

# **Back to the Past: Breaking the Love Spell**

## **#Chapter 101 - Read Back to the Past: Breaking the Love Spell Chapter 101**

### **Chapter 101**

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As Carlisle heard the automated message on his phone, his heart skipped a beat.

He rushed to the front desk and asked the receptionist, "Did a lady with short hair in a white dress leave just now?"

The middle-aged receptionist, who wasn't the same person from the night before, shook her head. "I didn't see anyone fitting that description."

Frowning, Carlisle pressed on. "She's staying in room 305. Could you please check if she's there?"

The receptionist hesitated, giving him a skeptical look. "I can't just open a guest's room without confirmation."

"We arrived together last night. Can you check the surveillance footage?" Carlisle urged.

"The surveillance system is down, and the maintenance guy isn't available," the receptionist explained.

Frustrated, Carlisle slammed his fist on the counter. He raised his voice, saying, "My friend might be in trouble! Can you afford the responsibility if something happens to her?"

The receptionist looked annoyed. "What's with the attitude? I'm just following protocol."

Carlisle shot her a glare. He stormed out to look for Wanda, guessing she might have gone out to buy breakfast.

Outside the hotel, Carlisle spotted the parked cab and its driver enjoying breakfast.

As soon as the driver saw Carlisle, he put down his croissant and drove over.

"Have you seen my girlfriend?" Carlisle asked urgently.

The driver shook his head. "I went to refuel and grab breakfast. Didn't your girlfriend stay with you?"

Carlisle got into the cab. "Let's look around nearby," he urged.

The driver quickly turned the car around and drove down the streets, checking breakfast spots on both sides.

Despite searching several streets, there was no sign of Wanda.

Carlisle tried calling her multiple times, but her phone remained switched off.

By 10:00 am, they returned to the hotel.

Carlisle approached the front desk and asked, "Have you seen a lady with short hair and a dress?"

The receptionist frowned. "Is she really missing?" she asked.

Carlisle nodded grimly.

The receptionist swallowed hard at the gravity of the situation. "You should call the police, she suggested.

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Carlisle's eyes reddened. Trembling, he pulled out his phone.

With no surveillance footage to rely on and no sign of her after such a long search, calling the police seemed to be Carlisle's only option.

Just then, the receptionist pointed outside. "Is that her?"

Turning around, Carlisle saw Wanda entering the lobby, holding a black plastic bag.

"Why are you staring at me?" Wanda asked nervously as she entered the lobby.

Without a word, Carlisle rushed over and enveloped her in a tight hug. Wanda's eyes widened, her body freezing in surprise. What was Carlisle doing?

With a hoarse voice, Carlisle said, "Wanda, don't ever disappear on me like that again.

Wanda realized her phone had died. She was touched by the fact that Carlisle went out to look for her because he couldn't contact her.

Feeling a mix of guilt and relief, Wanda explained softly, "I'm sorry I went to withdraw some cash, but the bank was crowded, so it took me a while..."

A sigh of relief mixed with frustration escaped Carlisle when he realized to om she had gone to the bank tô o m withdraw money. He gently let go of Wanda and ruffled her hair, saying, "Remember what I said. Don't ever disappear like that again."

Wanda nodded earnestly. "I will, and next time, I'll bring a power bank."

She handed Carlisle a black plastic bag. "I didn't know how much you needed, so I withdrew all my pocket money."

Carlisle peeked into the bag. There was probably around a hundred thousand dollars inside.

He felt a mix of envy and relief, knowing that Wanda was indeed from a wealthy background, which set them apart. In an era where most people earned only a few hundred dollars a month, having that much pocket money was truly mind-boggling.

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Carlisle felt like he was taking candy from a kid as he looked at Wanda's extravagant pocket money. He chuckled. "Since you're giving me all your pocket money, what will you live on?"

"I still have my savings and living expenses," Wanda replied with a playful smirk.

Carlisle teased with a playful grin, "Looks like I've hit the jackpot with my rich lady here. I guess I can kick back and let you take cate of me from now on!"

