or no knowledge of something [informal] 我不知道、說不定、也未可知, 常用來表示對某事不知道或不關心

40 To have many jobs or roles 身兼數職

41 If someone or something has several qualities rolled into one, the person or thing has all of those qualities. 集於一身

42 Used to describe a situation in which any two people try to achieve something together, by one of them being friendly and pleasant and the other using threats or force 白臉黑臉

43 To cause someone to suffer emotional and mental problems 使(某人)出現精神問題

44 To start behaving in a way that is not generally acceptable, especially dishonestly or illegally [informal] 舉止怪異; 行為不軌

45 A young person who commits crimes 少年犯

46 To avoid doing any work [informal] 逃避工作; 偷懶

47 To begin to behave well, having until now misbehaved 改過自新, 改正不良行為

48 To speak angrily to someone because they have done something wrong 責備, 斥責(某人)

49 (To put up with something or someone) To accept or continue to accept an unpleasant situation or experience, or someone who behaves unpleasantly 忍受, 忍耐

50 (To call somebody out) To criticize someone or ask them to explain their actions 批評某人; 要求某人解釋其行為

51 To make a mistake 犯錯誤, 疏忽

- 52 Cannabis [slang] 大麻
- 53 Money that is easily and sometimes dishonestly earned (有時指靠不誠實手段得到的) 得來容易的錢; 橫財
- 54 A drug dealer [slang] 毒販
- 55 (To take up with someone) To become friendly or start a relationship with someone, especially someone who might have a bad influence on you 開始與(尤指可能帶來不良影響的人)來往
- 56 A moment when you suddenly realize something or have a good idea [informal] 靈光一現
- 57 A powerful, illegal drug (容易上癮的) 烈性毒品
- 58 The beginning, when someone starts to do something, or a process starts 開始, 開端
- 59 Be down to (do something) To be ready, willing, or eager to do something 願意、樂意、準備好做某事情
- 60 (To egg someone on) To strongly encourage someone to do something that might not be a very good idea 慫恿, 鼓動, 煽動
- 61 To take care of somebody and make sure nothing terrible happens to them 彼此互相照應
- 62 To take an overdose (= too much) of a drug [slang] 過量服用(藥物)
- 63 If something that happens is a wake-up call, it should make you realize that you need to act to change a situation. 警示, 警鐘
- 64 (To rope someone in) To persuade someone to take part in an activity despite their reluctance [informal] 勸說(某人)幫忙; 說服(某人)加入
- 65 Someone who is extremely nervous or anxious and is therefore unable to organize their life [informal] 極度緊張(或焦慮)的人; 精神瀕於崩潰的人
- 66 To make a person feel worried and unhappy because of problems, responsibilities, and duties 使(某人)焦慮; 使(某人)沮喪
- 67 To inform an authority figure of one's bad or illegal behavior 出賣某人; 打某人的小報告
- 68 To fail to take advantage of an opportunity 放過, 放棄, 錯過(機會)
- 69 A person's record that shows no evidence of any problems, broken rules, etc.

乾淨的紀錄(意味著可以從頭開始,沒有過去的問題影響目前的狀況)

70 Making progress and likely to succeed 有望成功;在正軌上

71 A small, noticeable part of a problem, the total size of which is much greater(重大問題的)冰山一角,端倪,明顯的一小部分

72 The crime of buying and selling people, or making money from work they are forced to do, such as sex work 販賣人口,例如性工作

73 Parts of the internet that are encrypted (= use a secret code), that cannot be found using ordinary search engines, and that are sometimes used for criminal activity 暗網(網頁/網站)

74 Away from the correct path or correct way of doing something 偏離正軌地;迷路地;誤入歧途地

75 It is clearly true 不可否認

76 (To be consumed by/with something) To have so much of a feeling that it affects everything you do 充滿(某種強烈的感情)

77 Thinking now about something in the past 現在回想

78 Respect for someone [informal] 對(某人的)尊重

79 Someone's father or husband [slang] 老爸;老公

80 To behave badly because you are upset, often in ways that you are not aware of(因為不高興而)發洩或行為不當

81 Forever 永久地,永遠地

82 The part of the body in which people say they feel fear or nervousness 胸口;心底

83 Something unusual or undesirable is happening [informal] 不尋常(或不好)的事發生了

84 Very strongly or forcefully 非常強大;非常有力

85 To meet someone you know when you are not expecting to 偶然遇到(某人);無意碰見(某人)

86 Like someone in a romantic/sexual way 對某人有意思

87 (To keep your distance from something or someone) To avoid going near someone or something, or to avoid getting too friendly with people 保持距離

88 To describe or portray something in a particular way 描述,描繪

- 89 Wedding day 大喜之日
- 90 Someone who becomes drunk very quickly [informal] 酒量差的人
- 91 Used to describe a situation in which it is impossible to be sure about what will happen [informal] 通常是指原本蠻確定的事情，由於一些突如其來的改變，導致無法預測結果
- 92 If a bad memory or feeling eats away at someone, it makes them feel increasingly unhappy. 煩擾(著某人)
- 93 To tell the truth about something that you have been keeping secret 全盤招供
- 94 (To give one's word) To promise 承諾; 保證
- 95 To successfully deal with something or solve a problem [informal] 成功處理; 解決
- 96 The way in which the level of something regularly becomes higher or lower in a situation (有規律的) 起伏
- 97 To disagree with someone on one or more matters 對事情想法有差異
- 98 (To pride yourself on something) To value a skill or good quality that you have 對...感到自豪
- 99 (To take (someone or something) as (something)) To regard, consider, or assume someone or something to be a specific type of person or thing 認為某人是...; 把...當作
- 100 Loyal and reliable 忠實可靠的，可以信賴的
- 101 Honest and can be trusted [informal] 誠實的; 值得信賴的
- 102 Used to mention something you have just realized or remembered 突然想到
- 103 An event has happened or a decision has been taken that cannot be changed. 大局已定，木已成舟
- 104 A particular skill or ability that a person has (某人擅長的) 強項
- 105 If you take criticism or advice to heart, you think about it seriously, often because it upsets you. 十分介意，耿耿於懷
- 106 Used to say that you are confident about what you are going to say 我能肯定地說
- 107 To do something that provokes someone's anger, contempt, or dismissal 得

罪某人

108 (To give something away) To tell people something secret, often without intending to 暴露隱情

109 If you are washed up, you are no longer successful and have no chance of success in the future. (工作)不會再有成功的希望的,沒有前途的

110 (To take after someone) To be similar to an older member of your family in appearance or character (在外貌、性格等方面)與(家庭中某個年紀較大成員)相像

111 To move your body in a particular way 舉止

112 (To carry a torch for someone) To be in love with someone [informal] 愛戀(某人)

113 Very envious 非常嫉妒

114 To ask someone to marry you 求婚

115 Very quickly, without needing to think about it 非常快的;無需考慮的

116 To move close to someone or something cautiously or furtively 悄悄貼近某人

117 An occasion when someone's underwear moves or is pulled up, so it is uncomfortably tight around, or between the two sides of, their bottom (作為惡作劇等)拉出(某人的)內褲

118 (Also to frighten/scare the wits out of someone) To make someone very frightened 把(某人)嚇得魂不附體

119 (To get a kick out of something) To have a stimulating or pleasurable effect or experience 從某事當中得到極大的樂趣或快感

120 (To drive someone up the wall) To make someone extremely angry 令(某人)大怒,令(某人)暴跳如雷

121 When someone gets the same bad treatment that he has been giving others 以其人之道,還治其人之身

122 A private joke that can only be understood by a limited group of people who have a special knowledge of something that is referred to in the joke 同個圈子內的共同笑梗

123 (To crack someone up) To suddenly laugh a lot, or to make someone sudden-

- ly laugh a lot [informal] (使)...突然哈哈大笑; (使)...捧腹大笑
- 124 To make a difficult situation even worse for someone 傷口撒鹽, 雪上加霜
- 125 Address someone with a name that is intended to be offensive 謾罵, 辱罵
- 126 If someone or something is boxed in, he, she, or it cannot move because of other people or things that are too close. 被困住的; 被堵住的
- 127 To do something exactly as the rules tell you 嚴格按照規矩辦事
- 128 Having old-fashioned and unchanging morals, especially relating to sexual matters (尤指在性問題上) 古板的, 拘謹的, 保守的
- 129 (To take something in stride) To deal with a problem or difficulty calmly and not allow it to influence what you are doing 從容處理, 對...處之泰然
- 130 A scenario in which an increase in a certain type of action should lead to greater chance of a particular outcome 「數字遊戲」指的是成功的機會主要依賴於嘗試或機會的數量, 而不是每次嘗試的質量。在這種情況下, 增加嘗試次數通常會提高成功的可能性。
- 131 An idealized romantic partner, often depicted as handsome, brave, and perfect in every way 白馬王子
- 132 To escape quickly from a dangerous or unpleasant situation 逃之夭夭
- 133 To ignore something that you know is wrong 視而不見
- 134 (To hang someone to dry) To allow someone to be punished, criticized, or made to suffer in an unfair way, without trying to help them 讓某人處於困境卻不給予援助
- 135 As good as someone or something else 與...相當
- 136 An unattached man who is desirable and worthy of choice 條件好的男人
- 137 Lesbianism [slang] 女同性戀關係
- 138 To be sexually attracted to both men and women [informal] 對男人和女人都感到有性吸引力
- 139 If something crosses your mind, you think of it. (念頭)閃現, 掠過; 想起, 記起
- 140 Having a great romantic or sexual attraction to boys [informal] 喜歡男生的
- 141 (To have something up your sleeve) To have secret plans or ideas that can be used when needed [informal] 暗中留有一招; 藏有錦囊妙計



- 142 When you understand what makes someone tick, you understand what causes someone to be excited, why someone makes the choices that they make, or what motivates someone. 使(某人)興奮做...的原因
- 143 To give someone the things they need, such as money, food, or clothes 為(某人)提供生活所需
- 144 (To be not cut out for something) To not be the right type of person for a particular job or activity 天生就不適合...
- 145 A young, attractive woman who is the partner of a wealthy and successful older man and acts as a symbol of his social position (年紀大的成功男人用來顯示社會地位的)花瓶妻子/女友
- 146 To decide that a planned event will not happen or to end an activity because it is no longer useful or possible 取消, 停止, 中止
- 147 To suddenly have strong romantic feelings about someone 對...傾心; 迷戀...
- 148 Not important to or not involved in a situation 不重要; 未參與或退出
- 149 To try very hard to do something, especially for someone other than yourself (尤其是為他人) 非常努力地做
- 150 To listen to someone with sympathy [old-fashioned] 聆聽, 傾聽
- 151 If someone wouldn't be seen or caught dead in a particular place or doing something, they would never do it, usually because it would be too embarrassing. [informal] (通常因為會太尷尬而) 絕不會做
- 152 To get something, using effort, by chance or in a way that has not been explained 得到; 弄到; 獲得
- 153 To give someone information discreetly or confidentially 給(某人)通風報信或秘密地提供資訊
- 154 (To cost (someone) a pretty penny) To be very expensive 花費(某人)很多錢
- 155 If something must be done or avoided at all costs, it must be done or avoided whatever happens. 不惜任何代價; 無論如何
- 156 To talk boastfully or overconfidently 說大話
- 157 (To trade on something) To use something, especially a characteristic, for your advantage and usually in an unfair way (為謀私利) 利用

- 158 To share your feelings and secrets with someone because you trust them not to tell other people 向...傾訴;向...吐露情感(或秘密)
- 159 To have a chance to achieve, attain, or have success in something 有機會達成某事
- 160 To start to behave in a way that is not socially acceptable(行為)越界
- 161 Deserving praise and respect 值得被稱讚和尊重
- 162 To ignore someone or not give your attention to something or to what is happening around you [informal] 不理睬,對...置之不理
- 163 To be honest about your feelings and intentions 攤牌,(把想法和意圖)和盤托出
- 164 To suddenly start talking or thinking about a completely new subject 突然離題;突然離開原來的思路
- 165 To do something that you do not want to do because you cannot find any other way of achieving something(別無辦法的情況下)訴諸,依靠,採用
- 166 To deceive someone for a long time about what you are intending to do 長期哄騙(某人);敷衍(某人)
- 167 Used to show that what you are describing is in fact much more serious or important than you have suggested 至少可以說
- 168 (To fall for someone) To be very attracted to someone and to start to love them 愛上某人
- 169 Judging something by how it has been planned rather than how it works in practice 在理論上
- 170 If you have something going for you, or if something has something going for it, certain advantages will make the result successful. 有...的有利條件
- 171 If you go weak at the knees, you lose your strength and feel you are going to fall over, usually because of seeing or talking about someone you are very attracted to or something unpleasant or frightening. (因看到或說到非常喜歡的人或讓人害怕的事而)膝蓋發軟的,腿發軟的
- 172 To not allow someone to become too friendly with you 與(某人)保持距離;疏遠(某人);不與(某人)過於親近
- 173 To lose the determination to oppose something 屈服;放棄抵抗

