

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 66

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 66

Elise shook her head and didn't think much about his words. Then, she took out her phone to hail a ride home.

When she arrived at the Griffith Residence, Jonah was engaged in a game of chess with Alexander. They were both surprised when they saw her. "Ellie, you're back so suddenly! You should've told us beforehand and I'll get Alex to fetch you."

Elise explained, "It's fine; there's not much difference if I return on my own."

Jonah beckoned to her. "Come, let me have a good look at you. I haven't seen you in half a month! Ellie, you seem to be thinner! You must be tired from all of your studying. Stella, prepare some chicken soup for Ellie, won't you?"

Stella hastily replied, "Understood, sir."

"Ellie, come have a game with me," he invited. At that, Alexander, who was seated opposite Jonah, rose to his full height and allowed Elise to take over his place.

As Elise had previously learned the ropes with Robin, she was aware of the general rules since she was half a beginner herself.

"Alex, please watch the game for us. Don't let her lose terribly."

Alexander nodded. "All right, Grandpa."

Thus, with Alexander as her support, Elise felt a little more confident. However, it was only reasonable to lose when the opponent was a master like Jonah. They played three rounds, all of which she had lost.

She was upset as she asked Alexander, "Didn't Grandpa ask you to watch the game? Can't you help me win for once?"

He simply replied, "It's bad manners to comment on the game from the sidelines."

Inasmuch as Elise wanted to say something, she found that Alexander had a point.

"All right, Ellie. You fought well. You were always exceptionally close to winning and I even thought you might be doing it on purpose."

She stuck her tongue out mischievously. "I'm not as good as you say, Grandpa."

Jonah smiled, but he didn't say more. Instead, he asked Elise about her studies. "Now that the boot camp is over, you're setting out to Northcliff to join the national Math Olympiad, aren't you?"

Elise nodded. "I'll be leaving tomorrow. The test starts the day after and it'll only take half a day to complete."

He nodded in understanding before he looked at Alexander. "Doesn't the company have some business relations in Northcliff?"

Alexander reported honestly, "Some, I think."

Jonah quickly added, "Then, that's the perfect opportunity! You can head to Northcliff with Elise tomorrow. Make sure she's safe and you can handle company matters while you're at it."

Upon hearing that, Elise quickly rejected the idea. "It's fine, Grandpa, I can head there on my own."

However, he wasn't about to back down. "Girl, don't be stubborn. Northcliff is a big city and it's not safe for a girl like you to be on her own. I was thinking of your safety when I asked Alex to accompany you. Also, he can settle some company business while he's there, so you can relax and join the nationals without any worries."

"But..She trailed off as she stole a glance at Alexander, who didn't seem like he was against the idea. "But it's just us two. It won't look too good either, will it?" she asked as she picked up from where she left off.

Jonah looked like he didn't catch her gist. "Don't worry! Ellie, Alex is quite a steady guy compared to the rest of them. I won't have to worry if he's the one accompanying you."

"He might not agree, though." Elise passed the responsibility to Alexander. She thought that he definitely would reject the idea, but she underestimated the weight of Jonah's words.

"Grandpa, I'll ask my secretary to get the plane tickets ready in a moment."

A satisfied Jonah nodded. Upon seeing that, Elise could only acquiesce.

Elise and Alexander arrived at the airport together the next morning with their first class tickets. It was after boarding the plane that she finally asked, "Why did you agree to head to Northcliff with me?"

He returned her question with another one. "Well, isn't that what Grandpa wanted?"

What she heard merely made her speechless.

She decided to keep her mouth shut. Since it was Jonah's intention, there was nothing more to question. The plane landed at the Northcliff Airport after two hours of flight

After Elise disembarked the plane with Alexander, they found that someone was already waiting for them at the arrivals hall.

"Mr. Griffith!" the chauffeur greeted with all due respect before he took over the luggage in Alexander's hand.

"Get in."

Elise nodded, then did as she was told.

As the car drove away from the airport, she asked, "Where are we going to?"

Alexander was responding to his business matters on his iPad as he replied, "I'll take you to the exam venue first, so you can familiarize yourself there. Then, we'll head to the house in Northcliff."

"You have a house in Northcliff too?"

He replied, "We're staying there for the night. I looked it up and found that the house is closest to the exam venue. It only takes 5 minutes to get there, so it's not that far either."

Elise nodded. "All right, understood."

She went to the exam venue and printed out her admission ticket. After finding her seat, she familiarized herself with the surroundings before returning to the accommodation with Alexander.

As it was a detached villa, it wasn't as grand as the Griffith Residence. However, land

prices in Northcliff were extremely overpriced, so a villa in itself would've set the Griffith Family back by a hefty sum.

"I've already asked someone to clean the house. You're getting the bedroom on the left and I'll stay in the bedroom on the right. The study is in the middle and I'll be working there. If you need anything, you can let me know."

Elise nodded. "Got it." With that, she went straight to the room assigned to her.

Alexander watched her leave and he only looked away after she disappeared from sight, thereafter he made a call. "Find someone to cook meals here."

After hanging up the phone, he made his way to the study and started to busy himself with work.

Once she arrived in her room, she didn't dally and immediately took out her phone to call someone. It was around half an hour later when she knocked on the door to the study "Come in!"

Elise opened the door and walked inside. "I'm taking a walk outside, so I thought I'd notify you. You can have dinner without me."

Alexander looked up at her. "You just arrived, so don't go around on your own. I can take you wherever you want to go."

Elise hastily rejected the idea. "It's okay, I'm really just walking around. I'll be back at night."

The look in his eyes darkened as he felt that Elise didn't trust him much, which made him upset. "All right, you can go. Be careful, though."

After she signed an 'OK', she closed the door behind her..

As Alexander listened to the footsteps dying down, he quickly lost interest in his work even though he was originally busy. He remained in his seat for a while before he rose to leave as well.

Elise hailed a cab the moment she left the villa. As she sat in the car, she watched the scenery gradually becoming familiar while a faint smile graced her lips. The cab

stopped at a public toilet by the road and she exited the car to head into the toilet cubicles.

By the time she emerged from the place, the ugly makeup on her face was replaced by a wholly new one. She then hailed another cab, which headed toward an old alley that seemed to be forgotten by time.

She walked in the alley until she arrived at the end where a row of courtyard houses silently stood. Moments later, she punched the right password on the access control panel, thereby unlocking the door and providing her with passage.

"Long time no see, Julius."

A young man was seated on the rocking chair in the yard while enjoying the sun. The sudden female voice frightened him and when he recovered his senses, his eyes brightened. "H, is that you?"

Coollest Girl in Town Chapter 67

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coollest Girl in Town Chapter 67

Elise smiled as she answered with another question, "What do you think?"

Julius immediately jumped from his chair and ran toward her. However, when he was half a step away from her, she stopped him. "Hey, calm down. There's no need to get too worked up."

His eyes reddened. "It's been so many years and you're finally back! We've looked everywhere for you..."

As he spoke, his voice started choking up.

Then, Elise patted him on the shoulder. "Look, I'm back in one piece. I see that you're learning to enjoy life more now, eh? You seem to be getting by quite nicely on your own."

It took a while for Julius to finally calm down, albeit slightly. Then, he asked, "Do Noel and the others know that you're back?"

"For now, I don't think so."

He hurriedly wiped the tears from his eyes as he added, "Noel has been waiting all these years for your return and he's the only one who insisted on waiting for you in the same place. I heard that he's the exclusive lyricist for an artist since he still has his way with words. However, without your voice and songs, the best effect cannot be achieved no matter how good the lyrics are."

Elise didn't say a word as she looked around at the courtyard houses. After a while, she suggested, "Let's go out for dinner tonight."

An elated Julius replied, "Then, I'll ask them to come along."

She quickly responded, "No, don't tell them that I'm back. Let's just have dinner together."