"Sure, if y don't mind the gossip." Wanda retorted with a chuckle.

Carlisle gently tapped Wanda's nose. "I don't want to live off you."

After checking out of the hotel, Carlisle took Wanda to an antique street by car.

The street was adorned with buildings dating back to the Eduarian era, while both sides teemed with farmers sporting patched clothes and straw hats.

In reality, these farmers were all actors. Dressed in modest vintage attire, they skillfully created the impression that their antiques had been unearthed from rustic villages or mountainous regions.

Holding onto Carlisle's sleeve, Wanda whispered, "Carlisle, you're not planning to buy antiques, are you?" "Why else would I be here?" Carlisle raised an eyebrow.

"Do you know about antiques? My grandfather has been in the business for over 30 years and still gets fooled

"Do you believe in luck?" Carlisle asked with a smile.

"Nope!" Wanda shook her head.

"You should. I've always had good luck," Carlisle said with a wide grin.

"Really? I haven't noticed," Wanda replied.

"Well, think about it. If I didn't have good luck, how could I have met such a wonderful girl like you?" Carlisle teased

"You're trying to flatter me, aren't you?" Wanda blushed, giving Carlisle a pinch on his waist.

"Ouch... that hurts!" Carlisle winced.

"I didn't even pinch hard!" Wanda blinked innocently.

"It's okay. Just massage it for me, and it'll be fine," Carlisle said,

"Hmph, you're trying to trick me again!" Wanda blushed and turned her head away.

As they chatted, they arrived at a shop called Retrovintage.

Carlisle's heart raced as he saw the sign board with the gleaming golden letters of "Retrovintage." This was definitely the place.

He recalled Yuriel promoting Retrovintage in his Interview.

Entering the shop, they found only an elderly man with sharp features lounging in a chair.

He held a long pipe in his left hand while using a traditional-looking fan to Intermittently cool himself with his right.

On the coffee table nearby, a pot of tea was steeping, filling the air with its aromatic scent. Meanwhile, an old-fashioned radio played a classic soap opera, The old man squinted at them. When he saw two youngsters before him, he lost. The cheapest item in my shop costs at least 10 thousand dollars!"

"Don't judge a book by its cover," Carlisle said, tossing the plastic bag onto the nearby table.

The old man's eyes widened when he saw bundles of hundred-dollar bills spilled out from the plastic bag. He sat up abruptly and picked up a stack of money to sniff it.

"Hmm... this is authentic," the old man exclaimed, his demeanor changing instantly. He swiftly washed two cups and poured tea for them. With a flattering smile, he said, "Ah, the magpies' cheerful chirping this morning was a good omen, heralding the arrival of such an esteemed guest!"

Being able to pull out a hundred thousand at such a young age clearly marked Carlisle as a rich kid, a fact that the antique street loved.

Carlisle tucked away the money and asked with a smile, "Do you have any good paintings?"

The old man looked proud as he said, "Not to boast, but my shop has the best and the most paintings on the whole street!"

Inviting Carlisle inside, the old man asked, "May I inquire which family you're from? You dress quite modestly."

After glancing around, Carlisle leaned in and whispered, "I'm from the county, and my family isn't into business."

The old man's eyes sharpened, "I see."

The old man quickly grasped that since Carlisle wasn't involved in business, he must come from Pah aristocrati@background. Aristocrats were not easily deceived.

He walked to a shelf and pulled out a wooden box from the bottom. Opening it, he revealed a collection of paintings.

"My grandfather's birthday is coming up. He loves paintings, especially those of horses," Carlisle said.

Images of Harold Delacruz's "Gallopig Horses" painting filled Carlisle's mind.

Harold Delacruz was a celebrated modern artist, renowned for blending the essence of traditional art into his works. His pieces held significant value for collectors, especially his depictions of horses, which carried profound symbolism.

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Among them, the "Eight Gems" painting was valued at millions.