- 174 To be tricked into believing something that is not true [informal] 對...信以為真
- 175 To be available to provide help and support for someone 總在(某人)身邊(提供幫助或支援);不離(某人)左右
- 176 (To wrestle with something) To try very hard to deal with a problem or to make a difficult decision 努力解決;艱難對付
- 177 A person who gives you help and support when you are in a difficult situation (危難時)可依靠的人,支柱
- 178 To be very close friends and share secrets, etc. [informal] 親密無間,非常友好
- 179 Someone who helps and supports you the most, especially at work (尤指工作上的)得力助手
- 180 To start to drink too much alcohol [informal] 開始酗酒
- 181 Used to emphasize the large number, amount, or level of something 相當大的;相當多的;相當可觀的
- 182 If you up the ante, you increase your demands or the risks in a situation to achieve a better result. 增加賭注;提高要求;提高風險
- 183 To lose a lot of money, especially as a result of a bet [informal] (尤指因賭博而)輸得精光
- 184 (To siphon something off) To dishonestly take money from an organization or other supply and use it for a purpose for which it was not intended 非法挪用(資金),侵吞
- 185 If it is (only) a matter of time until something happens, it is sure to happen, but you do not know when it will happen. (只)是個時間問題,是遲早的事
- 186 (To wind up in something) To find yourself in an unexpected and usually unpleasant situation, especially as a result of what you do [informal] 以...收場
- 187 In prison 在坐牢
- 188 Too involved in a difficult situation 深陷困境
- 189 (To get wind of something) To hear a piece of information that someone else was trying to keep secret 聽到...的風聲;得知...秘密消息
- 190 To recognize that something is not as it appears to be or that something

dishonest is happening 發覺有可疑之處，感到其中有詐

191 (To buy someone off) To pay someone so that they do not cause you any trouble 買通，賄賂

192 To make a person seem to be guilty of a crime when they are not by producing facts or information that are not true 陷害，誣陷

193 (To catch someone red-handed) To find someone in the act of doing something illegal 當場抓住(某人)做非法勾當

194 (To clear oneself or clear one's name) To prove that one is innocent 證明某人的清白

195 (To take a/the fall for someone) To accept the blame for something another person did [informal] 替...承擔責任

196 To do something so bad 墮落到如此地步

197 To trick someone into doing something or to make someone seem guilty of something that they have not done [informal] 設下圈套，讓某人不知情地順著策劃者的意圖做事

198 Something that is extremely unpleasant but must be accepted 必須接受的殘酷事實

199 An occasion when police officers take a person who has been arrested for a crime through a public area so he or she can be seen and photographed by the media (員警將被拘捕的罪犯帶到公共場所讓媒體觀看和拍攝的) 遊街

200 Someone or something that seems stupid or silly 笑柄

201 (To lay bare something) To make something known 公開，公佈

202 To spend time in prison 服刑；蹲監獄

203 Badly damaged or completely spoiled 嚴重受損的，完全毀壞的

204 (To get back at someone) To take revenge on someone 報復某人

205 (To stick/stand out like a sore thumb) Be very obviously different from the surrounding people or things [informal] 與周圍格格不入，顯得刺眼

206 A film about relationships, love, etc. that attracts mainly women [informal; humorous] (指主要吸引女性觀眾的) 愛情電影

207 Uneasy or cautious in new situations or with unfamiliar people 慢熱的

208 To seem to be (a specified quality or character) 帶給別人什麼樣的印象、

## 感覺

- 209 A person who likes to do things on their own without other people 孤僻的人, 不合群的人
- 210 To give all your attention to something 沉浸於
- 211 To be happy because you are doing what you like or can do best 適得其所; 得心應手; 如魚得水
- 212 To help someone get out of a bad situation 解救某人
- 213 To easily complete or win something [informal] 輕鬆完成; 輕鬆贏得
- 214 If someone is your rock, you feel that you can depend on them and that they will always support you. Rock 在這指的是可以依靠, 支持你的人
- 215 (At odds with someone/something) In disagreement 與某事不一致; 與某人不合
- 216 A woman's menstrual period [informal] 女子的月經
- 217 To walk into a room quickly, without being invited 闖入
- 218 To pretend to be unintelligent or unaware in order to deceive someone or gain an advantage 裝聾作啞; 裝傻
- 219 (To drive someone nuts) To make someone feel irritated, annoyed, or angry [informal] 令(某人)惱火或感到厭煩
- 220 (To tell on someone) To give information about someone, usually something bad that they have said or done, especially to a person in authority [informal] (尤指向當權者)告發(某人)
- 221 To tell the truth about something that you have been keeping secret 全盤招供; 和盤托出
- 222 To talk or complain about something many times 反覆談論; 不停抱怨
- 223 A way of losing body weight quickly by eating very little (透過節食的)快速減肥
- 224 Continuously or without any interruptions 連續地, 不間斷地
- 225 Something that seems to be a fast and easy solution to a problem but is in fact not very good or will not last long (不完善的)應急解決辦法, 權宜之計
- 226 Not operating correctly or looking right 出毛病的, 不正常的
- 227 To treat someone/something as being more important than anyone/anything

else 優先考慮...;認為...是最重要的

228 To go somewhere with a person or group, usually when they have not asked you to go with them [informal] (通常指未經邀請) 跟隨, 尾隨

229 Used to tell someone forcefully and quite rudely to go away [informal] 滾開!

230 (To leave someone be) To not worry someone, or to allow someone to continue what they are doing 別管(某人), 由(某人) 去吧

231 To annoy someone a lot 使(某人) 心煩

232 The stage at which someone is about to become very angry (人的憤怒情緒的) 爆發點

233 The physical punishment of people, especially of children, by hitting them (尤指對孩子的) 體罰

234 To suffer the bad effects of a situation 倒楣, 承受某情況的惡果

235 Most of the work involved in something; the most challenging part of a task [informal] (工作) 最主要的方面; (任務) 最困難的部分

236 (On top of something) In addition to something, especially something unpleasant 除(令人不快的事)之外, 而且

237 A right to have or get something from someone, or to use something [informal] 對...的所有權(或使用權)

238 Used to refer to the seat next to the driver in a car or other vehicle [informal] (車的) 副駕駛座位

239 To treat someone or something better than others because you like them more 厚此薄彼; 偏心

240 To become successful 有成就; 成功

241 To manage to live when you do not have enough money and other necessary things 勉強維持生計

242 (To find one's footing) To start to be comfortable in a new situation or to begin to be confident or successful 習慣於新環境; (在新的形勢下) 立足, 站穩腳跟

243 To be able to provide all of the things you need for living without help from anyone else [informal] 自立, 自食其力

- 244 Extremely tired 精疲力竭的
- 245 The remaining energy or resources in a situation 剩餘的精力或資源
- 246 (Especially of something boring) done or happening every day for a long period of time (尤指枯燥之事) 一天接一天, 日復一日
- 247 To give one credit or praise for something 給予某人榮譽或讚美
- 248 To have just enough money to pay for the things that you need 勉強維持生計
- 249 (Also side gig) A piece of work or a job that you get paid for doing in addition to doing your main job (主要工作之外的) 副業, 兼職
- 250 To be in a strong position when you are competing with someone else because you have all the advantages 處於優勢, 掌控局面
- 251 An unexpected event that has a damaging effect on someone or something 打擊; 不幸
- 252 (To top it (all) off) If you have been describing bad things that happened, and then say that to top it all something else happened, you mean that the final thing was even worse. 更糟的是
- 253 (To run on fumes/empty) To continue to work and be active when you have no energy left [informal] 勉強支撐 (雖筋疲力竭仍打起精神繼續工作並保持活躍)
- 254 (The last/final straw or the straw that breaks the camel's back) The last in a series of unpleasant events that finally makes you feel that you cannot continue to accept a bad situation (壓垮駱駝的) 最後一根稻草; 使人最終崩潰的一擊
- 255 To speak angrily to someone 嚴厲斥責 (某人)
- 256 If you rock the boat, you do or say something that will upset people or cause problems. [informal] 惹麻煩; 惹事; 搗亂
- 257 To attack someone or something verbally or physically in an angry way 斥責; 痛打
- 258 A person who accepts being treated badly and does not complain [informal] 逆來順受的人; 出氣筒
- 259 The most important facts about a situation and the effects of that situation on other things 最重要的部分; 全局

- 260 To live with limited or no savings 作為月光族(每個月把賺的錢花完)
- 261 To win or lose as a result of something you did in the past 種瓜得瓜, 種豆得豆; 善有善報, 惡有惡報
- 262 To remain positive and hopeful in a difficult situation 堅強振作, 保持樂觀
- 263 To start to suffer from an illness, especially one that is not serious 患上, 染上(尤指小病)
- 264 (When it comes to something/someone) Used to identify the specific topic that is being talked about 當談到某事(人)
- 265 (To fall short) To fail to meet an expectation or standard 未達到期待或要求
- 266 (To eke something out) To use something slowly or carefully because you only have a small amount of it 精打細算地維持; 儘量節約使用。Eke out a living 是指勉強維持生計
- 267 A small container, sometimes in the shape of a pig, that is used by children for saving money 儲蓄罐
- 268 Not having enough money [informal] 手頭緊的, 缺錢的
- 269 A system of paying for goods in small amounts and receiving the goods after the full amount has been paid, or goods bought in this way 分期累計付款(款清後取貨); 以分期累計付款方式購得的商品
- 270 An advantage that comes from a difficult or unpleasant situation (失望或不幸中的)一線希望(或一點慰藉)
- 271 A child who is at home without adult supervision for some part of the day, especially after school until a parent returns from work 鑰匙兒童
- 272 From a point at which nothing has been done ahead of time 從頭或從零開始
- 273 To heat or cook something in a microwave oven [informal] 用微波爐加熱或烹調
- 274 To stop working, often in a way that is very sudden and noticeable [informal] 故障, 出毛病
- 275 (To not bring yourself to do something) To not be able to force yourself to do something that you think is unpleasant 無法強迫自己做(不願做的事)



- 276 To give something to someone else, especially when you do not want to (尤指不情願地)放棄,捨棄
- 277 To cause a young man or boy to act like an adult and take responsibility 使(年輕人或男孩)具有男子氣概;使長大成人
- 278 To stop providing for someone financially 終止財務幫助
- 279 To change your opinion of something, often influenced by another person's opinion (常指在別人意見的影響下)想通,改變心態,改變觀點
- 280 Your family or relatives 自己的骨肉;自己的親人或親戚
- 281 Someone who other people help out of pity [informal] 被人同情才得到幫助的人
- 282 A place where many different people and ideas mix and coexist together 大熔爐(很多不同的人及思想共存、融合的地方)
- 283 When something unpleasant sets in, it begins and seems likely to continue in a serious way. (不好的事)到來,開始(而且可能會持續)
- 284 Someone who is extremely nervous and worried [informal] 焦躁,緊張不安的人
- 285 When your number is up, you are going to die. [informal] (某人)氣數已盡,死到臨頭
- 286 Not surprised or worried [informal] 不吃驚的;不擔憂的;泰然自若的
- 287 Something that fails completely or goes extremely badly 完全失敗;極為糟糕
- 288 (To wash over someone) To affect someone strongly and suddenly, often with a particular emotion or feeling 衝擊;感動
- 289 If you say there is an elephant in the room, you mean that there is an obvious problem or difficult situation that people do not want to talk about. [informal] (人們不願提及的)棘手問題
- 290 In reality; actually 事實上
- 291 Not as good as people say [informal] 並沒有所說的那麼好
- 292 New York City [informal] 紐約市
- 293 Noise and activity 喧鬧嘈雜
- 294 Extremely good [informal] 極好的

- 295 If an event is in full swing, it has already been happening for a period of time, and there is a lot of activity. (事件)正在進行中,處於活躍狀態
- 296 (To get something in) To fit an activity into a busy schedule or before a deadline 抽空或安排時間做某事
- 297 To do something too much, or to be too excited or eager about something [informal] 做得過頭;過分激動;過分熱衷
- 298 To say something that you should not have said 說不該說的話
- 299 To notice something that other people have not noticed 注意到(他人未注意到的事物)
- 300 Narrow lines around the outside corners of your eyes 魚尾紋
- 301 (A token friend) A person included in a group or social circle primarily to fulfill a diversity quota or to give the appearance of inclusivity, rather than being genuinely valued for their friendship or contributions 一個主要是為了滿足多元化配額或給人一種包容性的外觀而加入群體或社交圈的人,而不是真正因為他們的友誼或貢獻而受到珍惜的人
- 302 A Jewish celebration in March or April every year to remember the escape of the Jews from Egypt (猶太人的)逾越節
- 303 Used to describe the best person, thing, or place for a particular purpose or need (為解決某個問題或做某件事情的)必找的(人);(為找到某件物品或服務的)必去的(地方)
- 304 (of food or places where food is sold, etc.) Prepared or kept in conditions that follow the rules of Jewish law (食物、售賣食物之處等)符合猶太教規的
- 305 A type of thin, flat bread, made especially in Jewish cooking and eaten especially during Passover 一種未發酵過的猶太麵餅,由水和麵粉混製而成,根據猶太人的傳統,在逾越節當天不能吃任何發酵過的食物
- 306 A prayer said by Christians before a meal to thank God for the food (基督徒的)飯前感恩禱告
- 307 Doing something because someone has challenged or dared you to do it 因為受到激將而做某事
- 308 To stay somewhere for a period of time 逗留,停留
- 309 A person who works in a restaurant removing dirty dishes and bringing clean

ones (尤指負責收餐具等的) 餐館雜工

310 (To be under someone's spell) To be strongly attracted to someone and influenced by them 被(某人)迷住, 爲(某人)著迷

311 In a particular person's opinion 在...看來, 就...而言

312 If talking to someone is like talking to a brick wall, the person you are speaking to does not listen. 對牛彈琴

313 To explain something in a very clear way with details 解釋清楚; 詳細地說明

314 To have a particular talent for dealing with or ability in 善于處理; 有辦法

315 To tell someone all about yourself, especially your problems [informal] 傾訴 (尤指遭遇的問題)

316 To behave in a way that makes people believe that you have a particular characteristic 表現得, 讓人覺得, 給人以...印象

317 Someone or something that is new and different and makes everything seem more exciting 令人耳目一新的人或物

318 To suddenly have strong romantic feelings about someone 對...傾心; 迷戀...

319 Used to express the fact that not all people have the same opinions about what is attractive [saying] 情人眼裡出西施

320 Used to say that everyone likes different things 青菜蘿蔔各有所好

321 To sleep until later in the morning than you usually do [informal] 睡懶覺

322 (To blow someone away) To surprise or please someone very much [informal] 使...大為驚訝; 令...非常高興