There was hesitation on his end. "I promised Noel to inform him of any news relating to you the moment I receive them." After saying that, he seemed to arrive at a conclusion. "Never mind, I'll just keep quiet. Maybe I can show you around instead?"

After voicing her agreement, Elise walked to the backyard where some limited edition motorbikes were parked neatly in a row. She reached out and touched one of them. "It's been so long since I last patted them."

While Julius grinned, he fished out a set of keys and tossed it to her. "Let's go for a drive."

She caught the keys before she quickly sat on the bike. Wearing the helmet had made her absolutely stunning. With a smile, she stepped on the ignition and brought the bike out of its parking spot.

They both rode a bike each and cruised the road side by side. It was obvious that Julius was overjoyed because it felt like he had returned to the good old times with Elise and their friends.

He brought her to a bar, where the two of them ordered a few classics to sample.

Then, she held the wineglass and clinked it with his. "How have you been, Julius?"

Julius replied, "It's been a long while, H."

The two downed the wine before Elise finally asked, "Really, how have you been these few years?"

"Ever since you left, everyone went their separate ways too." He smiled. "Noel is the only one who's still active in the field whereas everyone else retired. As for me, I run this bar, so I come here at night to keep an eye on things. During the day, I sunbath in the courtyard houses. Noel is quite lucky, seeing how he gradually brought that particular artist to fame. That artist is quite the star these days, I believe. What's the name again? Right, Jack Griffith! You can look up his songs; Noel is the lyricist for some of the most notable ones."

The moment she heard Jack Griffith's name, Elise was dumbfounded. *It's a small world. Way too small.*

"I'll give it a listen when I feel like it. Your bar is rather presentable."

Julius smiled. "Why don't you make an appearance tonight? Sing a song or two."

She shook her head. "No, it's okay. I haven't sung in years and I've already forgotten the feeling."

He wasn't about to throw in the towel either. "Just go and sing a song! Won't you grant my little wish, please?"

Elise didn't know whether it was her inability to win against Julius in an argument or her desire to have some satisfaction, but she found herself hesitating for a while.

Then, she donned a mask as she took to the stage.

"A mystery guest has decided to join us in Kimi Bar tonight. She will be performing a beautiful song called *Concealed Fragrance*. Let's welcome her with applause!"

As the host ended his introduction, Alexander frowned from his perch on the second floor. He sat alone at the side and he couldn't help but focus on the middle of the stage.

Concealed Fragrance was H's trademark song. After she left the entertainment field, he had never heard of the song ever since. He never thought that he would chance into this song just by heading out for a drink in boredom.

Elise was wearing a white dress as she gracefully walked onstage. As she wore a mask, no one could figure out what she looked like. However, the moment she opened her mouth, the audience fell silent.

"When petals fall away from the flower, the concealed fragrance remains. It went away in the rain, and no one knows.

As soon as Alexander heard her voice, he was shaken to the core. He was overcome with disbelief, for this voice was exactly the same as H's voice in his memories...

The angelic voice seemed to be reciting a tale in the song and every member of the focused audience was fully immersed in the experience. Since he was the first to come to his senses, he quickly rose to his full height and strode toward the backstage.

"Sir, this is the backstage. You cannot enter." A waiter blocked Alexander's way, but Alexander retrieved a stack of cash from his pocket and pressed it into the waiter's hands. The waiter paused for a while before he pretended to turn away, thus allowing Alexander passage.

After the song was over, the audience erupted in thunderous applause. Elise smiled as she bowed, then she proceeded to walk off the stage. However, a moment later, she saw Alexander walking toward her while saying, "Wait..."

He was calling out for her, which stunned her as she stopped in her tracks. Her hand had also subconsciously tugged at the mask she wore. She forced her voice into a lower pitch as she asked, "Is there anything, sir?"

"I just wanted to ask, are you H?"

Elise never thought that Alexander would recognize her. She was taken aback by his question, but she could never allow him to know of her identity. "Sorry, I'm not."

With that, she moved to leave, but he grabbed her wrist instead.

"What are you doing? Please let go, sir."

Alexander examined the woman before him and he felt that her figure was identical to someone whom he knew, but he also thought that it was impossible.

After a pause, he asked again, "Are you really not H? You two have identical voices, though."

Elise explained, "I only know how to mimic her. You're giving me compliments I don't deserve, but that just means I've improved at mimicking, so thank you for that."

So, I see. He seemed to be convinced by her answer as he released his grip on her.

Now that she had regained her freedom, Elise refused to delay a moment longer as she quickly walked off.

Julius approached her and asked, "Who is that man? What did he say to you?"

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 68

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 68

Without providing any explanation, Elise then dragged Julius out of the bar and soon vanished from Alexander's sight.

Alexander believed that him seeing H was a product of his hallucination since he was under the influence of alcohol. After disappearing without a trace for ages, it wouldn't make sense for her to show up and sing at this bar. Plus, the girl he saw earlier had a different aura from his memory of H. He withdrew his gaze and turned to leave.

Once Elise was out of the bar, she released her grip on Julius. "I need to head back now because there's something I have to do tomorrow."

It was Julius who appeared reluctant to part ways with her. He finally expressed the thoughts he had wanted to tell her all along, "H, did you see that? They were all engrossed in your music earlier. After so many years, some of your fans are still checking in on Twitter daily to wait for news on your comeback. Are you really okay to say goodbye to the fans who love you?"

"I guess I can only apologize to them." She pursed her lips.

Julius was aware that Elise would react in the same way that she did years ago—she would not renege on her words. Still, he was clinging on to a sliver of hope. "No matter what, we're waiting for your comeback. We'll be here to witness you recreating the glorious years from before."

Without replying to him, she merely smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "Send me home now," was what she said next.

After sending her to the lobby of her apartment, Julius added before leaving, "If you arrive at a decision at any time, feel free to contact me. I'll be waiting for you."

Elise waved at him before she headed straight into the apartment. Since Alexander was not back yet, she decided to retire to her room, wash up and go to bed.

As there was an exam the next day, she woke up earlier to prepare herself for it. Then, she realized that Alexander, who stayed in the room next door, had stayed out for the entire night. She didn't give it much thought and hastily grabbed a bite at the joint in front of the neighborhood entrance. Then, she hailed a cab to the exam venue.

Once she arrived, she saw Samantha and Riley waving at her from afar. "Elise, we're here!"

It was at that moment when Elise walked over to them. "You guys are quite early."

Riley chuckled. "We actually arrived yesterday! Last night, we even had some northern cuisine for dinner! It was delicious!"

Then, Elise asked, "Which exam hall are you in?"

Riley checked her entrance pass and replied, "I'm in Hall 7. What about you?"

"I'm in Hall "

Samatha chimed in, "Oh, what a coincidence! I'm right next to you, I'm in Hall 20."

The three of them headed into the campus while chatting. When they were close to the exam halls, they happened to run into Zachary. He had also spotted Elise and handed her a pouch full of stationeries that he prepared beforehand. "I packed you some 2B pencils and ballpens."

Elise was a little taken aback and hurriedly turned him down. "It's fine! I brought mine."

He did not reply to that and instead shoved the pouch into her hands. Before leaving, he added, "See you after the exam."

She looked dumbfounded as her friends exchanged looks beside her. "Miss Elise Sinclair, tell us the truth. What's going on?"

"Nothing," Elise replied as she shrugged in confusion.

Samantha and Riley obviously didn't believe Elise's words and continued to pester her. After having been defeated, she playfully knocked them on their heads. "Quit being busybodies and focus on your exams!"

Although Riley wanted to ask further, she ultimately held her tongue. "I think he must have fallen for you." Then, she stuck out her tongue at Elise before she waved and wandered into her exam hall.

Upon seeing that, Samantha hurriedly comforted Elise, "Don't mind her. All the best!" Then, she waved at Elise, who watched as her friends walked away

Elise looked at the pouch in her hand and wondered whether Zachary had truly fallen for her. *What does he want from me, though! I don't have the most beautiful face...* Since she could not figure out his intention, she gave up and handed his pouch to her classmate who didn't bring any stationery

The duration of the exam was two hours, but because Elise had performed so well, she was able to submit her papers half an hour before the time was up.