As the old man emptied the box of its contents, he quickly singled out two paintings with markings "Here we have 'Gallopers' and En.

Thousand Stallions,' both masterpieces by Harold Delacruz," he informed. "Which one are you interested in?"

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"Is this really an authentic piece by Harold Delacruz?" Carlisle asked, eyeing the old man skeptically.

The old man chuckled awkwardly and said, "I can't guarantee that. You'll have to judge for yourself."

Pointing at the "Thousand Stallions" painting, Carlisle said, "Let me see that 'Thousand Stallions' painting first."

The old man retrieved a pair of white cotton gloves from his pocket and carefully untied the cotton rope binding the scroll before unveiling it.

Carlisle picked up a magnifying glass and began examining the painting closely.

The old man said, "Given your family's probably extensive collection of antiques, I assume you know a thing or two about them, right?"

Carlisle replied casually, "A little."

The old man chuckled again. "You're quite modest."

Carlisle carefully examined the details of the horses' hooves through the magnifying glass and then inspected the seals.

With a sigh, he shook his head and said, "Show me the other painting."

Without much ado, the old man rolled up the painting and placed it back in the wooden box. He then opened the scroll containing the "Gallopers" painting.

Carlisle continued his careful examination with the magnifying glass.

Not far away, Wanda sat on the bench. She rested her chin on her hands, admiring the serious Carlisle.

It was a shame her phone had died, or she would've taken more pictures of him.

Suddenly, a chilling voice from outside interrupted her thoughts.

"Is this the place?"

"Yes, this is it."

"Mr. Gust, please.

"Mr. Thompson, please, after you!"

Wanda stood up abruptly and dashed toward Carlisle, her voice quivering as she said, "Carlisle, my dad's here."

Carlisle raised an eyebrow. "Really? That's such a coincidence!"

Wanda looked at the old man and said, "Sir, I need a place to hide!"

Pointing to a warehouse behind him, the old man said, "Go in there, but be careful not to knock over any porcelain."

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Wanda hesitated for a moment. She bit her lip and entered the dark storage room, closing the door behind her.

Carlisle inquired, "I'll take this 'Gallopig Horses' painting. How much is it?"

The old man clicked his tongue. "You must be familiar with the antique market's rules, right?"

"No returns, and no refunds," Carlisle said.

He had seen quite a few movies about antiques in his previous life and remembered some of the jargon.

The old man let out a chuckle and said, "For an average buyer, I'd sell this painting for 300 thousand dollars. But given your special status, I'll give it to you for 150 thousand."

Carlisle shook his head. "The seals on this painting aren't authentic, and the details on the horses' hooves need improvement. It's not worth the asking price."

The old man looked at Carlisle in surprise and then grumbled, "Well, 120 thousand dollars will do."

Carlisle dismissed the painting with a wave. "I could pick this up for 60 thousand dollars just for fun!"

Just as he said that, two well-dressed men approached from outside Carlisle glanced over and immediately furrowed his brows.

It was Yuriel Gust, the wealthiest man in Riverland.

The old man sighed and started to say, "How about 100 thousand dollars, I-"

"Deal," Carlisle interrupted. He handed the money to the old man and rolled up the painting.

"Carlisle?" Zachary widened his eyes in surprise upon spotting Carlisle. He wondered what Carlisle was doing in Rainville. Wasn't he supposed to be in Riverland?

Carlisle put on a fake smile and greeted him, "Oh, Zachary! What a surprise to see you here!"

He reached out to shake Zachary's hand.

Casting a quick glance at Carlisle and noticing his inexpensive attire and flip-flops, Zachary made a disgusted face and warned, "Don't try to act like you're close to me."

Zachary couldn't understand why his sister would be interested in someone like Carlisle.

Shein Thompson turned to Zachary, asking, "Do you two know each other?"

Zachary replied nonchalantly, "Not really. He got himself into trouble with some thugs, and I had to bail

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Shein responded with mild indifference, "It's rare to find someone so righteous at his age. You could learn a thing or two from him."