323 If something resonates with you, it makes you feel an emotional connection. 使產生聯想; 引起共鳴

324 Being something that helps produce or influence a result (對結果) 在起作用

325 (Head over heels (in love)) Completely in love 墜入愛河

326 (In a film, etc.) A humorous or interesting situation in which two people meet that leads to them developing a romantic relationship with each other (浪漫喜劇中主角之間的) 美麗邂逅

327 A short period of enjoyment [informal] 短暫的歡樂時光

- 328 To gradually end, often disappointingly or weakly 逐漸終止, 有始無終
- 329 To get married [informal] 結婚
- 330 A large amount or number of something 相當多, 大量
- 331 (To make a pass at someone) To speak to or touch someone in a way that shows you would like to start a sexual relationship with them [informal] 與(某人)調情; 勾引(某人)
- 332 To find a romantic partner for someone [informal] 為...介紹(男友或女友)
- 333 To reveal a lot of information about something; to show something very clearly 透露了很多; 清楚地表明
- 334 To tease or make fun of in a playful or good-natured way (非惡意地) 取笑
- 335 To have someone in a situation where you have complete power over them [offensive] 完全控制(某人)
- 336 (To eat out of someone's hand) To be completely controlled by someone 完全順從某人
- 337 A term usually applied to white males who have a clear sexual preference for women of Asian descent, although it can also be used in reference to white females who prefer Asian men [slang; offensive] 這個措詞通常用來指白人尤其對亞洲人有興趣的現象 [容易冒犯人的俚語, 使用時請注意]
- 338 (Up for something) Intended, suggested, or being considered for something 計劃要; 被建議; 正被考慮
- 339 Used to emphasize rudely that you are not interested in or worried about something or someone [informal] (表示強調) 我一點也不在乎
- 340 (A hole in a wall) A small, often unpleasant, shop, house, or restaurant 小商店; 小餐館; 狹小的房子
- 341 A tiny house, room, etc. 狹小的房子或房間
- 342 (To give (someone) a run for his/her/their money) To make it difficult for someone to win 給競爭對手構成威脅或挑戰
- 343 To sleep at someone else's house for the night, especially when you have not planned it [informal] (尤指事先無計劃而留在別人家裡) 過夜
- 344 If you take someone under your wing, you start to protect and take care of them. 呵護(某人); 庇護(某人)

- 345 To be extremely important to someone 是(某人)的一切;對(某人)來說非常重要
- 346 The area in front of the stage at a rock concert where energetic and rough dancing takes place (舞臺前、觀眾可狂舞的)搖滾舞池
- 347 To cook food and have drinks out of the back of your car in the car park before going in to watch a game 在觀看比賽前在停車場打開後車蓋煮食暢飲
- 348 To swim while naked [informal] 裸泳
- 349 Used to say there are many things to choose from 凡是你說得出的;應有盡有
- 350 To throw smooth flat stones into a lake, river, etc. in a way that makes them jump across the surface 打水漂 (向水面投擲瓦片或石片等,使其在水面上跳躍前進)
- 351 A game where a group of people sitting in a circle take turns to spin a bottle placed in the center of the group, and whoever spins the bottle must kiss the person whom the bottle points to 轉瓶選擇接吻對象的遊戲
- 352 If someone or something makes your skin crawl, you think it is very unpleasant or frightening. (因令人不快或恐懼而)使人起雞皮疙瘩
- 353 It is enough to say 無需多說,只需說...就夠了
- 354 To like very much 非常喜歡
- 355 The particular clothing, especially when strange or unusual, that someone is wearing [informal] 奇特的服裝
- 356 To be or become confused or perplexed/To think hard about something 感到不解;埋頭苦思
- 357 To happen [slang] 發生
- 358 A toilet prank, whereby someone defecates in the refill tank (water closet), causing each additional flush to deliver brown, poopy water into the bowl 馬桶惡作劇 (在馬桶補充水箱中排便,導致沖洗都會將棕色的便便水送入馬桶)
- 359 The act of ingesting alcohol through one's rectum to increase the alcohol's effect and the speed with which one becomes intoxicated 把酒灌入直腸來加速喝醉的速度

360 Said to emphasize that people should not be surprised when boys or men act roughly or noisily because this is part of the male character 男孩子就是這樣; 男人總歸是男人

361 In a quick and careless way without any thought about the future [informal] 好像沒有將來似的; 不顧一切地

362 To cook or prepare food or drink [informal] 做(飯); 準備(食物或飲料)

363 To give some money when several people are giving money to pay for something together 共同支付; 湊錢

364 (of a person) Having eaten enough or too much [informal] (人)吃飽的, 吃撐的

365 Willing to do things that are new, difficult, or that involve risks 願意嘗試的; 有冒險精神的

366 To learn a new skill or language by practicing it rather than being taught it (透過練習而)學會

367 Knowing a lot about something 精通的; 熟知的

368 To be or become aware of the opinions and attitudes of a group of people that you are talking to 會看狀況和臉色

369 Intelligence [informal] 智力, 智慧

370 (To be a hit with someone) If you are a hit with someone, that person likes you a lot from the time that they first meet you. [informal] 給(某人)留下很好的第一印象

371 If you do something without fail, you always do it. 總是; 必定

372 (To look out for someone) To take care of somebody and make sure nothing bad happens to them 關心某人, 確保他們不受傷害

373 An idea or plan that is impossible or very unlikely to happen 白日夢, 妄想; 行不通的計劃

374 To wait calmly for a good opportunity to do something 靜候時機

375 To go to a place 去(某處)

376 (To blow someone's cover) To make known secret information about who someone is and what they are doing 暴露...的身份; 揭發...的秘密活動

377 Something that goes up in smoke fails to produce the desired result. 泡湯

了，未達到預期的效果，化為泡影

378 A product that has a very low price, or a price that is much lower than the original cost [informal] 便宜的物品；低價

379 To treat someone in a bad, rude, or annoying way, or to start an argument with someone 打擾(某人)，招惹(某人)

380 To learn/know how to do a job or activity 學習做事的訣竅

381 If a problem or responsibility weighs on you, it makes you worried or unhappy. (問題、責任等)使(某人)焦慮不安或擔憂

382 (To bring something to the table) To provide something that will be a benefit 提出一些有益於他人或激發討論的建議，或提供有助於他人的特殊技能

383 To have responsibility for something while someone is absent [humorous] 暫時負責，代管

384 (On top of something) To be able to control a situation or deal with it [informal] 能控制；能應對

385 (To turn something around) To change an unsuccessful business, plan, or system so that it becomes successful 使(企業、計劃或體系)好轉，使有起色

386 If you say you have (got) to hand it to someone, you admire the person for their skills or achievements and think they deserve a lot of praise. 不得不佩服(某人)

387 Officially controlling an organization or company 負責，掌管

388 If a situation turns the corner, it improves after a difficult period. 境況好轉

389 To continue to exist during a difficult situation and until it ends without serious harm 安然渡過(難關)

390 If a company goes under or goes down the tubes, it is unsuccessful and has to stop doing business. [informal] (公司)倒閉

391 To stop employing someone, usually because there is no work for them to do 解僱(某人)，解聘(某人)

392 To defeat someone in a competition, sport, or business 戰勝或打敗

393 In a sound and stable condition 保持穩定的狀態

394 To do everything you can to achieve a good result, especially when looking for something (尤指尋找東西時)竭盡全力，不遺餘力

- 395 To just be able to manage, especially when you have financial difficulties (尤指財務上)勉強應付過去,慘淡經營
- 396 (To double down on something) To continue to do something in an even more determined way than before 大舉增加賭注、投資或承諾
- 397 Courage and confidence 膽量;信心
- 398 To admire and respect someone 敬仰,敬重
- 399 To be young and without experience 乳臭未乾的,無經驗的
- 400 If you “give someone a shot”, you give them an opportunity, even though you are not sure of success. 給某人機會
- 401 To speak in an honest and direct way without trying to be kind 直言不諱
- 402 Refers to the quickening of one’s heartbeat or a sudden jolt or shock 心跳加速;心頭一震
- 403 (To do oneself justice) To do something as well as you can in order to show your true qualities and ability 充分發揮自己的能力
- 404 (To have the edge over/on someone) To have a slight advantage or superiority over 比...人有優勢
- 405 Used to say that someone should help or give something to another person in return for the help provided 欠你個人情
- 406 (That said; having said that; even so) Despite what has just been said 儘管如此,話說回來
- 407 If you jump or are thrown in at the deep end, you start doing something new and difficult without help or preparation. 獨自應付難題;陷入未曾料到的艱難處境
- 408 To be at risk 面臨危險,處於危險之中
- 409 To improve one’s performance or the quality of one’s work 努力改善表現
- 410 (To bite off more than one can chew) To undertake more than one can handle [informal] 承擔力所不及的事;不自量力
- 411 To be careful not to do something too quickly, so that you do not get too tired to finish it 控制自己的速度;調整自己的工作(或活動)節奏
- 412 (To be on good, friendly terms with someone) To have a good, friendly relationship with someone (與某人)關係好,關係友好



- 413 An amount of money that is paid to someone illegally in exchange for secret help or work (不合法的) 回扣, 酬金
- 414 Someone almost as important as the person in charge 副手; 二當家
- 415 To happen or become available in the future 即將到來或發生
- 416 To be the leader, who is in control of a group of people doing something [informal] 主管一切
- 417 If you walk/tread a tightrope, you have to deal with a difficult situation, especially when deciding between two opposing plans of action. (尤指因進退兩難而) 處境危險
- 418 To become involved in an argument or discussion in a forceful way 積極參與 (辯論或討論)
- 419 (To breathe down someone's neck) To stay close to someone, watching everything that they do [disapproving] 緊緊盯住...; 監視...
- 420 To say things that make someone else seem silly or wrong 駁倒(某人)
- 421 Not able to decide something 猶豫無法決定
- 422 To acquire or assume a particular quality or characteristic 開始具有(某種特徵); 呈現
- 423 The last moment or almost too late 最後一刻, 最後時刻
- 424 Through a series of very difficult or unpleasant experiences 使飽受折磨, 使經受考驗
- 425 To motivate others; to urge people to work harder 鼓舞人心; 督促大家更加努力
- 426 If you say that someone talks the talk but does not walk the walk, you mean that they do not act in a way that agrees with the things they say. 說一套, 做一套
- 427 (To put someone out to pasture) To stop someone working in a job because they are too old to be useful [informal] (因某人年紀過大而) 使(某人) 離職或退休
- 428 When someone is getting at something, they mean it or are trying to express it. [informal] 暗示; 意指; 試圖說明
- 429 (To be on the same page) To have the same ideas as someone else 意見一致

- 430 Calm and able to deal easily with difficult situations 鎮定的, 冷靜的, 沈穩的
- 431 Abbreviation for bullshit 胡說, 屁話 (bullshit的縮寫)
- 432 To act as if you have a lot of power or authority [disapproving] 耀武揚威, 作威作福
- 433 Official rules and processes that seem unnecessary and delay results 繁文縟節; 官僚作風; 拖拉費時的繁瑣手續
- 434 To reduce unnecessary spending [informal] 減少不必要的花費
- 435 In an honest way and without any doubt 光明正大地
- 436 Dishonest activities intended to harm someone you are competing against 非正當手段
- 437 A person who gets an advantage without paying for it or earning it 不付出卻可得好處的人
- 438 Someone who behaves in an uncontrolled or unexpected way and is likely to cause problems for other people 喜歡惹是生非的人, 愛招惹麻煩的人; 舉止無法預料的人
- 439 To consider someone to be liable or responsible for something 使某人對...負責
- 440 A member of a large organization whose job, although necessary, makes them feel as if they are not important (大機構中的) 小職員; 不可或缺但無足輕重的人, 小人物
- 441 To make a special effort to achieve something 付出比別人期望中還要大的努力
- 442 To leave a company or organization in order to work for another, especially in order to get a higher salary or better working conditions [informal] 跳槽
- 443 To be firm and determined in order to get what you want 採取強硬方式
- 444 To refuse to be pushed backward or to continue in your beliefs in an argument 堅守陣地; 堅持立場, 不讓步
- 445 To comply with a certain course of action; to follow the rules and behave according to expected standards of behavior. 遵守方針; 守紀律
- 446 (To think on their feet) To make a quick decision or give an answer quickly

## 思維敏捷

447 To work very hard 勤奮地工作

448 To behave in a way that gives you an advantage or allows you to succeed at something 辦事高明，處理得當

449 To not accept something because you do not think it is good enough for you 嗤之以鼻；瞧不起

450 To cause surprise or shock 令人吃驚或震驚

451 Used to describe the best or highest quality individuals or things within a particular group or category 做好的部分；精英

452 All-inclusive or comprehensive [informal] 一應俱全

453 To work late into the night 工作到深夜；熬夜工作

454 The feelings of intense anxiety and dread that routinely occur every Sunday 出現在星期天的焦慮感

455 To meet and spend time with someone [informal] (與某人)接觸；(與某人)往來

456 To be successful in the work that you do 取得進展；獲得成功

457 An ability to not be upset by unpleasant things 強大的心理素質；堅強的意志

458 Used to say that two things are completely different and it is not sensible to compare them 兩個無法比較的東西

459 (To pass something/someone over) To ignore or not give attention to someone or something 忽略，對...不予考慮

460 (To throw a fit/tantrum) To experience and show a strong feeling of anger, especially suddenly 大發脾氣

461 If you are in a situation and you burn your boats/bridges, you destroy all possible ways of returning to that situation. 自斷退路