She strolled out of the exam hall, checked the time and hailed a cab back to the apartment. At that time, she bumped into Alexander, who was about to leave his room. When he saw her, his expression had remained calm. "Something came up at the last minute. I'll head home tomorrow."

Elise was fine with that. "If you're busy, don't mind me. I can head home on my own today."

As Alexander narrowed his eyes, he replied, "Grandpa asked me to take care of you. If you return alone, do you think he will let this slide?"

Indeed, using Grandpa as an excuse to shut her down was always effective. She instantly agreed to stay for another day. "Are you heading out? Where to?" ()

He said nothing as he scanned her from head to toe. "If you are bored, you can join me."

Elise wanted to turn Alexander down, but upon a second thought, she realized that she'd be bored if she stayed in the apartment after her exams. That was the reason why she decided to follow him out. Little did she expect him to bring her to a luxurious salon.

A panicked Elise then tugged on his sleeve. "Why did you bring me here?"

He explained, "I will meet a client later. Do you think you look presentable?"

She quickly checked her appearance but thought she looked alright. In fact, she was used to her lack of fashion sense.

On the other hand, Alexander had directly passed her case to the stylist. "I'll give you an hour. Style her and give her a totally different look." ()

Upon hearing that, the stylist scrutinized Elise to the point where Elise felt a little on edge. She hurriedly urged, "It's fine; you don't have to exercise too much effort. Just give me a formal suit."

After looking at Alexander for confirmation, the stylist only brought Elise to pick an outfit after he agreed

"Miss, please pick your outfit first. When that's done, we will style you."

A layer of cold sweat started to coat Elise's forehead as she replied, "I don't want to trouble you! I can take care of my own hair and makeup."

The last thing she wanted was to allow the stylist to work on hair and makeup because she'd be in deep trouble if her identity was exposed.

In the face of Elise's apprehension and insistence, the stylist did not insist on styling her. She finally changed into a black formal suit, pulled her hair back into a bun and retouched her ugly makeup. As a result, she looked a little fairer than before and her features seemed to be more harmonious. Other than that, she looked quite similar to before.

Elise regarded her new look in the mirror. When she confirmed that she looked decent, she walked out and announced, "I'm done."

When Alexander looked up, his eyes flickered with strange emotions because she had a voluptuous body and her gown did its part to accentuate her alluring figure.

"Do I look okay?" she asked hesitantly.

He turned away and answered with a question, "Is your French good?"

As Elise was confused by the purpose of Alexander's question, she blinked a few times. "Well, I can hold basic conversations."

"If that's the case, help me to interpret later."

She clarified, "Huh? You mean to say that you want me to be your interpreter?"

"Yeah," he retorted. "Do you have any problem with that?" ()

There was a slight frown on her face. "But—".

He ignored her reservations and replied, "No buts!"

Then, Alexander stood up to his full height and led Elise out of the salon.

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 69

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 69

As a global conglomerate, the Griffith Group had maintained business relationships with entities in various countries. On that particular day, Alexander brought Elise to an upscale French restaurant and they saw their guests the moment they stepped into the private dining hall—a group of French people.

The moment Alexander entered, the French people were joyful and they enthusiastically greeted him whereas Elise shot him a glance and understood his hint. Then, she started to interpret for both sides and her fluency in the language was more than conversational as she had spent some time abroad.

His gaze had intermittently swept past her throughout the course of the dinner. It was then he realized that she had a captivating charm.

When Elise saw that the meal was almost over, she whispered to Alexander, “I’ll head to the washroom.”

He slightly nodded, thus allowing her to excuse herself from the hall. After she left, the guests couldn’t help but ask him in French, “Alex, what’s with you today? Why were you quiet during the meal? The missus was the only one speaking to us.”

Alexander smiled beguilingly as he slowly replied in fluent French, “She’s my assistant. Since she’s unfamiliar with the operations, I was giving her a training opportunity earlier.”

The French guests exchanged looks with each other and grinned. “So, she’s only your assistant, Alex? I clearly saw how you looked at her just now, though. I thought she was your girlfriend.”

Upon hearing the term ‘girlfriend’, Alexander oddly didn’t feel repulsive because he seemed to agree that it was a suitable nickname for Elise.

He fell silent and took a huge sip of the wine in front of him. The French were always passionate, sensual and especially open-minded when it came to relationships. When they saw Alexander agreeing with them in silence, they couldn’t help but joke with him. “Alex! It looks like the missus’ identity is not as simple as you said! I think you should be more courageous to meet the true love of your life.”

The wine didn’t smoothly slide down his throat because the moment he heard their words of encouragement, he choked on his wine.

It so happened that Elise was back from her trip to the washroom. She could sense that something had shifted in the air the moment she entered the hall, but she quickly handed him a tissue regardlessly. "Are you alright?"

Alexander looked up and met her clear eyes that sparkled with his reflection in them. As it reminded him of the 'advice' from his guests, it caused him to hurriedly look away and reply, "I'm okay."

She could feel that he was acting in a strange manner, but she couldn't pinpoint exactly what went wrong.

The amused guests looked like they had made a new discovery. As they were about to speak, Alexander swiftly handed them the bottle of wine and smiled knowingly before he downed the contents in his glass.

His abrupt action was clear-he wanted to prevent them from exposing him.

Since it wasn't their first time collaborating with him, they exchanged grins as they were elated to witness him losing his composure. No one was stopping him and by the end of the event, he had already downed more than he could handle.

In the end, Elise had to support Alexander as they walked out of the restaurant, which made her pant from the exertion. "Why did you drink so much?" she grumbled as she couldn't hold back her annoyance, to which he simply commented, "I haven't had so much fun in a long time. I am only feeling a bit dizzy."

She replied, "How could you not be dizzy after all the drinking? Stand still for now. I'm calling a cab."

He grunted and was about to stand straight when he lost his balance a second later, leaving her with no choice but to lean against her.

It left her at the end of her wits. After hailing a cab with her phone, she brought him back to the apartment.

It was with much effort that Elise finally hauled Alexander into the unit and the action of doing so had exhausted her. She leaned against the wall for a short rest and wanted to reach out for the light switch. Much to her surprise, his body fell toward her and she hurried over to hold him. As she failed to catch him, she watched as he fell flat onto her and sent them crashing to the ground.

She was still reeling from the pain when she heard a loud thud somewhere. A pair of warm lips pressed themselves against hers in the middle of the dark, causing her eyes to widen in shock as she stared at the enlarged face in front of her. Her nose was filled with a unique masculine scent, after which she shoved him away carelessly in a frantic manner. "Alexander, what are you doing?"

Alas, he had too much to drink and he was slumped on his side as he leaned against the wall limply.

Elise quickly wiped her lips and forced herself to rise from the floor. As she left Alexander behind, she rushed to the bedroom and stared at her reflection in the mirror while regrets washed over her. "Ahhhhhhhhhh! What was that?! Elise, that was your first kiss! It's gone just like that!".

She sounded so regretful that she badly wanted to repeatedly cleanse her lips.

Even though the corners of her mouth had turned red from the rigorous wiping, she still refused to stop.

After what seemed like an eternity, she took a deep breath to calm down. "It will be fine. Elise Sinclair, just forget what happened before. Act like nothing has happened."

Despite her attempts to convince herself, the earlier scene was still playing itself in Elise's mind. She finally lost her cool and cursed in desperation, "Dammit! What the heck was that?"

As she had lost her mood to care for Alexander, she left him asleep on the floor until late after midnight when she felt a little sorry for him. She headed out of the bedroom to take a peek and found him still on the floor. Now that she was feeling sorry for him, she caved in and dragged him to his bedroom.