Meanwhile, Wanda, who was hiding in the warehouse, felt a sense of contentment hearing her father praise Carlisle.

"Oh, Carlisle, remember this is your future father-in-law. Best behavior, okay?" Wanda silently urged.

Zachary scoffed, "Learn from him? Do you even realize how out of line he was? If I hadn't stepped in, he'd be in serious trouble. If he sets the example, it's the end of the Thompson family legacy!"

Wanda tightened her fists in annoyance. "Why does Zachary always have to be so mean? Can't he just be civil?" she fumed inwardly.

Shein shot Zachary a stern look. "Shut up!"

Shein thought to himself that Zachary needed a good talking-to when they got back home, especially considering he was being so rude in front of Yuriel.

Zachary rolled his eyes, thinking, "This guy's almost run off with your daughter, and you're defending him?"

Shein then smiled at Carlisle and reassured, "Lad, that's just how my son is. Don't take it to heart."

Carlisle grinned. "It's okay. He's not wrong. I underestimated the situation and ended up in trouble because of it."

Yuriel turned to Carlisle and asked, "Are you here to buy paintings too?"

Carlisle nodded. "My grandfather's birthday is coming up. He loves paintings, so I came to find something special."

Zachary eyed the painting in Carlisle's hand and then glanced at the money in the Retrovintage owner's hand. It looked like around 100 thousand dollars.

"That painting looks expensive," Zachary remarked, suspecting Carlisle had swindled Wanda financially.

"It wasn't cheap, and it cost me 100 thousand dollars," Carlisle replied honestly.

"Come with me," Zachary said expressionlessly as he headed outside.

Carlisle quietly followed him.

With his father and Yuriel present, Zachary wouldn't dare lay a finger on him, would he?

Once outside, Carlisle noticed a dozen well-dressed bodyguards standing by the entrance.

Zachary lit a cigarette, then pressed Carlisle against the wall, coldly warning, "Carlisle, let me remind you, stay away from my sister. She's not someone you can mess with."

Carlisle calmly replied, "You can't dictate Wanda's feelings."

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"Smack!"

Zachary punched Carlisle in the face, causing him to stumble.

Several passersby stopped to look. The bodyguards quickly lined up to block the view of the onlookers.

Zachary grabbed Carlisle's collar and sneered, "You might not have known what the Thompson family was like before, and I can't blame you for that. But understand this: the Thompson family is a league you'll never join."

Carlisle wiped a speck of blood from his cheek with his tongue and calmly replied, "I never aspired to be part of 1. the Thompson family. I don't reach for what's beyond my grasp, so don't underestimate me."

"Damn..." Zachary raised his hand, ready to strike again.

"Zachary!" Wanda rushed out from Retrovintique and pulled Carlisle behind her.

She looked up defiantly and declared, "If you want to fight, fight me!"

Shein emerged from Retrovintique, wearing a grim look. He asked calmly,

"What's going on here?"

With his hands in his pockets, Zachary smirked. "You wondered why Wanda didn't get into a top-tier 19t upiversity, right? It's because of him.

Wanda deliberately scored lower to get into Riverland University and then started dating him!"

Shein raised an eyebrow. "Is that true?"

Wanda remained silent. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Feeling the weight of the situation, Carlisle knew no matter what he said, the Thompsons wouldn't think highly of him. He spoke earnestly, "Mr. Thompson, Wanda and I will focus on our studies."

Just as Zachary was about to retort, Shein silenced him with a stern look.

Shein turned to Carlisle and said,

"You're both still young. I hope you'll make wise decisions. Wanda looked NO at her father in disbelief, wondering if he had just allowed her to be with Carlisle.