462 If something comes back to bite you, it will become a bigger problem in the future because you have not dealt with it. 得到報應；遭到反噬

463 If something gets to you, it makes you suffer. [informal] 使(某人)難受；使(某人)不舒服

464 To show no sign of surprise or worry when something unexpected happens

眼睛都不眨一下；面不改容

465 (On (a) par with) The same as or equal to someone or something 和...同樣，不相上下，不相伯仲

466 To get fired 被解僱

467 To behave in a way that is unacceptable or not expected 舉止出軌，行為欠妥

468 (To run a company or rule a country with a iron fist) To control a group of people very firmly, having complete power over everything they do 以鐵腕手段控制

469 To control a business or other organization firmly and effectively 有效地嚴格管理

470 Behaving as if you are more important than you really are [informal] 自以為是；擺架子

471 To tell or show someone that they are less important than they thought 使(某人)明白自己的位置；使(某人)有自知之明

472 Used to emphasize how surprised, angry, shocked, etc. you are (驚奇、憤怒或震驚時用於加強語氣) (我的)天哪！

473 Unwillingness to get involved in or influence other people's activities 置之不理，不管不問，放任自流

474 To publicly support or approve of something without taking action to implement it 口頭上支持而不付諸行動

475 A lot of physical effort [informal] (體力上的) 重活；費勁，苦幹

476 A person who tries hard to please someone, especially someone in a position of authority, in a way that other people find unpleasant [informal] 馬屁精；To brown-nose [informal] 拍馬屁

477 The situation in which your job is taken away from you, usually because you have done something wrong or badly [informal] 解僱，開除(通常指因犯錯誤或表現差而失去工作)

478 (To subscribe to something) To agree with or support an opinion, belief, or theory 贊同，支持(觀點、信仰、理論等)

479 A particular way of thinking or a set of ideas or opinions that a group of

people share about a matter 思想流派或思潮

480 When things fall into place, they happen in a satisfactory way, without problems. 有條不紊地進行，按部就班

481 (To check up on someone) To try to discover what someone is doing in order to be certain that that person is doing what they should be doing 監督；督促

482 To finish reading, eating, or dealing with something with difficulty 費勁地做(某事)

483 To become familiar with and confident at something you have recently started doing 逐漸進入狀態；開始上軌道

484 (To have your (fair) share of something) To have a lot or more than enough of something bad 遭遇許多不幸或過多(壞事情)

485 No unusual; expected 稀鬆平常；預料之中

486 (In the works; in the pipeline) In the process of being planned or done [informal] 在籌備中；在進行中

487 To succeed in becoming familiar with a new situation 適應新情況(或新環境)

488 To give someone extra or missing information 向...提供(額外或漏聽的資訊)

489 (To flesh something out) To add more details or information to something 以細節(或資訊)使其更豐富

490 To do something kind or helpful for someone [informal] 幫某人忙

491 To ask someone who knows a lot about a subject for information or their opinion 請教某人或請此人幫忙回答、解決一個問題

492 To quickly or abruptly change what one is doing or discussing 突然轉換活動或話題

493 Something that you say in order to ask someone to explain what they have been doing or what they are planning to do 一種詢問對方做了什麼或計畫做什麼的說法

494 Used when you do not tell all the details 長話短說

495 To have a romantic relationship with someone 和...談戀愛

496 A friend who helps you with dating or social outings (尤指在社交場合中

幫助你吸引他人的)朋友

497 To go out drinking, dancing, etc. 喝酒, 跳舞, 吃飯獲得歡樂

498 Various things of different types, usually small and not important, or of little value [informal] 零碎東西, 零星雜物

499 Far from places where many people live or usually go 偏僻的

500 If you put someone on the spot, you cause them embarrassment or difficulty by forcing them at that moment to answer a difficult question or make an important decision. 讓(某人)難堪; 使(某人)為難

501 To perform or speak without having prepared what you are going to do or say [informal] 即席做; 即席發言

502 Someone with a more important position in an organization [informal] (機構中的)高層人物

503 To give someone information or a warning about something that will happen 提醒或警告某人某事即將發生

504 To speak in public without having planned what to say 即興演講, 即興發言

505 To surprise someone by doing something that they are not expecting or ready for 使(某人)措手不及; 趁(某人)不警惕時(做某事)

506 To be disturbed or distracted 受干擾

507 To be forgotten 被(某人)忘記

508 To rise to a very high level 飛漲; 激增

509 (To chalk it up to something; to chalk a result up to its cause) To explain something by stating its cause 把...歸因於

510 A feeling of nervousness that you experience before something important happens [informal] (通常指在重要事情發生前的)極度緊張; 忐忑

511 (To shoot up) To grow in size, or increase in number or level, very quickly [informal] 迅速長大; 急速增加; 快速提高

512 A decoration for the head, like a small hat that some women wear at formal events such as weddings 女性在一些正式場合, 如婚禮, 配戴的一種像帽子的華麗頭飾

513 In the wrong place or looking wrong 錯位, 不協調

- 514 If you say something tongue in cheek, you intend it to be understood as a joke, although you might appear to be serious. 開玩笑地; 說著玩地。Tongue-in-cheek (開玩笑的; 說著玩的) 為其形容詞
- 515 To be emotionally carried away or deeply influenced by something or someone 沈浸其中; 被某人深深影響
- 516 To develop in a particular way or in a successful way[informal] 以某種方式發展; 進展順利
- 517 Available to be used by someone 可供某人使用
- 518 Because of 因為, 由於
- 519 If you can't hold your drink, alcohol quickly affects you badly. 酒量小
- 520 To eat some food in preparation for a drinking session [informal] 喝酒前吃東西墊肚子
- 521 Very drunk [informal] 爛醉的
- 522 (To be cut from the same cloth) To have very similar qualities to someone or something else 非常相似, 在相貌、性格或興趣上有很多相同之處; 出自同一模子
- 523 To hold oneself back from taking action or revealing one's true feelings or thoughts 克制; 退縮
- 524 To begin a relationship badly or to make an unsuccessful start in something 出師不利
- 525 To ignore someone [informal] 對某人不加理睬
- 526 To be incompatible or unable to interact or coexist easily due to fundamental differences in personality, opinions, beliefs, etc. 水火不容; 不合
- 527 Worried or nervous [informal] 擔憂的; 緊張的
- 528 To decide not to do something you are expected to do, or not to meet someone you are expected to meet 拒絕某人; 放人鴿子
- 529 (of things) In bad condition [informal] (東西) 用壞了的, 破爛的
- 530 An unpleasant or painful situation or person that you have to accept and deal with, although you find it very difficult 煩惱; 沈重(心理)負擔
- 531 If a vehicle pulls over, it moves to the side of the road and stops. (車輛) 駛到路邊

- 532 To abandon a person or thing 拋棄某人/某事物; 放某人鴿子
- 533 To have a very high opinion of someone or something 對(某人或某事)評價高
- 534 To deal with the problems or needs of a person or thing 照料, 照顧; 關心
- 535 Feelings of hate between people because of arguments in the past 感情不和; 嫌隙, 仇恨
- 536 (To take something out on someone) To mistreat someone because you are upset or angry, even if they have done nothing wrong 向(某人)發泄, 拿(某人)出氣
- 537 To make yourself stop feeling kind or friendly toward someone 硬起心腸
- 538 (To drive a wedge between person or group A and B) To damage the good relationship that two people or groups of people have 使A和B之間的關係惡化
- 539 A person who is not willing to work, does not behave responsibly, and does not fit into ordinary society [informal] 遊手好閒的人; 不負責任的人
- 540 (To sponge off someone) To get money, food, etc. from other people, especially in order to live without working 白吃, 白要; (尤指)吃白飯
- 541 To be able to live or deal with a situation with difficulty, usually by having just enough of something you need, such as money 勉強過活, 勉強應付的過去
- 542 To start something with difficulties, problems, or challenges 起步不順利
- 543 To share your feelings, such as things that worry you 傾訴(分享擔憂或內心感受)
- 544 (To take someone up on something) To accept an offer that someone has made 接受(某人提出的邀請或提議)
- 545 If two people are an item, they have a romantic relationship. [informal] 有戀愛關係
- 546 Suddenly and abruptly 突然地
- 547 Used to refer to someone who has died 已故的, 已去世的
- 548 To continue to the end of a difficult or unpleasant situation 堅持到底; 忍受下去, 挺住
- 549 To gradually accept a sad situation, often the death of someone you love 逐漸接受(常指所愛之人的死)



- 550 (To rally around (someone)) To help or support someone 幫助, 扶持; 支持
- 551 (To let someone in) To talk to someone about your problems and feelings [informal] 讓人幫你分擔心事
- 552 In the most active or dangerous part of a particular situation or activity 在... 的最激烈時, 在... 的最危險時刻
- 553 When a situation plays out, it happens and develops. 發生; 發展
- 554 If you come out of your shell, you become more interested in other people and more willing to talk and take part in social activities. (使)變得不再自閉, (使)融入外面世界
- 555 If an idea, belief, or system takes root, it starts to be accepted. 深入人心; 被牢固樹立; 生根
- 556 To become better [informal] 改善, 好轉
- 557 Someone or something whose behavior is sometimes unexpected 無法預測的人或事物
- 558 An act of believing in or attempting something whose existence or outcome cannot be proved 相信或嘗試某件無法證明其存在或結果的事物的行為
- 559 To agree to stop what you are doing [informal] 停止做
- 560 To get married [informal] 結婚
- 561 To start living in the same house as sexual partners, without being married [informal] 未婚同居
- 562 Pregnant 懷孕的
- 563 A marriage that is arranged very quickly and suddenly because the woman is pregnant 奉子成婚
- 564 To suddenly become too frightened to do something you had planned to do, especially something important such as getting married (尤指面對結婚等重要事情時) 突然退縮或猶豫
- 565 If you have mixed feelings about something, you feel both pleased and not pleased about it at the same time. 互相矛盾的感情, 喜憂參半
- 566 To have your first child 生第一胎
- 567 To limit someone's freedom 限制, 束縛(某人)
- 568 To allow another person or group to have power or authority over you, or to

accept something unwillingly 順從，屈服；不得以接受

569 If you do or achieve something against (all) the odds/against all odds, you do or achieve it although there were a lot of problems and you were not likely to succeed. 儘管困難重重；在極為不利的情況下

570 To put all your energy or enthusiasm into what you are doing 全力以赴，竭盡全力

571 To make a mistake, especially by doing something stupidly or carelessly (尤指由於愚蠢或粗心) 犯錯誤

572 Under the situations where everyone has an equal chance 在平等的情形下；平起平坐

573 To forget about an important idea or fact because you are thinking too much about other things 忘記，忽略

574 To take care of or be in charge of someone or something 照顧或負責(某人或某事物)

575 To work at an extra job, especially without telling your main employer (尤指未告知主要僱主) 從事兼職工作

576 (To wear someone down) To make someone feel tired and less able to deal successfully with a situation 使(某人)精疲力竭；磨垮(某人)

577 Not possible or not allowed 不可能；不被允許

578 To continue doing something although it is difficult 堅持下去

579 The opinion or reputation that someone or something has 名譽或聲譽

580 (To stick up for someone or something) To defend or support a particular idea or a person who is being criticized or attacked [informal] 支持，維護(想法、遭受指責或攻擊的人)

581 To feel awkward because you are in a situation that you have not experienced before or because you are very different from the people around you 在陌生環境感到不自在

582 Said when you feel that someone has made a bad situation worse by doing something else to upset you 雪上加霜；往傷口上撒鹽

583 To be ready to protect or defend someone [informal] 隨時準備好保護(某人)

- 584 Upset or very excited about something 生氣或激動的
- 585 (of a relationship or enterprise) Likely to fail soon [informal] (關係)岌岌可危; (企業)瀕臨失敗
- 586 To deal with a difficult period or situation without becoming any less certain or determined in your plans or opinions [informal] 度過(難關), 從(困境)中挺過來
- 587 To have complete control over someone 把某人吃死死的
- 588 If a serious situation hangs by a thread, it means that even a slight change can decide what will happen and that a bad result, such as death, failure, etc., is likely. 千鈞一髮, 岌岌可危, 危在旦夕
- 589 Different things appeal to different people 每人喜好不同
- 590 To prevent or restrict the progress or development of someone or something 阻礙...的發展
- 591 (To wear something away) To become thin and disappear after repeated use or rubbing, or to cause something to become thin and disappear in this way (使)磨損, 磨掉
- 592 To continue or persist with something until it is completed or fully executed, despite challenges or obstacles (把事情)堅持到底, 執行到底
- 593 To fail to find or produce what is needed or desired 不成功, 一無所獲
- 594 If a vehicle pulls off or pulls away, it starts moving. (車輛)開動
- 595 Because of a sudden decision 因為突然的念頭, 衝動地
- 596 To make your feelings and emotions obvious rather than hiding them 流露(自己的)情感
- 597 Avoiding being recognized by changing your name or appearance 隱姓埋名地, 隱藏身分地
- 598 To avoid attracting attention to yourself 不張揚; 低調處理
- 599 (To keep at something) To continue doing something or trying to do something 堅持做某事
- 600 To do or say something that helps you to get rid of strong feelings or energy 發洩怒氣; 宣洩感情; 釋放精力
- 601 A cup of coffee 一杯咖啡