The next morning, Elise woke up almost close to noon and rummaged for her phone. When she realized that it was already 11:00AM in the morning, she washed up and exited the bedroom. She saw Alexander seated on the couch and furiously typing away on his laptop.

"You're awake?" he asked. When she heard his voice, she was instantly transported to the scene last night, which irritated her to no end.

When he didn't receive any answer, he looked up at her and closed his laptop. "I had too much to drink last night, so it must have been tough for you."

Elise then glared at him sharply before she couldn't help but complain, "Good that you know it! Do you know how much effort I used to get you home? I was so exhausted!"

At the sight of her animated expression, Alexander unknowingly broke into an almost unnoticeable smile that would easily be missed. "My mind went completely blank last night. I didn't cross a line, did I?"

Upon hearing that, she had wanted to retort, but she resisted and coldly replied, "No," (Coolest Girl in Town Updated at novelheart.com)

Alexander looked reassured after hearing Elise's reply. When he first woke up, some vague memories lingered in his mind and he was worried that he had crossed a line. Come to think of it, he found his reaction after he drank the alcohol rather odd. He rarely was tipsy even after downing many glasses of wine on normal occasions, but last night was an exception. *I totally blacked out! I think I need to cut down on drinking next time.*

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 70

/ [Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 70

“When are we heading home?”

Alexander snapped back to reality and answered, “Pack your stuff. Let’s head back in the afternoon.”

After hearing his answer, Elise relaxed and turned around to enter her bedroom.

In the afternoon, they traveled in silence throughout their journey to the airport. He could sense that she was intentionally creating distance between them.

Moments after they returned to Athesea, he asked the driver to send Elise home while he himself headed to the office.

Once she arrived at home, a concerned Jonah asked, “Ellie, how was the exam?”

She replied, “It was fine. Not a problem for me.”

He then gave a warm smile. “I knew it! Ellie is the best! By the way, why are you home alone? Where’s Alex?”

The last thing she wanted to talk about was Alexander, so she answered curtly, “He went to the office.”

The old man clearly sensed the change in Elise’s mood and assured, “Ellie, he didn’t bully you in the past two days, did he? If he bullied you, just let me know. I have your back!”

Elise focused on a particular spot on the floor before she shook her head. “I-I’m fine! Grandpa, I feel a little tired. So, I’m going to rest in my room.”

Now that she had greeted Jonah, she went upstairs into her room. He flashed a smile of knowledge at the vanishing figure and the butler beside him interjected, “Sir, you seem to be in a good mood.”

Jonah’s smile widened even more. “Yeah! It looks like my trick has worked pretty well. In the future, you need to figure out ways to make them spend time with each other. I don’t want to let this future granddaughter-in-law escape!”

The butler rarely saw Jonah in such high spirits. “Sir, you’re right! Miss Elise and Young Master Alex look quite compatible.”

Confirmations of his greatest wish was what Jonah loved to listen to.

"This boy, Alex, keeps everything to himself and he is extremely calculative. Someone like Ellie by his side would only spice up his life even further!"

"You're right indeed! Young Master Alex's birthday is around the corner. Do you think we should... do some matchmaking?"

Upon hearing the suggestion, Jonah agreed and nodded. "Let's observe for now. When the time is right, we'll give them a push."

Elise returned to her room, opened her laptop and logged into the account that she previously used to help Alexander with interpreter work. She found herself staring at the message he sent to her half a month ago-he asked whether she wanted to help him with interpreting on the spot at Aris. Without a second thought, she replied, 'No!'

She instantly felt much relieved after she replied with a one-word answer. Now that she had sent the message, she closed the laptop and shoved the matter to the back of her mind.

Now that she was done with the National Mathematics Olympiad, she returned to school once again.

Alexander should have been the one to send her to school, but she stubbornly decided to leave with Danny.

Since Elise was absent for half a month, she found herself longing for school life.

Mikayla approached Elise and gave a bear hug. "Elise, you're finally back!!!"

"That's enough! You're squeezing me; I can't breathe!"

Upon hearing that, Mikayla released Elise from her embrace. "Do you know how badly I have missed you in your absence?"

They interlocked their fingers in an intimate manner while heading to the classroom. As Mikayla suddenly thought of something, she lowered her voice. "Oh, right, I have something to tell you. Jasmine is going to be engaged. She came to school two days ago to deliver the invitation cards for her engagement party to us.

Now that Elise was hearing Jasmine's name once again, it no longer evoked any reaction from her. She then replied airily, "Her life has nothing to do with me."

In contrast, Mikayla looked indignant. "How could someone like Jasmine live such a good life? I refuse to accept that! Shouldn't the bad receive their karma?"

Mikayla looked confused, but Elise merely ruffled her friend's hair. "Okay, stop overthinking! We just need to live our lives to the best of our abilities. The lives of others do not concern us."

After being comforted by Elise, Mikayla immediately cheered up and they both entered the classroom.

At the same time, Alexander was seated in his luxurious executive chair in his office at the Griffith Group. His eyes were staring at the words on his computer screen-the reply he received regarding his request for interpreting on the spot *No!*

He lifted a brow in surprise and finally made an internal call. Soon, an assistant came into the office.

"I told you to look for Arisian interpreters. Are there any candidates? Send their resume to my inbox, please."

Upon hearing that, the assistant responded in nervousness, "Young Master Alex, we have not received any resumes so far."

Alexander's eyes narrowed as he fell into deep thought. "Did you ask the foreign language college? I don't mind fresh graduates as long as they can help with basic interpretation work."

"I have checked with a couple of colleges in Aris, but nobody has majored in the language since the population of Arisian speakers is small. That's why I can't find a candidate until now."

As he rapped his knuckles rhythmically on the table, Alexander stared at Elise's reply before he finally decided and messaged, 'What's your offer? As long as you are willing to work, the pay is not a problem.'

After sending his reply, he felt that it wasn't enough and added, "If you have any issues, you can talk it out with me face-to-face. As for the pay, I can match your preferred salary."

This was the first time Alexander had lowered himself to beg for a favor. It was all because the company urgently needed talent, yet it was hard to come across.

To be more blunt, he was running out of options.

"Get back to work and search for an Arisian interpreter. Once you receive an application, let me know right away."

"Sure, Young Master Alex."

With that, the assistant left, but the door to the office was opened again soon after. As Alexander was buried deep in work, he thought that his assistant had returned. "Anything else?"

Jonah smiled and announced, "It's me."

Alexander looked up with a surprised face. "Grandpa, why did you visit today?"

Calmness had enveloped Jonah when he replied, "You must have endured a lot this time. I'm just bored at home, so I decided to swing by."

Then, Alexander rose to his height and handed his grandpa a couple of financial reports that he had vetted. "Grandpa, these are the financial reports for this month. Take a look! I have a meeting soon, so I'll need to run."

Jonah accepted the reports, but he placed them aside for the time being. "Those aren't urgent. I need to talk to you."

Upon seeing his grandfather's grave expression, Alexander thought that serious matters would be discussed and he asked the assistant to close the door. "Grandpa, what's the matter?"

Much to his surprise, Jonah flashed a smile. "Why are you so nervous? It's nothing much. I just noticed that it's going to be your birthday soon. Do you have any thoughts on how you want to celebrate it?"

Alexander was taken aback by the question. "Grandpa, it's just a birthday. It's not that important."

As usual, he never liked anything ceremonial and would prefer a simple dinner with family for his birthday.

"Well, here's what I think. Since our family hasn't gathered for a long time, let's have everyone over to celebrate your birthday. What do you think?"

Alexander was still in the dark about his grandpa's plan and tried to reject the suggestion with the excuse of being busy. "Grandpa, I have a lot of projects to work on. I even have a work trip to Aris in a few days' time. As for the birthday celebration, let's put it aside for now."

"Look at you! You're only focused on work. If so, I'll take care of your birthday celebrations and you'll just need to focus on your work. When your birthday rolls around, all you have to do is to show up."