## Chapter 105

Chapter 104 Shein responded with mild indifference, "It's rare to find someone so righteous at his age. You could learn a thing or two from him." Meanwhile, Wanda, who was hiding in the warehouse, felt a sense of contentment hearing her father praise Carlisle. "Oh, Carlisle, remember this is your future father-in-law. Best behavior, okay?" Wanda silently urged. Zachary scoffed, "Learn from him? Do you even realize how out of line he was? If | hadn't stepped in, he'd be in serious trouble. If he sets the example, it's the end of the Thompson family legacy!" Wanda tightened her fists in annoyance. "Why does Zachary always have to be so mean? Can't he just be civil?" she fumed inwardly. Shein shot Zachary a stern look. "Shut up!" Shein thought to himself that Zachary needed a good talking—to when they got back home, especially considering he was being so rude in front of Yuriel. Zachary rolled his eyes, thinking, "This guy's almost run off with your daughter, and you're defending him?" Shein then smiled at Carlisle and reassured, "Lad, that's just how my son is. Don't take it to heart." Carlisle grinned. "It's okay. He's not wrong. I underestimated the situation and ended up in trouble because of it." Yuriel turned to Carlisle and asked, "Are you here to buy paintings too?" Carlisle nodded. "My grandfather's birthday is coming up. He loves paintings, so | came to find something special. Zachary eyed the painting in Carlisle's hand and then glanced at the money in the Retrovintage owner's hand. It looked like around 100 thousand dollars. "That painting looks expensive," Zachary remarked, suspecting Carlisle had swindled Wanda financially. "It wasn't cheap, and it cost me 100 thousand dollars," Carlisle replied honestly. "Come with me," Zachary said expressionlessly as he headed outside. Carlisle quietly followed him. With his father and Yuriel present, Zachary wouldn't dare lay a finger on him, would he? Once outside, Carlisle noticed a dozen well-dressed bodyguards standing by the entrance. Zachary lit a cigarette, then pressed Carlisle against the wall, coldly warning, "Carlisle, let me remind you, stay away from my sister. She's not someone you can mess with." Carlisle calmly replied, "You can't dictate Wanda's feelings." pter104 272 "Smack!" Zachary punched Carlisle in the face, causing him to stumble. Several passersby stopped to look. The bodyguards quickly lined up to block the view of the onlookers. Zachary grabbed Carlisle's collar and sneered, "You might not have known what the Thompson family was like before, and | can't blame you for that. But understand this: the Thompson family is a league you'll never join." Carlisle

wiped a speck of blood from his cheek with his tongue and calmly replied, "I never aspired to be part of the Thompson family. I don't reach for what's beyond my grasp, so don't underestimate me." "Damn..." Zachary raised his hand, ready to strike again. "Zachary!" Wanda rushed out from Retrovintage and pulled Carlisle behind her. She looked up defiantly and declared, "If you want to fight, fight me!" Shein emerged from Retrovintage, wearing a grim look. He asked calmly, "What's going on here?" With his hands in his pockets, Zachary smirked. "You wondered why Wanda didn't get into a top-tier university, right? It's because of him. Wanda deliberately scored lower to get into Riverland University and then started dating him!" Shein raised an eyebrow. "Is that true?" Wanda remained silent. Tears welled up in her eyes. Feeling the weight of the situation, Carlisle knew no matter what he said, the Thompsons wouldn't think highly of him. He spoke earnestly, "Mr. Thompson, Wanda and I will focus on our studies." Just as Zachary was about to retort, Shein silenced him with a stern look. Shein turned to Carlisle and said, "You're both still young. I hope you'll make wise decisions." Wanda looked at her father in disbelief, wondering if he had just allowed her to be with Carlisle.

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Shein calmly responded, "Do you need to ask me about something so trivial?"

Zachary sniffed and asked, "Should we kick him out of Riverland University?"

Shein chuckled softly. "If you dare to kick him out, Wanda will drop out immediately."

After a moment of consideration, Zachary proposed, "What about putting pressure on his parents?"

Shein leaned back on the couch, closing his eyes to rest. "That's up to you. Just make sure Wanda doesn't find out it was you!"

At 4:00 pm, the cab pulled up at the entrance of Riverland University.

The driver handed Carlisle a business card with a friendly smile. "Hey, lad, I usually hang around near Riverland University. If you ever need a ride, just give me a call and book in advance!"