- 602 To begin to do something or deal with something 著手做;開始做
- 603 Not in keeping with someone's usual pattern of behavior and motives 不符合某人一貫的性格
- 604 Relaxed 不拘束的;放鬆的
- 605 To like someone and become friendly immediately (與某人)相處得好;一見如故
- 606 Immediately 立刻,馬上
- 607 The strange feeling that in some way you have already experienced what is happening now 似曾經歷過的感覺;似曾相識的感覺
- 608 (To tickle someone's funny bone) To make someone laugh; to be humorous to someone 逗人笑
- 609 Uncontrolled laughter [informal] 狂笑
- 610 For hours, days, etc. without stopping 連續數小時,幾天(等等)
- 611 (To wear thin) If something such as a joke wears thin, it becomes boring or annoying or stops being funny or effective because it has been seen, heard, or used too much. [informal] (因出現太多而)失去吸引力(或趣味),不再有效。If your patience wears thin, you become less and less patient. [informal] 逐漸失去耐性
- 612 To do something without worrying about the risk or negative results 不顧風險,魯莽行事
- 613 To make someone feel guilty 使...良心不安,使...覺得內疚
- 614 An action that insults or upsets someone [informal] 一記耳光;侮辱;打擊
- 615 To have to do a lot of things that seem difficult or unnecessary in order to achieve something [informal] 克服種種障礙
- 616 (To never live something down) To be unable to stop feeling embarrassed about something you have done 對...感到尷尬不已,一直對...感到難堪
- 617 If you do something to your heart's content, you do something enjoyable for as long as you want to do it. 盡興地,盡情地
- 618 To discuss or argue about unpleasant or private things in front of other people 家醜外揚
- 619 To tell someone your secret thoughts and feelings 打開心扉;傾吐心聲

- 620 To behave as if a problem is not important or does not worry you 強裝勇敢; 裝作不在乎
- 621 To see only the pleasant things about a situation and not notice the things that are unpleasant 只看到事物好的方面; 過於樂觀地看待問題
- 622 Happy for the rest of your life, especially in a romantic relationship 永遠幸福
- 623 Used to describe men and women who seem to have it all 人生勝利組
- 624 To feel a lot of pleasure, love, etc. because of something or someone 為...神魂顛倒
- 625 To have a heart of gold means to be very kind and generous. 寬容體貼大方的
- 626 To feel that you like someone very much 鍾情於(某人), 十分喜愛(某人)
- 627 (To press/push someone's buttons) To cause a strong reaction or emotion in someone [informal] 踩(某人的)雷
- 628 If someone has a sweet tooth, someone likes eating sweet foods. 嗜甜, 對甜食喜愛
- 629 To watch several episodes of a television series or program, one after another 連續觀看電視節目, 追劇
- 630 (of entertainment) Not complicated or demanding much intelligence to be understood [mainly disapproving] (娛樂消遣) 膚淺的, 庸俗的
- 631 To seem much less serious or important when compared with someone or something else 相形見绌; 比不上
- 632 To make food or a meal very quickly and easily [informal] 迅速做出一頓飯或一道菜
- 633 In a hurry and often without preparation 匆忙且經常未經準備
- 634 Using power or authority more forcefully than is needed, without thinking about the feelings or wishes of other people 高壓的; 專橫的
- 635 (To keep someone in line/check) If you keep someone in check or in line, you make them obey you, or you make them behave in the way you want them to. 讓某人服從或在你的掌控之下
- 636 To be as good as what was expected or promised 與(預期或承諾的效果)

一樣好

637 (To stem from something) To start or develop as the result of something 源自...; 由...造成

638 (To be in the dark) To not know about something that other people know about 蒙在鼓裡, 渾然不知

639 To be as good as something 與...一樣好

640 To work exceptionally hard 拼勁全力或很努力

641 At the highest level of the exceptional levels of achievement in a person's studies at a US college or university (源自拉丁語: 美國大學的) 最優等的

642 To win everything that is available 囊括全部獎項, 大獲全勝

643 To tell someone what to do in a rude or threatening way [informal; disapproving] 對(某人)粗暴地發號施令, 擺布(某人)

644 (To do someone a disservice) To do something that harms (someone) 做對某人有害的事。 (To do someone a service) To do something that helps (someone) 幫某人

645 An argument [informal] 爭吵

646 Friendly enough to talk 友善到可以對談

647 To take actions to correct or compensate for a mistake or wrongdoing, especially in a way that repairs a relationship or restores harmony. 採取行動來修正或彌補錯誤或過失, 尤其是以改善關係或恢復和諧的方式

648 To be very stubborn 倔得像頭驢子, 非常固執

649 To believe that someone is perfect 把(某人)當作偶像; 把(某人)奉為完人

650 The basic facts about sex and how babies are produced [humorous] 性的基本知識

651 If something is said in passing, it is said while talking about something else and is not the main subject of a conversation. 順便, 附帶地

652 Committed, substantial, and significant 認真(交往)的

653 To ask someone to marry you 求婚

654 Used after a negative statement to emphasize how unlikely a situation is because something much more likely has never happened (用於否定句後表示

強調)當然不會,更不用說

655 To become involved in a difficult situation or argument in order to help find a solution 插手;介入;居中斡旋

656 Something said or given by a person to show that they want to be friendly, especially to someone they have argued with 示好的言詞;示好禮

657 To be the person, especially a woman, in a relationship who is in control and who makes decisions for both people (尤指女性)掌權當家,佔主導地位

658 (To stand one's ground) To refuse to be pushed backward or to continue in your beliefs in an argument 堅守立場;堅持不讓步

659 To stop an argument and become friends again 和好

660 To be ecstatically happy 非常高興

661 (To shove/force/ram something down someone's throat) To force someone to accept or like something, such as one's ideas or beliefs [informal] 強迫人家接受

662 Used to describe someone's opinions when that person has the same bad qualities as the person they are criticizing 荒謬的,可笑的

663 A child usually has a similar character or similar qualities to his or her parents 有其父(母)必有其子(女)

664 To try to improve a relationship after there have been problems 修補(關係),和解

665 To finally agree to what someone wants, after refusing for a period of time (先是拒絕,後來)勉強同意,讓步

666 If you hit the right note, you say or do something that is exactly appropriate for a particular situation. 言行得體;說話做事恰到好处

667 To feel very nervous, usually about something you are going to do [informal] (通常指對將要做的事)感到非常緊張,覺得很心慌

668 Immediately from the start [informal] 立即

669 To surprise or shock someone so much that they do not know how to behave for a short time 使(某人)大吃一驚

670 To begin to sound 發出聲響

671 A person who thinks that a particular type of behavior is essential, and

always follows it or tries to make other people follow it 非常注重(某種行為)的人;固守(某種行為)的人

672 To discover exact details about something 清楚地知道;確認

673 (To have someone's best interest at heart; to act in someone's best interest)  
To do what is best for someone 為某人著想

674 (To be out of one's mind) Extremely stupid or crazy [informal] 犯傻的;發瘋的

675 (To eat one's words) To admit that something you said before was wrong 承認自己說錯了話

676 Someone with good qualities, who you can have a long relationship with [informal] 好的可以穩定交往的對象

677 An unpleasant person [very informal; offensive] 爛人

678 To be unable to remember a particular thing or to fail to get an answer or a result [informal] 記不起;未能答覆;毫無結果

679 A man who gives women a lot of attention and likes to be with them 給女人很多關注的男人;喜歡廝混在女人堆的男人

680 To behave in a loud, angry way in public 在公眾場合大吵大鬧

681 To talk to someone as if they are less intelligent or important than you 高高在上地對人說話

682 To get angry very easily 十分易怒

683 A flag used as a sign of danger (用作危險信號的) 示警紅旗

684 (To pay for something) To be punished for doing something bad to someone else, or to suffer because of a mistake that you made 為...付出代價, 因...得到報應

685 Something that you say when you tell someone about something that you are certain will happen in the future [old-fashioned] (告訴別人某事將來肯定會發生時用語) (你)記住我的話!

686 (Karma is a bitch; payback is a bitch) Something bad happens to you after you do something bad 惡有惡報

687 To expect something or depend on something happening 指望, 信賴; 依賴, 依靠



- 688 To fail to happen 未發生;失敗;落空
- 689 In a blunt and direct manner (用於強調時) 完全地, 直接地
- 690 To roffie someone means to secretly and illegally give someone a drug, usually in a drink, in order to make them unconscious or unable to function normally so that they can be made to have sex against their wishes or otherwise harmed [slang] (通過使用藥物, 使受害者無法反抗, 意圖迷姦) 下藥
- 691 To believe that something is true [informal] 相信
- 692 The less unpleasant of two choices, neither of which is good 兩害相權之輕者
- 693 Something that is thought to be unsuitable or unacceptable [informal] 不合適(或不可接受)的事物
- 694 To stop yourself from saying something that you would like to say 緘口不語;保持沉默
- 695 To gradually make someone love or trust you, especially by being dishonest 逐步贏得信任或好感(通常是透過不誠實手段)
- 696 In an unpleasant, unfortunate, disagreeable way 不愉快地, 掃興地, 令人討厭地
- 697 Something you say when the person you were talking about appears unexpectedly 說曹操, 曹操就到
- 698 To behave very well in order to gain someone's approval 給人留一個好印象
- 699 To present someone or something in a positive manner 以好的方式呈現
- 700 A person's ability to stay calm and not become angry or excited 冷靜, 沉著, 從容
- 701 Someone who deliberately tries to hear what will be said or see what will happen while not being noticed 暗中觀察或偷聽者
- 702 It suggests that the person or thing being referred to is genuine and transparent, and there are no hidden surprises or hidden agendas. (形容一個人的) 真實坦承; (形容事物) 一目了然
- 703 Someone very honest and careful to behave in a socially acceptable way 正直, 坦率, 合乎社會規範的人

- 704 Sometimes but not often 偶爾，有時
- 705 To play basketball 打籃球
- 706 (To live within your means) To spend less money than you receive as income  
量入為出地過生活
- 707 (To abide by something) To accept or obey an agreement, decision, or rule  
[formal] 遵守，遵循(協議、決定或規章)
- 708 If a group of people are close-knit, they all help and support each other. 關  
係緊密的
- 709 To move in a very awkward way when dancing(跳舞時)笨手笨腳，不協調
- 710 Something that a group of people continue to refer to and find funny over a  
period of time or a joke that is repeated many times(會被重覆拿出來說的)老  
笑話
- 711 Someone who can do many different jobs 萬事通，有多種技能的人
- 712 (At someone's expense; at the expense of someone) Making another person  
look silly 捉弄，戲弄；拿...來取笑
- 713 To not be noticed or dealt with by a system 不被注意，遭遺漏，被遺忘
- 714 A state of emotional volatility, moodiness, and uncertainty as to one's place  
in the world, typical of or associated with adolescence 少年的煩惱
- 715 If an activity or situation spills over, it begins to affect another situation or  
group of people, especially in an unpleasant or unwanted way. (尤指不良地)波  
及，擴散，影響
- 716 To assume control; to become dominant 掌控；主導
- 717 To begin to hold (onto something) less tightly 鬆開(緊握的東西)
- 718 To decide not to do something because you are too frightened [slang; disap-  
proving] (因恐懼而)退縮，放棄
- 719 Surprised or confused so much that one is unable to think of what to say or  
do next [informal] 使驚訝得不知所措
- 720 To be out of control and act in a wild or dangerous manner 肆無忌憚，失  
控，發狂
- 721 If something goes off the charts, it far exceeds the normal standard, good or  
bad, for something. 超出標準值

- 722 In and of itself is another way of saying “on its own” or “by its very nature”  
本身
- 723 To try very hard to do something, especially for someone else (特別是為他人) 非常努力地做
- 724 A card with someone’s name on it, put at the place at a table where they will sit, especially at a formal meal (就餐時的) 座位牌
- 725 The details of a matter are its most problematic aspect. 細節決定成敗
- 726 (To spare no effort/expense) To use a lot of effort, expense, etc. to do something 不遺餘力; 不惜成本
- 727 To exceed expectations or go the extra mile in terms of effort, dedication, or performance 超越期望
- 728 Used to say that something is not important or worth worrying about, especially when considering cost 不成問題; 不在話下
- 729 A problem that delays or interrupts something for a while but does not usually cause serious difficulties (造成短暫延誤或中斷的) 小問題
- 730 The person who takes care of the rings at a wedding ceremony (婚禮上的) 捧戒小童
- 731 At the last possible moment 在緊要關頭; 在最後一刻
- 732 To be old and in bad condition 已經破敗; 風光不再
- 733 Similar in type 類似於, 與... 近似
- 734 If you do something against the clock, you do it as fast as possible and try to finish it before a certain time. 搶時間, 爭分奪秒
- 735 To take the bride to the altar (在婚禮上) 將新娘交給 (新郎)
- 736 To be wearing fashionable or formal clothes for a special occasion [informal] 衣冠楚楚, 打扮入時
- 737 Relating to a very formal social occasion 需盛裝出席的
- 738 (To spruce someone/something up) To make someone or something cleaner and tidier or to improve his, her, or its appearance generally [informal] 把...收拾整潔; 打扮
- 739 Stylish, attractive, or pleasing [informal] 时髦的; 吸引人的; 令人愉快的
- 740 To take pleasure from something that makes you feel good 沉浸在...中

- 741 Excellent 傑出的, 一流的
- 742 Without preparation 未經準備; 未加思索; 即興地
- 743 To have a lot of force or a significant effect [informal] 有巨大作用(或影響)
- 744 To become unable to speak or almost begin to cry because of sadness or strong emotion 激動到無法言語或幾乎要哭出來
- 745 To be or feel ill [informal] 生病; 感覺不適
- 746 A bar or restaurant that serves food and drink at low prices (賣廉價飲食的) 酒吧(或餐館)
- 747 To suddenly begin to do something 突然開始做...
- 748 To happen successfully without any problems 順利進行
- 749 Extremely tired 筋疲力盡的
- 750 To start a journey or leave a place 出發; 離開
- 751 To prepare something, usually something official, in writing 起草; 擬定
- 752 To continue moving forward with determination, often in the face of challenges or difficulties 堅定地向前邁進, 繼續前行
- 753 To be pregnant 懷孕
- 754 Not happening or existing very often 不常發生; 稀少
- 755 If you kick ideas around, you talk about them informally. [informal] 隨便談一談, 非正式討論
- 756 (To go into something) To start an activity, or start to be in a particular state or condition 開始(從事某種活動); 開始進入(某種狀態)
- 757 To fail to happen 未發生; 失敗; 落空
- 758 A system in which you are rewarded for some actions and punished for others 賞罰分明
- 759 When a woman says her biological clock is ticking, she means that she is worried that she is getting too old to have a baby. 生理時鐘開始滴答作響(指女人擔心自己很快就會年紀太大無法生育)
- 760 (To get the better of someone) If a feeling gets the better of you, it overwhelms or controls you, causing you to act in ways you normally wouldn't if you were more rational. 情感勝過理智而做出平常不會做的事