Since Jonah was insistent and even offered to help, Alexander did not reject the idea and allowed his grandfather to take charge instead.

Coollest Girl in Town Chapter 71

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coollest Girl in Town Chapter 71

Matthew was already waiting for Elise at the entrance the moment school knocked off for the day. He had done so until she showed up at the gates. Then, he alighted from his car and walked toward her. "Give me your bag."

She obliged, to which he took her bag while he held the car door open for her. Once they were inside the car, he started the engines and cruised down the street.

Then, he initiated the conversation. "How was school today?"

"Good," she monotonously replied, "Everything's fine."

Matthew shot a glance at her through the rearview mirror in the silence. When they arrived home, he parked the car in the underground garage and they left for the elevator together. Much to their dismay, the lights in the elevator suddenly blinked before it turned off and plunged them into darkness.

A panicked Elise asked, "What's the problem?" As she spoke, she reflexively reached out to bang on the elevator doors.

Matthew quickly comforted her, "It could be a technical error. I'll make a call now to the servants."

While he comforted her, he fished out his phone only to realize that there was no line. He also hadn't noticed that Elise was suffering from a full-blown panic attack as sweat beads formed across her forehead while her body trembled violently.

Elise's breathing was erratic and her body went limp a second later, after which she collapsed to the floor. When Matthew saw this happening, he asked in worry, "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

What answered him was her chattering teeth, which he found to be rather odd. "Are you... claustrophobic?"

At that moment, she could not hear what he was saying. Even though she was taking deep breaths, she felt that her brain had gone numb. It was only at this time when he realized that the situation was grave. Without any hesitation, he banged on the doors and yelled to anyone who happened to be outside. Soon, the servants hurried over, but they couldn't help much except to call the technician.

"Young Master Matthew, are you alright?"

As he stared at the unconscious Elise sprawled on the ground, this was the first time Matthew stammered, "O-Open t-the d-door! O-Open i-it right now!"

Upon hearing the shouts from the other side, the servants then circled the ground in worry. At the same time, Alexander's car rolled in and one of the servants immediately approached him as soon as Alexander got out. "Young Master Alex, something's happened! Miss Sinclair and Young Master Matthew are both trapped in the elevator!"

The moment Alexander heard those words, he knew that he couldn't afford to waste any more time and rushed over to the scene. When he confirmed that the doors were stuck, he switched off the electricity to restart the entire system. Within two minutes, the elevator started to work again. As soon as the doors reopened, he immediately noticed a pale Elise on the floor. Without further ado, he carried her in his arms and marched out.

While staring at Alexander's back, Matthew's eyes darkened as he clenched his fists silently.

"Quickly call the family doctor and ask him to come over as soon as possible," Alexander ordered the servants while he had Elise in his arms. The servants who were all at home had panicked and rushed to get the doctor.

Then, he brought her back to the bedroom and placed her on the bed. Despite repeatedly calling out her name, she did not respond to him. On top of that, her hand was also twitching.

Without saying any more, he firmly grabbed hold of her hand and only released it when the family doctor arrived.

"Here, take a look at her. What's wrong?"

Since the doctor had hurried over to give Elise a body checkup, Alexander could only leave the room. He ran into Matthew the moment he walked out, which caused his expression to darken. Then, he questioned Matthew, "What did you do to her?"

Seeing that Matthew did not reply, Alexander continued firing shots without any mercy. "I am warning you now: you better not take advantage of her. If not, I will make sure that there is no place for you in our family."

Alexander's words were an obvious threat, to which Matthew did not take seriously. Rather, he sneered. "You seem to care for her a lot. Have you fallen for her?" After that, he couldn't help but mock, "An ugly girl like her might not fit your ideal type, though!"

As he approached Alexander, the disdain in his eyes appeared to be more obvious. "You better not think that I have no idea about your motive. Or, should I say that we share the same goal? If that's the case, let's not attack each other and have a fair competition instead."

With a cold look in his eyes, Alexander smiled mockingly. "You're letting the cat out of the bag."

Matthew scoffed and left without a word.

Now that Alexander was aware of Matthew's advances, he believed that life would be interesting from now on.

Elise was so traumatized after the earlier scare that she even ran a temperature at night. As a result, she was in and out of consciousness until the next afternoon. The *moment* she opened her eyes, she noticed Jonah staring at her with a concerned face. "Ellie, you're finally awake!"

Her mind was still blank as she looked at the familiar ceiling. Since her memory was still replaying the scene where she was trapped in the elevator, it made her tremble in fear again.

"Ellie, are you okay?"

Elise shook her head. "I'm fine now. Sorry to make you worry."

"Oh, please don't say that! I did not know that you are claustrophobic. In the future, I won't let this happen again."

She grunted in acknowledgment. Not many knew about her claustrophobia and to be fair to her, she hadn't suffered an attack in such a long time. At first, she thought that she was successfully in control of her deepest fears, but this incident clearly indicated that her claustrophobia would haunt her for her entire life.

"Ellie, tell me if there's anything that you crave. I'll have the servants prepare it for you. Since you're still recovering, you need more rest."

Elise replied, "Okay, I got it. Thanks, Grandpa."

The experience had rendered her unwell for a few days and she spent most of her time in bed. During that period, the young masters of the Griffith Family took turns to take care of her. Jack had a few deadlines to meet and when it was his turn after work to look after her, he looked rather annoyed. Still, the four brothers didn't dare to go against Jonah's words and they obeyed his orders to attend to her.

Regardless of how the men felt, Elise had gotten along well with young masters of the Griffith Family during her recovery period. Alexander was the only one who received a different type of treatment-she was obviously shunning him to the point where he was well aware of her change in attitude.

As usual, he brought a bowl of chicken soup on a tray to her room. "The servants prepared this for you. Eat it while it's hot," he told her.

She was in the midst of reading a book at that time and merely answered with a grunt. Then, he added, "Are you going back to school tomorrow?"

Elise replied without raising her eyes, "Yeah."

Alexander was still confused about her thoughts and didn't probe further. "Remember to finish your food. I'm leaving now," he reminded her.

This time around, Elise didn't bother to reply to him. After he left, she finally put down the book in her hands and sighed helplessly. For some reason, the sight of him brought her back to the night where they were alone with each other. Besides, she remembered that the servant informed her that it was Alexander who brought her into her room after she had fainted in the elevator.

The moment she thought about it, she felt embarrassed the person who gave her the experience of her first kiss and the first time being carried in a guy's arms... was Alexander himself.

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 72

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 72

Taking a glance at the chicken soup which Alexander had brought her, Elise lost all appetite and took out her laptop instead. After turning it on, she logged into her own account and immediately saw the message Alexander had dropped her.

"This guy is rather generous," she muttered, judging him. But then again, she thought, if he's willing to pay me handsomely to be an interpreter, why shouldn't I do it? As long as I disguise myself well, he may not recognize me. Also, what's more important than making money?

When she had thought it through, she replied, 'I'm charging 10 million. If you're alright with the price, we can leave anytime?'

Alexander's cell phone beeped curtly, whereupon he tapped the message open. Without hesitation, he replied, 'OK.'

I have to admit that he's really generous, Elise thought. She then decided to just go ahead with it and called Jamie. "Jamie, get an ID and passport done for me with a random name-whatever name that's good enough to get me on a flight."

Curious, Jamie asked, "Boss, are you going abroad?"

"Yeah. I'm making a trip abroad in a couple of days."

"Boss, you have a passport from Mesdra, don't you?" Jamie answered hurriedly. "Why go through the hassle to make a new one?"

At his reminder, Elise recalled that she *did* have a passport from Mesdra. At first, she was worried that Alexander would find out about her identity, but her name on that passport was a name which he didn't know,

"Alright. Then book me a flight to Aris for the day after tomorrow."

"I got it, Boss."

