**Now or Never**

Edmond’s impatient gaze went from the Comtoise clock inherited from his Grandmother to the gate of the property. He scrutinized the slightest change of light that a car with all lights on would announce. From time to time, he made an incursion into the kitchen to check that Leila, his faithful maid, was ready. The seven guests were in the living room busy commenting on the news, and the irresistible rise of fascism in Europe.

The table was deliciously prepared, nine superb plates called “Ecume,” a little ostentatious but underlining the refinement of the host.

It was 8 p.m. and his last guest was scheduled to arrive at 7.30 p.m.

Edmond was a successful man in business. Nothing extraordinary, but he was able to grow his insurance company until that one day he was sent a buyout offer that he couldn't refuse.

At the age of seventy, it was time to devote a little more to himself.

This summer evening, planned for months, he had decided to take the bull by the horns and invite his former sales manager. A man as discreet as efficient in his work, Charles nevertheless remained an enigma for Edmond. During the four years Edmond and Charles had developed a professional complicity, but they never succeeded in penetrating their respective intimacies. This intimacy Edmond wanted to ignite, bear, and develop.

Edmond found in Charles all the qualities of an alter ego with whom he was ready to share the rest of his life.

The candles enthroned on silver candlesticks reflected in the plates and made the crystal glasses sparkle.

Charles was more than thirty minutes late. Edmond thought it was now best to sit down and eat. Charles would eventually arrive. His empty chair to Edmond's right sounded like a false note in this joyous atmosphere.

Edmond's eyes lit up. The long-awaited glow of lights finally made him smile. Charles had arrived. The headlights of the car on the gate made his heart rate go from sixty to 100 beats per minute. Edmond couldn’t wait to introduce Charles to his friends.

“My friends, our latecomer is arriving just now. Excuse me for a moment.”

Rushing to the front entrance even before Leila had time to react, Edmond opened the door and almost fainted.

Accompanying Charles was a superb woman. Charles presented her as Benedicte, his future wife.

“I don't understand,” stammered Edmond. “I thought you would come alone. You are sitting on my right at the table.”

Before Edmond could add anything, Benedicte and Charles looked at each other. She looked saddened by Edmond’s reaction.

Charles looked at Edmond, a small tear was announcing a dramatic end.

Charles and Edmond fell in each other’s arms.

This is an interesting story with a nice build up of tension. Good job. I like Edmond’s dialogue. You could add a bit more from Charles. A little more drama could be added with additional action by the protagonist, pacing, more clock-watching, peering out the curtains. The surprise and twist are very good, but you need a little more clarification.

I removed unnecessary words or combined your descriptions. As writers, we don’t need just, suddenly, etc. I changed the formatting to indents and double spacing. There is only a double space between paragraphs. A publishing company would state the specific rules for submission.