- 761 (To let someone in on something) To allow (someone) to know (a secret) 向(某人)透露秘密
- 762 Said if you know who gave you the information being discussed but do not want to say who it was 無可奉告, 我不說
- 763 (To have or get a bun in the oven) To be pregnant [old-fashioned; humorous] 懷孕(舊式幽默用語)
- 764 Can't do something to save your life is said to mean that you are terrible at doing something [informal] 完全做不好; 無論如何也做不到
- 765 (To let something/someone slide) To not do anything about something or someone when you should try to change or correct that thing or person 放任不管, 不加處理
- 766 To be very pleased 非常高興, 非常快活
- 767 Problems that someone has had in the past that they do not worry about because they happened a long time ago and cannot now be changed 已成往事, 無法改變的事實
- 768 An innocent or naive facial expression 無辜裝可憐的臉
- 769 (To have someone wrapped around one's (little) finger; to have someone by the short hairs) To have complete control, dominance, or mastery over somebody 把某人吃死死的
- 770 Something that trips/rolls off the tongue is easy to say or pronounce. 很容易說出(或發音)
- 771 To try to persuade people to believe things that they already believe 勸別人相信他們已經相信的東西
- 772 (Set/carved/etched/written in stone) Permanent; not able to be changed 已確定; 成定局; 不可被改變
- 773 To want or do something 想要...; 想做...
- 774 To eat a lot or too much [informal] 大吃大喝, 狼吞虎嚥
- 775 Something that stimulates or restores, often a drink or a tonic 提神物; 興奮劑
- 776 The period after lunch when you feel tired, groggy, and irritable 下午疲倦的時候

- 777 (To wean someone off/from something) To make someone gradually stop using something bad for them 使(某人)逐漸戒掉;使(某人)脫離
- 778 Used parenthetically to indicate that something is being suggested as possible or likely but not certain 大約;例如
- 779 To know what someone is thinking without them telling you 看出(某人)的心思;猜出(某人)想甚麼
- 780 Extremely hungry [informal] 非常飢餓的
- 781 If you are fresh out of something, you have just finished or sold all of it, so that there is no more left. 剛用完;剛賣光
- 782 If something is hit-or-miss, you cannot depend on it to be of good quality, on time, accurate, etc. 沒準的,碰運氣的;時好時壞的
- 783 Said when you think someone might not understand what you say, or be upset by it 別誤會
- 784 To do something exceptionally well 表現很好,令人驚艷
- 785 (of a fried egg) Turned over when the white is nearly done and fried lightly on the other side, so that the yolk remains slightly liquid 先將蛋的一面煎至蛋白凝固,再翻面略煎另一面,使蛋黃保持半熟狀態,形成筷子戳下會爆漿的荷包蛋
- 786 To get good value 錢花得值
- 787 Extremely good [informal] 極好的;非常棒的
- 788 Used to say an occasion will be more enjoyable if a lot of people are there 人越多越有意思
- 789 Someone or something depressing, disagreeable, or unsatisfactory [informal] 令人沮喪的人或事
- 790 To no longer be in danger or difficulty [informal] 脫離險境或困境
- 791 To become well again after a serious illness, especially when you might have died (尤指從致命的重病中)恢復健康
- 792 To be the type of thing that you are interested in or that you enjoy doing 合口味;受(某人)喜愛
- 793 Perfect, as if new (好像)新的;完美的
- 794 To record the sale of something, especially by using a cash register 把收款金

額輸入收銀機

795 To obtain something by payment 購買;用錢取得

796 (To lie in something) To exist or be found in something 存在於;在於

797 If you allow an opportunity or a person to slip through your fingers, you lose it, him, or her through not taking care or making an effort. (機會或某人)被錯過

798 Some secret or surprise has been revealed or exposed. 秘密被洩漏了

799 Secret 秘密的

800 A bad situation or habit that, after it has started, is likely to get very much worse 滑坡效應(指壞情況或惡習一旦開始就很可能變得越來越嚴重)

801 When everything about a situation is considered together 大體上,總體上,一般來講

802 To be easy and without problems 一帆風順

803 A cesarean (= an operation in which a woman's uterus is cut open to allow a baby to be born) 剖腹產手術

804 If a situation is touch-and-go, it is uncertain. (形勢)不確定的

805 (To throw a wrench into the works) To do something that prevents a plan or activity from succeeding [informal] 從中搗亂;破壞計劃

806 A holiday that you take at home or near your home rather than traveling to another place [informal] 在家中(或附近)度假(而不是到別處旅行)

807 If an activity is on hold, it has been intentionally delayed. 被延後,被故意延遲

808 The act of making an environment or object safe for children 使(某處)對嬰兒安全,防止嬰兒受傷

809 A young child [informal] 小孩

810 In a position that is safe from harm or from which harm cannot be done 在安全的地方;安全地

811 (To be hung up on something or someone) To have great or excessive interest in or preoccupation with someone or something 對某人或某事有極大的興趣或過度關心

812 ((It is) better (to be) safe than sorry) Said when you think it is best not to

- take risks even when it seems tedious or difficult to be careful 有備無患
- 813 To sit in the driver's seat or drive a motor vehicle 坐在駕駛座;開車
- 814 A situation or experience that alternates between making you feel excited, exhilarated, or happy and making you feel sad, disappointed, or desperate 情緒跌宕起伏很大
- 815 Someone or something that keeps you on your toes forces you to continue directing all your attention and energy to what you are doing. 忙個不停,永不懈怠
- 816 If something is on the back burner, it is temporarily not being dealt with or considered, especially because it is not urgent or important. (尤指因不緊急或不重要而)暫時擱置一旁
- 817 In support of a particular objective 贊同,支持某個決定或計劃
- 818 (To be/stay in the loop) To be part of a group that is involved in or has knowledge of a particular situation or activity, often implying that you are kept informed about relevant updates or decisions [informal] 了解(圈內)最新消息;掌握(圈內)最新資訊
- 819 To make large profits or to become rich 發財
- 820 Done or experienced by someone 由某人所做;由某人所經歷
- 821 If something you have done pays off, it is successful. 取得成功,得到好結果
- 822 To provide or do something that is missing or not getting done 接替中斷或沒做完的工作
- 823 To borrow from people or ask them to give you things without paying for them or intending to return them [slang] 撈取;白吃白拿;揩油
- 824 If you support or stay with someone through thick and thin, you always support or stay with them, even if there are problems or difficulties. 不顧艱難險阻,在任何情況下,赴湯蹈火
- 825 To try to force someone to do something 強迫(某人)去做不願意做的事
- 826 If something takes its/a toll, it causes suffering, deaths, or damage. 造成損失(或傷亡、破壞)
- 827 (On one's own terms) In accordance with one's wishes; in one's own way 依



照自己的意願；以自己的方式

828 Abbreviation for best friend forever, a way of referring to a person's best friend [informal] 最好的朋友 (best friend forever 的縮寫)

829 To spend a lot of time alone, not talking to other people very much 獨來獨往

830 Unexpected or suddenly 出乎意料地；突然

831 (To dabble in something) To engage in an activity or subject in a superficial or casual manner without committing fully to it 涉足某事

832 (To brush up on something) To improve your knowledge of something already learned but partly forgotten 溫習，複習

833 To learn [informal] 學習

834 A thing that is easy to do or accomplish [informal] 容易做或完成的事

835 Not having the knowledge, experience, or skills to deal with a particular subject or situation 無法駕馭，不能勝任

836 Predestined or determined by fate. 命中注定。 (As luck would have it) By chance 碰巧，幸好

837 To meet someone, especially by chance (偶然) 與...相遇

838 To look at someone or something and then look again because you suddenly recognize him, her, or it or notice that something unusual is happening [informal] (因認出某人或物，或感覺有異樣而)再仔細看一眼，再認真看一下

839 To cause someone to lose interest [informal] 使某人失去興趣或倒胃口

840 A natural feeling that makes people know what is right and wrong and how they should behave 道德羅盤 (指令人們能判別是非，清楚行為準則的自然感覺)

841 If two people click, it means they quickly establish a good connection or rapport with each other. It implies a sense of mutual understanding, compatibility, or chemistry. [informal] 合得來

842 Shared interests, beliefs, or opinions between two people or groups of people who disagree about most other subjects (興趣、信仰或觀點上的) 共同點或共同基礎，即使在其他方面存在差異

843 To have similar ideas and similar ways of expressing them 有共同語言；在思維方式、理解或溝通方式上相似

- 844 Very often 時常
- 845 To take a risk 冒險
- 846 (To count on someone/something) To be confident that you can depend on someone or to look forward to something to happen 依靠; 指望
- 847 To visit briefly [informal] 短暫的拜訪
- 848 To stop doing things and relax 停下來, 放鬆
- 849 A man who tries to secretly watch women when they are wearing no clothes 窺視者(指偷看女人脫衣服的男人)
- 850 If you are in the doghouse, someone is annoyed with you and shows disapproval. [informal] 惹禍, 惹麻煩
- 851 To make an argument or bad situation worse 火上加油
- 852 To be wrong about the reason for something or the way to achieve something [informal] 找錯了原因; 用錯了方法
- 853 The act of buying things for yourself to feel better when you are unhappy [humorous] (不高興時透過為自己買些東西來排解心情的) 購物療法
- 854 Intentionally wearing clothes that attract sexual attention and admiration 穿著性感的; 穿著顯眼的
- 855 To keep away from someone in order to avoid trouble or to avoid annoying them 不去煩某人
- 856 If a feeling cools or cools off, it starts to become less strong. (感情) 冷靜下來, 平靜下來, 冷淡下來
- 857 If you have the upper hand, you have more power than anyone else and so have control. 上風; 有利位置
- 858 Used to refer to a situation in which any win by one person always means a loss to another person involved 一方得益一方受損的; 得失所系的
- 859 (To boil down to something) If a situation or problem boils down to something, that is the main reason for it. (形勢或問題) 主要原因在於, 歸結為
- 860 To force yourself to do something unpleasant or difficult, or to be brave in a difficult situation 咬緊牙關應付, 硬著頭皮應付; 勇敢地面對
- 861 Very nervous and easily upset 緊張的; 易生氣的
- 862 To be or become mentally disengaged or detached from a situation 心不在

焉，分心

863 To experience a lot of problems in a period of your life [informal] 經歷困難

864 Said as a way of telling someone to not give up, despite difficulties 堅持住，挺住

865 To hide a problem or try to keep it a secret instead of dealing with it 隱瞞，掩飾

866 (All bark and no bite; all talk and no action) Full of big talk but lacking action 虛張聲勢；光說不練

867 The act of not speaking to someone, or speaking to them very little, because you are angry or upset about something they have done 冷戰；沈默對待

868 To refuse to think about unpleasant facts, although they will have an influence on your situation 逃避現實，不願面對現實

869 To notice or understand something indirectly or subtly 察覺到；領會到

870 To keep doing or talking about the same thing without achieving anything 原地兜圈；毫無進展；瞎忙活

871 (To turn around; to turn something around) To change for the better; to be changed for the better 好轉；使有起色

872 To spend less money than you did before because you have less money 勒緊褲帶，省吃儉用

873 To be of the usual or expected standard 達到一般水準，達到標準

874 Something you say to a person who has just sneezed (在某人打噴嚏時說) 大吉大利！

875 To move about from side to side or turn a lot in bed, especially because you cannot sleep (尤指因無法入睡而) 翻來覆去，輾轉反側

876 A bacteria or a virus causing an illness that is usually not serious [informal] (引起小毛病的) 細菌；病毒

877 To sleep very well [informal] 睡得很香

878 To be very lucky [informal] 十分走運

879 If someone or something weathers the storm, they successfully deal with a very difficult problem. 渡過難關

880 The stage at which your control over yourself or a situation is lost 爆發點；

失控點;極限

881 If two people see eye to eye, they agree with each other. (兩人)意見一致

882 Convinced or enthusiastic about something 對...感到熱切或有信心

883 (To be/become a recipe for something) To be very likely to become something 是導致...的原因

884 To develop and finish naturally 自然發展;持續到自然結束

885 No feeling of being upset 不記仇,不憤怒

886 If a situation descends into a particular state, it becomes worse. [formal] 陷入

887 A series of people or things that follow each other in time (相繼的)一系列;長久以來的傳統

888 To love someone completely and believe they are perfect 寵愛;溺愛

889 A person who has an important or powerful position in a group or organization [informal] 大人物,重要的人

890 (To know something inside out) To know everything about a subject [informal] 對...瞭如指掌

891 (To ruffle someone's feathers) To cause someone to become annoyed or upset 使某人生氣

892 (To pander to someone/something) To do or provide precisely what a person or group wants, especially when it is not acceptable, reasonable, or approved of, usually in order to get some personal advantage 迎合;討好

893 As said by most people 據說;大家都說

894 A sudden and often unpleasant piece of news [informal] (常指令人不快的) 出人意料的消息;爆炸性新聞

895 If someone comes into money, property, or a title, they receive it due to the death of a relative. 繼承(錢財、財產或頭銜)

896 (To give/hand something to someone on a (silver) platter) To allow someone to get something very easily, without having to work for it 輕易讓步;拱手相讓