Hanging up the call, Elise reckoned that she had to maintain a distance with Alexander on this trip to Aris with him so that something like what happened the last time wouldn't occur again.

After she had agreed to go to Aris with Alexander, she asked for leave from her

lecturers the next morning on the pretext that she was going to visit her grandparents in the countryside.

Meanwhile, when Jonah found out that she was going back home, he immediately sent someone to prepare lots of gifts. "Elise, bring all these with you and send my regards to your grandparents."

Looking at the pile of gifts, Elise was a little concerned. Her initial plan was to make the trip back home after her return from Aris, but it seemed like there would be a change of plans and she had to go home first.

"Okay, I thank you on their behalf, Grandpa Griffith."

So, on that afternoon, she made a trip back to the prairie on the northwest with the gifts Jonah had prepared.

As her grandfather, Robin, already knew that she was coming, he already instructed the servants at home to prepare the snacks she loved. "Be a little more smart and alert once Ellie is back," he said to his wife, Laura. "No matter what, we shouldn't try to make her stay because we already agreed before this that we should take care of her marriage first."

Knowing what was on his mind, Laura agreed. "Don't worry. I just want to enjoy Ellie's visit, and I promise I won't make her stay. We'll let her stay a night at home, let her hang around a little, and then send her on her way after a meal."

"Yes, that's what we have to do!"

Just like that, the elderly couple reached an agreement and waited until Elise returned to the home where she hadn't been back to for a long time. The moment she saw Robin, she ran straight into his arms. "Grandpa, I missed you so much!"

Even though Robin was very excited to see his granddaughter, whom he missed dearly as well, he acted very calm on the surface and said, "Looks like you still have some conscience, not forgetting to visit an old man like me."

Hugging his arm, Elise said in a spoiled manner, "Gramps, what are you talking about? You and Grandma are always on my mind. How are you two doing recently? Are you eating and sleeping on time? More importantly, did you miss me?"

Proudly, Robin answered, "We're doing very well, but what about you? In the blink of

an eye, a few months have already passed. So, how about that thing we spoke about before? Are there any boys from the Griffiths that you're happy with? Let me know if there is. I can-

Before he could finish, Elise cut him off, saying, "Grandpa, I rarely come home. Can we talk about something else instead?"

Ha, I knew this cunning girl was going to wriggle her way out of this, Robin thought and sighed. "What a hard life I have. My granddaughter doesn't listen to me anymore now that she's all grown up," he lamented with a sad and deplored face.

Hurriedly, Elise added, "Okay, Grandpa. I understand. I'll do as you say and try to check them out, but don't forget our agreement before this. If I don't meet anyone I like within a year, you can't bring up this topic anymore."

Hearing that, Robin looked relieved and asked, "So, there's no one you fancy now?"

Without thinking, she shook her head in reply, which only made Robin look helplessly at her. As they entered the living room, Laura, who had been trying to keep her emotions in check, watched on as she saw Elise walking in and cleared her throat. "So it's Elise who's back."

Running over to her in a hurry, Elise exclaimed, "I missed you so much, Grandma!"

Delighted to see the return of her granddaughter, Laura noticed that Elise's cheeks had grown a little chubbier in just a few months of not seeing her. Despite that, Laura remembered her ultimate objective and deliberately looked behind Elise. "Are you back alone?"

Although a little embarrassed, Elise still nodded her head obediently and answered, "Yes, Grandma."

Upon hearing that, Laura seemed unhappy and kept her hands away from Elise. "You never cease to make me worry."

Grabbing Laura's arm, Elise whined, "Grandma, I never make you worry. I've always been a good girl."

Laura snorted. "If you're a good girl, you should bring your husband back with you and get your marriage over and done with. That will be my biggest relief."

With a sorry look on her face, Elise said, "But I'm still young, Grandma! I don't want to get married yet!"

"Do you think you're still young? You're eighteen now, almost turning nineteen. In the blink of an eye, you'll be twenty soon. That's not young anymore. When I was your age back then, I was already married to your grandfather."

“That’s the norm at your times, but things are different now! People advocate marriages and having children at a later time. It’s not too late even if I get married three or five years later.”

Her words almost made Laura suffer a stroke as she exclaimed, “You’re planning to get married three or five years later? Are you trying to drive me to my grave?”

“No, I’m not. Don’t be angry, Grandma,” Elise consoled in a hurry. *I knew they’d urge me into marriage again when I come back, she thought. I should have returned later.*

Staring at Elise, Laura seemed to have recalled something, and her eyes turned red before she sighed deeply. “Elise, your parents left before their time, and your aunt is

still not married until now. Although we have our own children, your grandfather and I are getting on in age, and you’re our only granddaughter. All we want is to see you set up your own family and career, so that we can put our minds at ease. Moreover, we need someone to take over our huge family business. You’re not young anymore, and you shouldn’t keep us waiting too long. I’m worried that we won’t get to see that day...”

Every word she said drilled into Elise’s ears, making her feel very uneasy, Since she lost her parents when she was young, she had grown up by her grandparents’ sides; now, their only wish was for her to find a fine partner, yet she kept disappointing them.

Maybe I can really give it a try, Elise thought. Just for my grandparents’ sake.

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 73

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 73

“Don’t be sad, Grandma. I’ll try my best, so don’t worry about me.”

Seeing that Elise had softened her attitude, Laura knew that she had made the right move, and she quickly added, “Well, you said it yourself. I’ll give you another chance, then. The next time you’re back, you have to bring along your husband so I can meet him.”

All of a sudden, Elise felt that she had fallen into a trap, but since she had already said it herself, she could only agree. “Okay, I’ll try my best.”

Upon getting her word, all the sadness disappeared from Laura’s face. “Come here. Let me take a good look at you to see if you’ve grown any taller or chubbier.”

Speechless, Elise could clearly feel that she had fallen for her trap, but even so, she had no complaints about it.

After having dinner with her grandparents, Elise went to her bedroom on the third floor. Opening the door, she immediately saw a huge poster with the letter H printed on the bottom.

Lifting her gaze, she stared at her own poster with an unreadable look in her eyes. However, very quickly, she looked away and scanned around the room. Everything in the room was exactly how it was when she left; it showed how careful Robin and

Then, she paced to the storage space in her room and opened the door. The space was filled with digital albums and posters, and she found the limited edition of her own album she published back then.

"Since Mikayla likes it so much, I'll bring a few albums for her. I think Matthew likes it as well, so I'll bring a couple for him, too," she muttered as she took out a few albums and signed the letter H with a Sharpie pen. When she was done, only then did she leave the storage with the albums in her hands,

"Ellie!" Laura suddenly called out while pushing the door open.

Setting the albums aside, Elise asked, "What is it, Grandma?"

Laura walked into the room and passed her the lucky charm she got for her. "Elise,

take good care of yourself out there. The most important thing is your safety," she said while putting on the lucky charm around Elise's neck. "Your grandpa and I are old, and we don't know how many remaining days we have. You're the only one that we worry about the most."

Throwing herself into her embrace, Elise said, "Grandma, I'll take care of myself, so stop worrying about me. You have to take care of yourself, too."

Laura stroked her head. "Yeah, I know how to take care of myself at this age. Actually, I came looking for you because I have a favor to ask from you." ()

While Elise was looking at her in confusion, Laura reached into her pocket and took out an antique-looking locket. "This was my dowry back then. My family was against my decision to marry your grandfather, and so many decades have passed since

then, but I've not thought of going home to take a look. So, I don't know how my family is doing now."

This was the first time Elise heard Laura mentioning her own family, the Richardsons, and she couldn't help but ask, "Do you have any siblings from your family?"

"I have a younger brother, but I haven't contacted him over the years and don't know how he's doing now. Previously, I heard rumors saying that his family have moved to Athesea, and since you're there as well, I wonder if you can help me out," Laura said.

"Just tell me what I can do for you, Grandma!" Elise said with a rough guess in her mind.