The driver was named Francis Gable. He seemed to be around 30 years old and drove smoothly. During their chat, he mentioned he was a retired soldier who had operated tanks in the military.

"Sure thing. I'll keep that in mind!" Carlisle said, taking the card with a smile. Despite the driver's earlier brusque manner, Carlisle found him friendly enough to consider hiring him as his personal driver in the future.

"Alright, see you later!" Francis noticed some students signaling for a cab and drove toward them.

Meanwhile, Carlisle spotted Mike chatting with a group of older students as they approached.

"Wanda, I'm heading back to the studio for a shower. Aren't you meeting Lily Green for dinner? We can meet up later and head to Southdale together! Carlisle said before walking off.

Watching Carlisle walk away, Wanda felt puzzled. She wondered why Carlisle was in such a hurry to leave.

Annoyed, she headed toward the campus.

"Mike, this freshman is pretty cute with her glasses. She looks quiet and demure," Kelvin Knox, one of Mike's lackeys, commented with a grin.

Kelvin was aware of Zachary's influential connections. After the humiliation he had endured, he was resolute about seeking revenge. Acknowledging his own powerlessness against Zachary, Kelvin believed that Mike might be a suitable candidate to confront him.

"What the hell, do you think I'm the type to go crazy over any girl?" Mike kicked Kelvin to the ground in frustration.

Kelvin landed right at Wanda's feet.

Wanda feigned surprise and asked, "Kelvin, are you enjoying the cool ground?"

Kelvin glanced at Mike in confusion.

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The usually brazen Mike seemed different today.

"Hey there, did I freak you out?" Mike greeted Wanda with a half-hearted smile.

Wanda took a moment to assess Mike and his group of older students. With their long hair and cigarettes tucked behind their ears, they looked every bit like troublemakers.

Considering Carlisle's earlier reaction, she began to piece things together.

"I'm fine," Wanda replied, flatly, then walked past Kelvin into the campus.

Kelvin got up from the ground. He chuckled lightly and teased, "Mike, are you trying to make a good impression on her?"

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"To hell with making a good impression," he snapped, sending Kelvin down with another kick.

Back in her dorm, Wanda swapped out her phone battery and dialed Zachary's number.

"Wanda, have you reached school yet?" Zachary's voice was calmer now.

"Why'd you do that?" Wanda's voice quivered with frustration.

"Do what?" Zachary sounded genuinely puzzled.

"Some guys attacked Carlisle when we got here.

"Those idiots!" Zachary exclaimed.

Wanda's heart sank. Her suspicions were confirmed.

It was no wonder Carlisle seemed so startled when he saw them earlier.

It seemed they had already confronted him before.

She wondered why he hadn't told her about this.

Zachary awkwardly chuckled. "Look, niokeer Wanda, I just wanted them to an eye on you, I didn't expect them to an on You go after Carlisle. J'll sort this out with them."

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"Zac..." Wanda hesitated before calling out.

He felt a slight pang of nervousness. He had a gut feeling that Wanda had something to say.

Wanda's voice was low and melancholy as she said, "If you still consider me your sister, please don't hurt Carlisle anymore."

Zachary took a deep drag of his cigarette. He chuckled wryly and asked, "Are you going to disown me if I keep intervening?"

As he uttered those words, Zachary felt a tightening sensation in his chest.

Their parents each had their own businesses, and their mother had returned to work just three months after Wanda was born.

Zachary had watched Wanda grow up. He had been there since her bottle-feeding days and watched her learn to walk.

Her first words were "Zac," and he had proudly told their parents about it for days.

Every time he was picked up from school, Wanda would eagerly watch from the car window. She would clap and cheer when she saw him.

Their bond had only grown stronger over the years.

In college, a friend had joked, "Zac, you spoil your sister so much. When she gets married, you'll be a crying mess, won't you?"

At that moment, Zachary had been stunned. He had never considered that scenario. In his eyes, no one was worthy of his sister.