897 (To get away with something) To succeed in avoiding punishment for something 做(錯事)而未被懲罰;做(壞事)而未被發覺

898 A small factory where workers are paid very little and work many hours in

terrible conditions 血汗工廠

899 If something checks out, it is correct or satisfactory. 正確的

900 To do the same thing as someone else did previously 仿效

901 (To sit well with someone) To be something that someone agrees or is pleased with (某人) 認可; 讓 (某人) 感到滿意

902 A visit to several pubs, one after the other, having a drink or drinks at each one 逐店飲酒, 逛酒吧

903 To go to a particular place 去某處

904 An alcoholic drink that is very strong 烈酒

905 Very drunk [slang] 爛醉如泥的

906 To show someone that you are annoyed with them by putting your middle finger up [informal] 對某人比中指

907 To treat something as if it is not important or not a problem 對...滿不在乎; 對...不予理睬

908 Being the bigger person means always doing the right thing, even if someone else is being childish 一個不計較, 不以牙還牙, 更加成熟的人

909 (of remarks, jokes, etc.) Rude or offensive to some people (言論或笑話) 有傷風化的; 冒犯人的

910 Deliberately ignore something bad happening 假裝沒看見 (不好的事情在發生)

911 To punch (a person) suddenly without warning [informal] 突然出拳

912 If all hell breaks loose, a situation suddenly becomes violent and noisy, especially with people arguing or fighting. 場面失控, 混亂

913 A way to punch someone with your right hand in a powerful punch 右勾拳

914 A usually disorderly or protracted fight, struggle, or dispute (混亂或持久的) 鬥爭、爭鬥或糾紛

915 (To round something/someone up) To find and bring together a group of animals or people 使...聚集; 使...集中

916 To do something immediately and instinctively, without pausing to consider or deliberate further 毫不猶豫

917 To pay money so that someone can be released from prison until their trial 把

(某人)保釋出來

918 To suddenly become very angry and start shouting or behaving violently 突然變得很憤怒(並開始大聲喊叫或行為激烈)

919 (To stoop to something) To lower your moral standards by doing something that is unpleasant, dishonest, or unfair 卑鄙到做...的地步,墮落到做...的地步

920 To behave in a moral way when other people are not behaving morally 做有道德與涵養的正確決定;不跟別人一般見識

921 If something is out of commission, it is broken or unavailable to use. If someone is out of commission, someone is temporarily unable to perform their duties or participate in their regular activities due to an injury or other incapacitating circumstances. 壞了的,不可使用的;無法工作

922 To save money for a time when it might be needed unexpectedly 存錢以備不時之需;未雨綢繆

923 (If/When push comes to shove) If something can be done, it can be done if the situation becomes so bad that you have to do it. 一旦情況緊急,不得已時

924 To move from one place to another without any particular purpose or energy because you are unhappy or disappointed (在...)無精打采地閒逛

925 ((Down) in the dumps) Unhappy 情緒低落,鬱悶,不高興

926 To not feel brave or determined enough to do something unpleasant 沒有做...的勇氣;缺乏做...的決心

927 To have a medical operation 做手術

928 To show anger, worry, or excitement that is unnecessary or greater than the situation deserves 緊張不安;大驚小怪;過分激動

929 Healthy again (病後)恢復健康,痊癒

930 To be in another person's situation 交換位置;交換處境

931 Usually, this is asked of someone who has been going through a difficulty, such as a sickness, the death of a loved one, etc. It is another way to say "how are you?" 你還好吧?

932 To start to have an effect or to happen [informal] 開始見效;起作用

933 To keep (a person or animal) inside a building or in a small space especially for a long period of time. Usually used as (be) cooped up 被監禁的;感覺受拘

禁的

934 (To take the edge off something) To make something unpleasant have less of an effect on someone 減弱, 削弱 (不良事物的影響)

935 If a feeling or the effect of something wears off, it gradually disappears. 逐漸消失; 消逝

936 To be able to get out of bed and move around again after a period of illness because your health has improved enough [informal] (病後) 能夠下床活動

937 To compare something to other things so that it can be accurately and fairly judged 客觀地比較; 客觀地審查

938 To stop and think carefully before making a decision 且慢, 先想想

939 To discuss something such as a problem or plan completely in order to find a solution or an agreement 透過協商消除 (分歧等); 透過協商解決 (問題等)

940 To think carefully about something for a long time 仔細思考, 反覆考慮

941 Someone from a low social class who has recently become very rich and likes to show this by spending a lot of money 新貴, 暴發戶

942 To make someone feel guilty, usually in order to make them do something [informal] (通常指為了使人做某事而) 使感到內疚, 使有內疚感

943 Plastic surgery 整形手術

944 To be getting better after an illness or injury [informal] (病後) 身體逐漸康復

945 (To check in with someone) To contact someone by making a phone call, short visit, etc., usually to make sure there are no problems or to tell them that there are no problems (通過打電話、拜訪等確認或報告某人是否無恙) 取得聯繫, 查看; 報平安

946 To talk for a long time, especially about things that are not important [informal] 喋喋不休地說, 沒完沒了地嘮叨 (尤指雞毛蒜皮的事)

947 An embarrassing secret 醜事; 隱情

948 (To shake somebody up) If an unpleasant experience shakes someone up, it makes them feel shocked and upset. 使震驚

949 To sound familiar 聽起來耳熟

950 To prepare yourself physically or mentally for something unpleasant (為困

難或不好的事)做好準備

951 To completely believe in a set of ideas 完全相信

952 A decision [informal] 決定, 抉擇

953 A secret purpose or reason for doing something 不可告人的動機

954 To be highly determined to do something without considering the risks or possible dangerous results [informal] 下定決心, 不顧一切(做...)

955 (To beat someone to the punch; to beat someone to it) To do something before someone else does it 捷足先登

956 To accept criticism or punishment for something you have done 接受批評(或懲罰)

957 To try to deal with or understand a complex problem or subject 盡力解決; 設法對付; 盡量克服

958 To become strong; to be established; to begin to have an effect 變強; 確立地位; 開始產生了影響

959 If you take situations or people for granted, you do not realize or show that you are grateful for how much you get from them. 視...為理所當然因此不表示感激或不去重視

960 To dislike someone very much [informal] 非常討厭(某人), 恨死(某人)

961 Without(如果)沒有, 要不是

962 To realize and understand something such as your feelings and attitudes 認識或理解(你的感受和態度)

963 Said when you accept that even enjoyable experiences cannot last forever 天下無不散的筵席

964 A state of deep sadness or emotional burden 沈重的心情

965 To start an activity with a particular aim 懷著特定目的(開始, 著手)

966 When people talk about walk(s) of life, they are referring to different types of jobs and levels of society. 各行各業; 各個社會階層

967 Lacking the courage to face something difficult or dangerous 膽怯的; 心臟不夠強的

968 To have just enough money to live on and nothing extra 僅夠糊口, 勉強度日



- 969 To be able to live or deal with a situation with difficulty, usually by having just enough of something you need, such as money 勉強過活, 勉強應付過去
- 970 If an event or situation reeks of an unpleasant quality, that quality is strongly and unmistakably present or associated with it. [informal] 明顯帶有, 充滿(令人不愉快的特性)
- 971 To use money or other things provided by other people and give nothing in return 佔便宜, 白吃白喝
- 972 To stay overnight with a host or a series of hosts, usually on a couch (while traveling) 當沙發客
- 973 To search through dumpsters for food or items of value or interest 翻垃圾桶找食物或有價值的物品
- 974 To not pay someone money that you owe them 不付欠款
- 975 To ask strangers for money, especially in a public place [informal] (尤指在公共場合) 乞討
- 976 To eat a meal in a restaurant and then leave without paying [informal] 吃霸王餐
- 977 Said when you recognize that you must accept an offer or a situation because it is the only one available to you [saying] 要飯的哪能挑肥揀瘦; 別無選擇
- 978 To manage to live without things that you would like to have or with things of a worse quality than you would like 湊合; 將就
- 979 If a quality, principle, or idea goes out of the window, it does not exist anymore. 完全消失, 不再存在
- 980 The fact of showing or watching events or looking at women from a man's point of view 男性凝視(指從男人的角度來看事情或看女人)
- 981 To make a whistle, shout, or comment of a sexual nature to a woman passing by 對經過的女性以尖叫, 發出嘯聲, 或吹口哨的方式騷擾
- 982 When a car or someone driving a car pulls up, the driver stops the car, often for a short time. (車) 停下; (某人) 把車停下
- 983 Used to describe the type of sexual jokes and remarks that men are thought to enjoy when they are together 更衣室的; 粗俗的
- 984 To stop believing that you can succeed 灰心, 失去信心

985 (To keep a lookout for something/someone) To continue to watch carefully for something or someone, especially to avoid danger (尤指為防備危險而)繼續密切注意,繼續關注

986 (To fall victim to something) To be hurt, damaged, or killed because of something or someone 成為...的受害者;被...所傷(或所害)

987 To try to trick or attract someone by pretending to be someone different on social media [informal] 在社群網路上偽裝自己以此吸引他人

988 Experiencing or using a threat of killing with a gun 在槍口威脅下;用槍威脅

989 If a dangerous person or animal is on the loose, that person or animal is free to move around (危險分子)在逃;(動物)自由活動

990 To make a special effort to appreciate the good things in one's life 往好處想;知足

991 To begin a romantic or sexual relationship with someone [informal] 與(某人)開始一段戀愛(或性)關係

992 Abbreviation for missing in action: used for saying that someone or something has disappeared and you do not know where they are 失蹤;消失

993 To do something unpleasant or difficult that has already been agreed or promised 照承諾去做;做完(令人不快或困難的事情);將...進行到底

994 To become completely involved in something 全心投入

995 A problem, situation, etc. that is difficult to deal with and causes a lot of disagreement 棘手的事情,麻煩事,燙手山芋

996 Something that makes you feel safe or confident 給予安全保障或安全感的東西

997 Used in reference to an opportunity that has passed or a situation that can no longer be changed 木已成舟,為時已晚

998 If you put down roots in a place where you have moved to live, you make new friends and join in new activities there so that you feel it is your home. (在新的地方)紮根,建立新生活

999 To become famous or successful [informal] 功成名就,飛黃騰達

1000 An opportunity for improving a situation, especially one that happens

unexpectedly 機會;機緣;好運

1001 To not seem quite right [informal] 感覺哪裡不對或怪怪的

1002 Not to know what to do or say 不知所措;不知該說什麼

1003 A contest in which two teams pull against each other at opposite ends of a rope with the object of pulling the middle of the rope over a mark on the ground  
拔河比賽

1004 The southern and central regions of the US where many people have traditional Christian beliefs 《聖經》地帶(美國南部和中部持傳統基督教信仰的地區)

1005 Immediately 當場,立即

1006 To succeed in understanding something difficult or strange 弄懂(複雜或奇怪的事)

1007 (To culminate in/with something) If an event or series of events culminates in something, it ends with it, having reached the highest point or a decisive point.  
以...告終;達到...的頂點

1008 (To get/be caught up in something) So involved in an activity that you have trouble thinking about anything else; involved in a difficult or confusing situation 過於專注於某項活動而無法思考其他事情;陷入困難或混亂的境地

1009 To provide a lot of information about something without the use of words; to show something very clearly without the use of words (無須言語) 提供了很多訊息;(無須言語)清楚表明

1010 To progress or succeed without much effort or difficulty 毫不費力取得進展;輕而易舉取得成功

1011 (To make a name for yourself) To become famous or respected by a lot of people 揚名,成名

1012 (To come on strong to someone) To behave toward another person in a way that is too severe, or that shows a strong sexual interest that the other person does not want [informal] 露骨地調情,挑逗;言行過分,過於苛刻

1013 To think very carefully about something 深思熟慮

1014 Something or someone that casts/sheds/throws light on a situation provides an explanation for it or information that makes it easier to understand. 為...提供

解釋;使...較容易理解

1015 Everything that exists or is possible 世界上的一切,一切可能之事

1016 Said to advise someone that it is better to tell the truth than to lie 誠實為上策

1017 A considerable period of time 很長的時間

1018 (To shower someone with something) To give someone a lot of something, typically affection, praise, or presents 給予大量的(喜愛,讚美,禮物)

1019 Not far away, or going to happen soon 不遠,就在附近;即將來臨

1020 To seem to be alive or become real 栩栩如生;像是真的

1021 To be very sorry for something wrong you have done in the past and wish that you had not done it [formal] 後悔;悔過,懺悔

1022 Cannot be saved, improved, or repaired. 無法挽回;無法補救;無可救藥

1023 With 和;跟隨

1024 To tell other people about something that you know, especially when it is a secret [informal] 透露,洩露(秘密)

1025 To remain strong or successful 保持強壯;保持成功

1026 (To be subject to something) To have or experience a particular thing, especially something unpleasant 有;遭受,承受。(To be subjected to something) Used to describe a situation where someone or something has already been affected by an action, typically a negative one, often against their will 已遭受,承受了

1027 The damage that happens to an object in ordinary use during a period (一定時期內的)磨損,損耗

1028 Used to describe something that is disorganized, chaotic, or not consistent 混亂,雜亂

1029 To stop being able to control your emotions and suddenly start to shout, cry, or laugh [informal] 失去理智;突然大叫(或哭、笑)

1030 If you say that a dead person would turn in their grave, you mean that they would be very angry or upset about something. 在九泉之下也不得安寧;將死人氣活

1031 To happen 發生

1032 A sweet dish made of a banana cut in half with ice cream and cream on top

香蕉船霜淇淋

1033 Completely naked [informal] 赤裸裸的, 全裸的

1034 Said when you want to show that someone or something is a surprising or exciting choice or example (用於表示吃驚或興奮) 竟然, 正是

1035 Something that you say when you tell someone about something surprising that happened 真沒想到

1036 To an extreme degree; in every way 十分, 極其; 徹頭徹尾的, 完全的

1037 (To jump out of one's skin) To be extremely surprised by something 大吃一驚

1038 (To have no business doing something) To have no right to do something 無權做...