Looking at the locket in her hand, Laura sighed. "Although I made the tough choice not to contact them for decades, they're still constantly on my mind. If you have time some day, please help me look for them."

"Okay, I got it, Grandma!" Elise replied.

Hy brother's name is Leonard Richardson. Please send him my regards if you find him."

After making a mental note of the name, Elise said, "Don't worry, Grandma! I'll ask around Athesea when I'm back there."

Having received Elise's assurance, Laura nodded. "Great! Thank you, Elise." ()

"You don't have to be so courteous to me, Grandma! If you would like to meet them some day, I can even--"

Before Elise could finish her sentence, Laura interjected, "There's no need to meet up. I just need to know if they're doing well. That's all."

Even though Elise didn't completely comprehend it, she respected Laura's decision and put it on her mind to remember this matter.

So, Elise stayed a night at home and said goodbye to her grandparents the next day. Before leaving, she even called for a courier service to have those albums sent to the Griffiths?.

After leaving her home, Elise didn't return to Athesea. Instead, she changed into a new look with a different makeup and headed straight for the airport. With the Mesdra passport she had from years ago which was registered under the name Sare, she checked in for the flight and got her boarding pass.

At the same time, Alexander had also arrived at the airport together with his assistant, Cameron. "Mr. Griffith, here's your ID and passport. I've already checked in for you, and your boarding pass is here as well. Boarding will commence in another twenty minutes."

Alexander nodded in reply and checked the time on his wristwatch. "Did you contact the interpreter? What time will she arrive?"

"I called her, but nobody picked up the phone," Cameron answered nervously.

Hearing that, Alexander knitted his dark brows tightly together and whisked out his phone to call the number that he was given before. A couple of rings later, someone picked up his call and he asked, "Hello, am I speaking to Sare!"

Recognizing that it was Alexander's voice, Elise suppressed her own voice, and almost immediately, a neutral and rather hoarse voice echoed through the call. "Yes, I'm Sare! Mr. Griffith, I'm already at the airport."

When he heard that she was already here, the expression on his face relaxed a lot. "I'm at boarding gate number 153. Are you coming over?"

After checking the boarding pass in her hand, she explained, "I'm sorry, Mr. Griffith, but since I'm in economy class, I won't be boarding together with you. We'll meet

during the transit in Singapore later, then."

"Why don't you come over, and I'll get my assistant to upgrade you to business class?" Alexander suggested straight away. "In that case, we can also discuss the job onboard."

Thinking that she didn't have to pay for the upgrade fees herself, Elise immediately agreed. "Sure. I'll see you in a while."

After hanging up the call, Alexander waited in silence. Barely three minutes had passed when a slender figure walked toward him steadily. The woman had chestnut brown hair and was wearing black sunglasses. Although she was casually dressed, the elegance she was exuding was impossible to hide. Stopping in front of Alexander, Elise spoke first. "Hello, Mr. Griffith."

Looking up, Alexander saw an elegant and charmingly matured woman, whom he would not associate with the ugly Elise that he remembered. He stood up from his seat and greeted her in a gentlemanly manner. "Nice to meet you, Miss Sare."

Smiling gently, Elise extended her hand at him. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Griffith."

Returning her smile, Alexander shook her hand, but the moment their hands touched, he felt an inexplicable familiar feeling surging within him. With a calm expression, he surveyed the person in front of him and said composedly, "Your reputation precedes you, Miss Sare. Hopefully, we'll have a pleasant cooperation during the next few days."

"I hope so too!"

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 74

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)
Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 74

After Cameron was finished with the upgrade procedure, Elise and Alexander soon boarded the flight headed for Singapore. More than ten hours of flight and transit later, they finally reached Aris.

The moment Elise got off the plane, she was incredibly exhausted, but she was the only one amongst the three of them who could speak Arisian, so she was the most important person in the group; despite her sleepiness, she had to help them to communicate with the locals until they reached the hotel. Upon contact with the bed, relief washed over her, and she fell into a deep slumber.

Elise spent one whole day adjusting to the jetlag and only recovered on the third day. After waking up, she saw the message Alexander had sent her earlier. 'Miss Sare, I'll meet you at the hotel lobby at 8.00AM.

She replied okay' after reading the text and then put down her phone. Then, she quickly washed up, changed into a set of formal business attire, and put on the glasses she had prepared earlier, making herself look like a professional career woman.

When she reached the lobby, Alexander and Cameron were already there waiting for her.

"Miss Sare!" Cameron greeted and passed a schedule to her. "This is Mr. Griffith's itinerary for the day. You'll need to accompany him the whole time as his interpreter, so your workload will be very heavy today. Are you okay with that?"

Taking a glance at the schedule, Elise thought that it wouldn't be a problem and answered, "It's alright. I'm okay with it."

With that reply from her, Cameron breathed a sigh of relief. He had been working as Alexander's assistant for years, and he knew his work attitude very well. When it came to work, Alexander had always been meticulous, and previously, Cameron was worried that Elise might delay the progress of their work, but he could now set his mind at ease after hearing her answer.

The three of them got into an MPV car, and Elise started to brief them on the culture and geographical climate of Aris. "Aris is a small country with a population of not more than ten million. Located in the Eurasian continent, it has a temperate continental climate with cold winters and warm summers. The annual temperature

difference is rather huge; it is dry most of the time and it rains very little. It's summer now, so the precipitation is low and the air is quite dry. So, you can bring a bottle of warm water with you to quench your thirst, Mr. Griffith."

"You seem very familiar with Aris," Alexander pointed out casually after hearing her explanation.

Composedly, she answered, "When I was in university, I fell in love with the fruit, medlar, and thought it would be a good idea to find out more about the local culture of Aris. As for learning the local language, it was only because I can gain more credits in university for learning a minor language."

At her reply, Alexander couldn't help but steal a peek at her. *This girl looks like she's only around twenty years old, so I didn't think that she had already graduated from university.* "Looks like you did really well in your studies."

"I was rather bright and skipped a grade in the middle, so I managed to start university earlier," Elise answered honestly.

"Where did you attend university?" Alexander asked next. ()

"University of Edinburgh."

At the mention of Edinburgh, Alexander seemed very interested. "What a coincidence! I did my double degree in Cambridge back then."

As Elise had already seen his resume a long time ago, she was more than aware of his education background, and she didn't appear surprised to hear him mention it now. "Anyone who could enter Oxbridge are talented people. It's easy to tell that you're a person who did really well in your studies."

Even when complimented, Alexander didn't appear flattered. "You're indeed a professional interpreter, Miss Sare. You're a very good conversationalist."

Elise smiled politely, and time seemed to pass very quickly while they were chatting. In just half an hour's car ride, they reached their destination. ()

The project that the Griffith Group would be working with the Aris government was an oil exploration project, and hundreds of millions had been invested. Knowing that Alexander would be arriving, the Aris government had sent their representatives to await him at the entrance, and the sounds of firecrackers greeted him when he

arrived.

"This is a local culture of the Arisians," Elise hurriedly explained. "Lighting the firecrackers shows that they're welcoming you."

It wasn't until the sounds of firecrackers had died down that Alexander finally got out of the car. With bright smiles on their faces, the government representatives walked toward him and extended their hands at him as they spoke in fluent Arisian. "Welcome to number one mining factory of Aris to monitor the work, Mr. Griffith."

The second Elise heard that, she immediately translated it for Alexander and helped him to exchange some opinions with the Arisians. After that, she followed them as the government representatives led them into the mining area to observe the work.

The whole while, she was serious in her job as the interpreter and managed to achieve a good flow of communication between both parties. Very quickly, it was noon, and the government representatives brought them to a restaurant which they had arranged beforehand.

"Mr. Griffith, the local food here is a little sweet. I'm not sure if it will be to your liking," Elise whispered softly into Alexander's ears.

In reply, he said, "I've lived in southeast Asia for a period of time. I think I can take it."