1039 Showing no shame or embarrassment about doing something terrible 赤裸裸的; 公然的; 厚顏無恥的

1040 Used to say that someone has good intentions 她/他的用意(或心地)是好的

1041 (To take someone's life) To kill someone [formal] 取(某人)的性命

1042 (To get under someone's skin) To annoy someone 激怒某人

1043 An action that insults or upsets someone 一記耳光; 侮辱; 打擊

1044 To be too good or too expensive for you 高不可攀, 高不可及 (If A is out of B's league, B 配不上A; B買不起A)

1045 An appearance of agreement 團結一致

1046 Said when you are giving someone a piece of information and you are not certain if that information is useful or important [informal] 不管有用或重要與否

1047 Well-organized, composed, and in control 整齊有序; 沉著冷靜; 掌控一切

1048 To participate or cooperate in a situation, often by pretending or going along with something, even if one is not genuinely interested or fully convinced (通常指不情願地) 附和; 配合

1049 (To screw something up) To make a mistake, or to spoil something [informal] 犯錯; 搞糟; 弄壞

- 1050 To disappoint someone by failing to do what you agreed to do or were expected to do 辜負(某人), 使(某人)失望
- 1051 Said when you want to emphasize that both people involved in a difficult situation must accept the blame, or that an activity needs two people who are willing to take part for it to happen 雙方都有責任; 一個巴掌拍不響
- 1052 If an argument or bad feeling festers, it continues so that feelings of hate or lack of satisfaction increase. (爭論或不愉快的感覺) 加劇, 惡化
- 1053 To remove the bad feelings between people 消除怨憤; 消除隔閡
- 1054 To be familiar with a particular experience or activity 熟悉, 對...毫不陌生
- 1055 If you put a bad experience or your bad behavior behind you, you do not let it affect your life now. 拋諸腦後
- 1056 To have severe problems that limit how you can act 處於絕境; 走投無路
- 1057 (To swear off something) To decide to stop doing, using, or being involved with something harmful, such as drugs or alcohol, or something that is not good or helpful 發誓不做, 保證放棄, 下決心戒除
- 1058 If something holds up, it is true or remains strong. 站得住腳
- 1059 To make an effort to understand and deal with a problem or situation 開始理解並著手處理(問題或狀況)
- 1060 To start behaving in a better way 翻開新的一頁; 改過自新
- 1061 (To take the rap for someone) To be punished for something someone else did [slang] 替某人背黑鍋
- 1062 More than anything else 首要的是, 首先
- 1063 To need to consider something again because you are mistaken [informal] 想錯了
- 1064 (To not mince (your) words) To say what you mean clearly and directly, even if you upset people by doing this 直截了當地說, 直言不諱
- 1065 To make problems, difficulties, or disagreements less serious or easier to solve, usually by talking to the people involved (通常透過交談溝通的方式) 緩和, 調解
- 1066 (To bring someone to justice) To find and prosecute someone for a criminal offence, especially when that person is then found guilty by a court 將某人繩之

以法;依法懲辦

1067 To become lost 迷路, 走失

1068 (To have an ax to grind) To have a strong personal opinion about something that you want people to accept and that is the reason why you do something 想說服別人;想爭個對錯

1069 (To own up to something, like a mistake) To admit that you have done something wrong 承認, 坦白(錯誤)

1070 To avoid discussing a subject or problem, usually because there are difficulties that you do not want to deal with 避開, 繞開(某個話題或問題)

1071 (To gloss over something) To avoid considering something, such as an embarrassing mistake, to make it seem not important, and to quickly continue talking about something else 搪塞;掩蓋

1072 Complaint, dissatisfaction, disagreement, quarrel [informal] 抱怨, 不滿, 不合

1073 To deal with something completely and conclusively 徹底了結地;一勞永逸地

1074 A situation in which you become so interested in a subject or an activity that you cannot stop trying to find out about it or doing it 無法脫身;深陷...之中無法自拔

1075 To do something unpleasant to someone because they have done something unpleasant to you [informal] 向(某人)報復

1076 To harm or punish someone who caused one harm 算舊帳

1077 (The glass is half full) Optimistic 樂觀的

1078 (To lay/put something to rest) To put an end to or alleviate a negative feeling, such as worry, fear, or resentment 消除(顧慮、恐懼或怨恨)

1079 To stop talking about something and to start acting [informal] 以實際行動支持;以行動證明自己的話

1080 (To have skin in the game) To be directly involved in or affected by something, especially financially [informal] 切膚之痛;自身會受到影響,尤其在財務上

1081 Often used figuratively to suggest a setback or loss 受到重創

1082 The line at the bottom of a financial report that shows the net profit or loss  
盈虧狀況

1083 To think imaginatively using new ideas instead of traditional or expected  
ideas 跳出傳統的思維框架

1084 (To throw (someone) a curve (ball)) To surprise someone with something  
difficult or unpleasant to deal with 給(某人)出難題;給(某人)意外的挑戰

1085 Said to show you believe that if you make an effort to achieve something,  
you will be successful [saying] 助己者,天助之

1086 To suddenly start to be successful or popular 取得成功;蓬勃發展

1087 (To gear someone/something up) To get ready to prepare someone else for  
something 準備;使(...)準備好

1088 (To send chills down someone's spine) To make someone feel very fright-  
ened 令人脊背發涼或毛骨悚然

1089 (To wallow in something) To remain in an unhappy emotional state or to  
allow yourself to enjoy something completely 陷於;縱情享受

1090 In the best or most successful position 在好或成功的處境

1091 When confronted with challenges or setbacks, adopt a positive attitude and  
find ways to turn adversity into opportunity. 當面對挑戰或困境時,應持積極  
態度,尋找方法將逆境化為機遇。

1092 (To take stock (of something)) To think carefully about a situation or event  
and form an opinion about it so that you can decide what to do 仔細考慮;作出  
判斷;評估

1093 (In the wake of something) As a result or consequence of 作為...的後果

1094 To start something again after an interruption 重新開始,繼續

1095 To stop/cease 停止;停下

1096 Something you try although it is unlikely to be successful 希望不大的嘗試

1097 Confused or uncertain about what to do next 亂了套的;不知所措的

1098 To start a romantic relationship [informal]; to come together 開始談戀愛  
或交往;聚會

1099 If facts come to light, they become known publicly. (真相)為人所知,被  
披露



- 1100 (To stumble upon/across/on something/someone) To discover something by chance, or to meet someone by chance 偶然發現; 撞見; 邂逅
- 1101 A house that is not in good condition, that someone buys with the intention of working on it, improving it, and increasing its value [informal] (狀況不佳、購買後修繕以增加價值的) 待修房
- 1102 To be suitable for a particular purpose or to be exactly what is needed in a particular situation 與目的相符或恰如其分
- 1103 To be likely to happen 很可能發生
- 1104 (Be expecting (a baby)) To be pregnant 懷孕; 有孕在身
- 1105 Throughout the entire process 在整個過程中
- 1106 (To put something/someone to shame) To make someone or something seem not good by comparison 使相形見绌
- 1107 If someone falls by the wayside, they fail to finish an activity, and if something falls by the wayside, people stop doing it, making it, or using it. (某人) 半途而廢, 沒能完成; (某物) 被擱置, 停止使用
- 1108 If you or your bank account are in the red, you owe money to the bank. 虧空; 負債; 赤字狀態
- 1109 (To stay/keep afloat) To have enough money to pay what you owe and continue operating 有償債能力的; 經濟上周轉自如的
- 1110 (To close up shop) To end an activity, usually a business activity, either temporarily or permanently 歇業; 關門; 停業
- 1111 The passing of information from person to person using oral communication 口耳相傳
- 1112 From a large number of places 從四處, 從各處
- 1113 To improve or increase 改善; 增加
- 1114 To find out whether something is likely to be successful before you do or try it 市場測試(試水溫)
- 1115 To be bought quickly and in large numbers [informal] 熱銷
- 1116 A product or service that makes a lot of money over a long period of time for the company that sells it, often money that is used to support the company's other activities 搖錢樹, 最賺錢的商品

1117 To be new and different 打破常規

1118 To destroy or defeat something or someone completely (以壓倒性姿態) 戰勝...; 徹底擊垮...

1119 When something sees the light of day, it appears for the first time. 首次出現, 問世

1120 (You win some, you lose some; you can't win 'em all) Something you say that means it is not possible to succeed at everything you do [informal] 不可能凡事都成功; 有得必有失

1121 Used to describe a situation where a product or item is selling very quickly and in large quantities 一搶而空

1122 Exactly right 確切的, 準確的

1123 (To try your hand at something) To try doing something for the first time 初次嘗試做某事

1124 To examine and analyze numbers, especially to determine exactly how much money is available, needed, etc. 檢查和分析數字, 尤其是準確地確定可用資金、需要資金等等

1125 (To kick oneself; could have kicked oneself) Used to say that you are very annoyed with yourself because you have done something stupid or missed a chance (由於做了蠢事或錯失機會而) 懊惱, 自責

1126 An occasion that causes you to consider the facts about a situation and not your opinions, ideas, or beliefs 面對現實; 反思現實

1127 (To take a knock/hit) To be badly affected by a difficult problem or situation 遭受挫折; 受到衝擊

1128 To reduce something to a weaker or less advanced state 削弱; 使倒退; 使受挫

1129 (To pull the rug from under someone or someone's feet) To suddenly take away help or support from someone, or to suddenly do something that causes many problems for them 突然停止 (對某人的) 幫助 (或支持); 突然 (給某人) 製造麻煩

1130 Something that seems bad or unlucky at first but results in something good happening later 禍中之福, 因禍得福

- 1131 To admit defeat 認輸
- 1132 To accept failure and learn from a particular experience 接受失敗並從中汲取教訓
- 1133 To have advanced to an improved or more developed state 取得進步, 取得進展
- 1134 A young woman who is in trouble and needs a man's help 等待英雄救美的少女; 落難女子
- 1135 To continue waiting or hoping; to endure or persist; to offer or extend 繼續等待或期望; 持續或堅持; 提供或伸出
- 1136 Someone who saves you from a difficult or dangerous situation 救星
- 1137 To become familiar with and confident at something you have recently started doing 逐漸漸入狀態; 開始上軌道
- 1138 To find your rhythm or to become good at something after a period of adjustment 找到自己的節奏或方法
- 1139 To spoil a good situation with something unpleasant 給...蒙上陰影
- 1140 To be completely different from something 和...大有不同
- 1141 Used to tell someone that they should deal with something more bravely [informal] 拿出點男子氣概
- 1142 And certainly not 更不用說, 更何況
- 1143 (To stand up for someone/something) To defend or support a particular idea or a person who is being criticized or attacked 支持, 維護(想法、遭受指責或攻擊的人)
- 1144 If something paves the way for/to something else, it makes the other thing possible. (為...)鋪路; (為...)創造條件
- 1145 (To go so far as to do something) To do something regarded as extreme 過分到...的程度; 竟然; 甚至
- 1146 If something goes to someone's head, it makes that person think they are very important and makes them less pleasant. 沖昏(某人)的頭腦, 使(某人)驕傲自滿
- 1147 (To give back) To contribute, help, or make a positive impact by supporting or benefiting others 回饋

- 1148 (To come into something) To gain importance or relevance 獲得重要性或相關性
- 1149 (To put someone off) To make someone dislike something or someone 使反感
- 1150 A story that gives a warning 警世故事; 具警示性的事件
- 1151 (To blind someone to something) To make someone no longer able to think clearly or behave in a sensible way 使某人不再能够清晰思考或以合理的方式行事
- 1152 If bad weather or an unpleasant situation lets up, it stops or improves. [informal] 改善, 好轉; 停止
- 1153 (To catch/cop/get some Z's) To sleep [informal] 睡覺
- 1154 To enjoy the effects or experience of something as much as possible 盡情享受, 充分體驗
- 1155 To admit that you were wrong or that you have been defeated 認錯; 認輸
- 1156 A fight or argument [old-fashioned] 打架; 爭鬥; 爭執
- 1157 (To catch sight of something) To see something only for a moment 瞥見; 一瞥
- 1158 To do something, especially to argue, with a lot of energy or violence [informal] 激烈地做某事(尤指爭論)
- 1159 (To be/get mixed up in/with something) To be connected with a bad or unpleasant person or thing 捲入; 與...有牽連
- 1160 To be replaced or superseded by 被取代, 淘汰
- 1161 To move about from side to side or turn a lot in bed, especially because you cannot sleep 輾轉反側; 輾轉難眠
- 1162 When events or details you did not understand before fall into place, they become easy to understand. 變得清楚; 明朗化
- 1163 To put something in the place or container where it is usually kept 把...收拾(或儲藏)起來
- 1164 If an unpleasant or surprising fact or idea sinks in, you gradually start to believe it, understand it, or realize the effect it will have on you. (事實或想法) 逐漸被完全理解, 被充分意識到

1165 If something strikes a chord with you, it causes you to approve of it or it impresses you. 引起共鳴;撥動心弦

1166 To make a new start after a period of difficulties 不再糾結過去,開始人生新的一頁

1167 To enjoy an experience as much as possible because you did not have the opportunity to do it earlier in life 彌補失去的時光,盡情享受

1168 (To be lost on someone) If a remark is lost on someone, they do not understand it. 未被(某人)理解