When he said that, he thought that the sweetness level of the food would be similar to food from the Philippines, but little did he know that all his appetite would be gone after he tried the local cuisine. *This is more than a little sweet—it's over-the-charts sweet!* he thought.

Sitting next to him, Elise noticed that he couldn't get used to the local flavors. So, she made use of the time when she made a trip to the bathroom to order a bottle of yogurt drink for him from the reception. "Have some yogurt to drink, Mr. Griffith. I'll take you to a restaurant which serves spicy food when this is over."

His stomach couldn't help but rumble at her words. Since he hadn't eaten anything the whole morning, he was already famished, but none of the dishes from the spread on the table was to his liking. Taking the yogurt drink from Elise, he said, "Thanks."

The culture at the dining table was more or less the same regardless where they went, and as representatives from the government, the Arisians kept refilling Alexander's

glass. As the locals had a liking for fruit liqueurs with a low alcohol content, Alexander didn't even feel tipsy after a few glasses.

Next to him, Elise advised, "Mr. Griffith, don't have too much of this fruit liqueur because the effect of the alcohol hits very badly afterward."

However, he merely took her advice nonchalantly. "It's just a few rounds of fruit liqueur. It will be okay."

Hearing that, Elise decided not to say anything else anymore. After all, he was the boss, and she was just his employee.

When the lunch was over, she went up next to him and asked in a whisper, "Mr. Griffith, are you alright?"

Right now, Alexander's face was already blushing bright red, obviously from the reaction to the alcohol. "I think I'm fine," he muttered, but he clearly sounded unsure of himself.

Hurriedly, Elise took out a box of mints and passed it to him. "Have a few mints and try to sober up a little. You didn't eat much at lunch earlier. I know a rather good restaurant here; I'll bring you there to give it a try." ()

Since Alexander was famished and had had quite a lot of fruit liqueur earlier, his stomach was already burning, but he had to maintain a calm composure. Hence, he pretended everything was fine until he got into the car, and his head started spinning when it drove away.

Seated beside him, Elise didn't even have time to react when she heard a barf and realized that Alexander had thrown up. This scene was more horrible than the last time when he was drunk.

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 75

[/ Coolest Girl in Town](#)

Coolest Girl in Town Chapter 75

Elise frowned in annoyance as she thought, *I've already warned him against the effect of the fruit liqueur earlier, but he still couldn't restrain himself. Regardless, I can't leave him by himself now when he's in this state.*

Despite that, she shuddered when she recalled what happened the last time.

Back at the hotel, she went straight to the hotel staff and passed them a stack of bills while requesting, "Please send him back to his room."

Seeing the wad of cash in front of their eyes, the hotel staff didn't even hesitate for a second before he called another colleague over to help him bring Alexander back to his room.

The next morning, Elise happened to run into Alexander when she stepped out of her room and saw that he had already recovered his usual energy. "Morning, Mr. Griffith," she greeted.

His eyes were fixed on her for a few seconds before he finally uttered, "Morning."

They got into the elevator one after the other, and the moment the doors slid shut, he said, "Sare, thanks for bringing me back yesterday." Then, he whisked out a cheque he had prepared beforehand and passed it to her. "This is for the trouble you went through."

Stealing a peek at the cheque, Elise was shocked to see that it was worth 200,000! *All I can say is, he's a really, really generous man!* she thought.

Nevertheless, she felt that she didn't deserve it because she didn't do much, so she rejected it. "That's alright, Mr. Griffith. It's just a small matter that's not worth mentioning."

Her words made him grow solemn, and when he spoke again, his voice sounded a little aloof. "I don't take rejection very well. Moreover, I don't want anyone else to know what happened last night."

So, he's using this money to buy my silence? After thinking for a while, Elise decided to accept the cheque in the end. *Why didn't I realize before that Alexander has the habit of giving cheques?*

"Thank you, Mr. Griffith. Rest assured that I won't breathe a word about what happened last night," she promised.

With her assurance, Alexander was relieved, and he grunted in reply. Just then, the doors slid open, and Elise let him out first out of politeness.

Today, she accompanied him to have a meeting with the Arisian government until 7.00PM when it finally ended. Stretching herself, Elise was already very tired, and she returned to the hotel directly after finishing her work. In the hotel, she had a quick shower before plopping onto bed and soon drifted off to sleep.

Such busy days continued for the entire week until the cooperation between the two parties reached an agreement. After the signing of the contract, it also meant that her work had come to an official end.

"Mr. Griffith, are we booking the flight back tomorrow?" she asked eagerly as she

However, Alexander said, "We'll go back in a couple of days. Accompany me to a place tomorrow."

Anxiously, she argued, "The work here is finished, Mr. Griffith. How about if I go back first, and you can stay back to enjoy yourself for a couple of days?"

Stopping in his tracks, he peered at her and asked in indifference, "How am I supposed to enjoy myself when I can't speak the local language?"

So now you realize my importance? Elise thought in silence and rolled her eyes. "Okay, I can stay a couple more days, but I have to charge extra."

Fixing his eyes on her, he asked, "Are you in need of money?"

Without hesitation, she nodded, thinking, *That's for sure! Everyone is in need of something as good as money!*

"I'll pay you extra by hourly pay," he added.

Elise's face lit up. "Sure, Mr. Griffith!" ()

The next day, she woke up early in the morning, but Alexander only contacted her in the afternoon. When she saw him, she couldn't help but ask, "Mr. Griffith, didn't you

say that you wanted to go out? Why did you contact me so late in the day?" *Don't you know that I'm paid hourly! This delay has caused me a big loss!*

Of course she could only say the last part in her heart and not out loud at him because she didn't have the guts to!

Despite that, Alexander seemed to have read her mind. "I can save some money by using your services a few hours less."

Speechless, Elise complained silently, *What a frustrating capitalist he is!* But on the surface, she plastered on a smile and asked, "So, where are we going today, Mr. Griffith?"

Instead of answering her, Alexander led her into a cab and passed the address on his cell phone to the driver, who drove the car to their destination.

Aris was renowned in the world for its oil industry, but another speciality of this country was stone gambling. The last thing Elise could think of was Alexander bringing her to a stone gambling market.

In the world of stone gambling, such a saying existed: "A cut could make one rich and another poor, while another cut could change one's destiny and reduce another to rags."

Both of them hopped off the cab, and what awaited them was a couple of historic, old streets. All along the streets, shops and stalls of different sizes selling mineral rocks with a variety of shapes and colors lined the streets.

It was Elise's first time to visit such a place. "Are we here to buy rocks?" she asked in confusion.

"Yeah. Come and take a look at this."

Then, they took the street on the right and ventured into the path. Suddenly, Elise realized that there were not only locals here; there were also some Europeans and Africans who looked really sharp, and she reckoned they were businessmen.

Alexander brought her to a street corner and stopped. With his eyes fixed on a rock, he said to her, "Ask him for the price of this rock."

Following his orders, Elise spoke to the seller in fluent Arisian, but a bewildered look

flashed across her face when she heard the price for the rock. "A sh*tty rock like t his costs 8,000?!"

Raising his brow, Alexander asked, "8,000 in which currency?"

"Of course it's in USD! The person who buys this sh*tty rock for 8,000 USD must have a hole in his head."

Just as the words left her lips, Alexander said, "I'm buying that rock. Go and buy it for me."

Shocked beyond words, she gawked at him in disbelief, but she was only his interpreter now, and it was none of her business what her employer wanted to buy. Therefore, she swallowed back her advice to him against buying it and spun around to negotiate with the stone seller instead. In the end, she made use of her bargaining skills and managed to get a 500 USD discount, closing the sale at 7,500 USD.

Elise was at a loss for words when she held the rock in her hand, but Alexander was expressionless as he continued walking. On the way, he ended up buying five pieces of stones in different sizes, with each ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 USD.

As Elise watched him hand out wads of cash, she could feel her heart wrenching. "Mr. Griffith, what are you going to do with these stones?"

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