Before Wanda took her SATS, Zachary had noticed some changes in her behavior.

She would often giggle to herself while studying. Besides, she seemed unusually happy when going to school, as if anticipating something exciting.

On weekends, she would impatiently await the passing of time. Having experienced unrequited love himself during high school, Zachary suspected that Wanda might be in love.

But he dared not investigate further. He feared he wouldn't be able to accept the truth.

If possible, he would rather remain oblivious forever.

However, his worst fears were confirmed when he found out about Wanda and Carlisle.

It was his fiancée, Queenie Lane, who had told him.

When he received the news, Zachary felt as if the sky had fallen on him. He had wrestled with the dilemma of choosing between Wanda's feelings and driving Carlisle away.

After much deliberation, he chose the latter. But what he never expected was that his beloved sister, whom he had cherished since childhood, would consider cutting ties with him for Carlisle.

Zachary sat blankly on the hotel couch. He didn't even flinch when the burning cigarette butt singed his fingers.

After a moment of silence from Zachary, Wanda asked, "Zac, are you okay?"

She felt uneasy too- torn between her dear brother and the man she had secretly admired, for two years.

"I... I'm fine," Zachary croaked, extinguishing the cigarette with his fingers.

"Zac, I'm sorry!" Wanda knew she had hurt Zachary deeply.

Guilt washed over her, and tears streamed down her face.

Zachary smiled bitterly. "I'll tell them all them O

not to bother Carlisle anymore."

"Zac, thank you!" Wanda choked back her tears, her voice trembling.

After ending the call, Zachary leaned back on the couch, closed his eyes, and let out a sigh.

Carlisle received a call from Cameron before reaching the studio.

Cameron was already at the entrance of Riverlandsity so Carlisle instructed the driver to turn back.

After picking up Cameron, they headed back.

Before he could say anything to Cameron, his phone rang again.

## **Chapter 108**

### Chapter 108

The call came from an unfamiliar number with the last six digits ending in eights.

Carlisle answered, and a deep voice came from the other end. "Is this Carlisle from Riverland University?"

Carlisle replied, "Yes, may I ask who's calling?"

"It's Yuriel," came the reply.

"Mr. Gust!" Carlisle exclaimed.

His heart skipped a beat, and he instinctively tightened his grip on the "Gallopig Horses" painting he held.

This painting rightfully belonged to Yuriel, but Carlisle had bought it first. He wondered if Yuriel would confront him over this.

"No need to be nervous. Just treat me like anyone else." Yuriel tried to sound reassuring.

Collecting himself, Carlisle asked, "Mr. Gust, what can I do for you?"

Yuriel inquired, "Did you purchase the 'Gallopig Horses' painting from Retrovintique?"

"Yes, I did, Carlisle replied.

'Til offer you 500 thousand dollars for it. What do you say?" Yuriel offered a price that would be hard for anyone to refuse.

Without hesitation, Carlisle replied, "I'm sorry, Mr. Gust, but I'm not willing to sell the painting."

Yuriel's brow furrowed slightly. "500 thousand dollars can get you a house and a car. Think about it," he reasoned.

Carlisle smiled and said, "Since you've called, I won't beat around the bush. I won't sell for anything less than a four."

Since the driver was a stranger, Carlisle kept the details vague.

Yuriel understood Carlisle's implied figure of 4 million dollars. Being a billionaire, he wasn't fazed. "I'll sweeten the deal with another 500 thousand dollars, but you only have one night to decide!"

With that, Yuriel ended the call.

There had been rumors circulating a few months ago that within a shipment of top-notch counterfeit paintings sold in Vintex Garden, there was an authentic masterpiece by Harold Delacruz.

Yuriel had spent over 200 thousand tracking down the batch's distribution to various antique shops. Over the past three months, he had visited numerous antique shops across several cities, buying up all of Harold Delacruz's paintings, whether authentic or not.

Retrovintage was his last stop.

The shop owner claimed to have only two Harold Delacruz paintings, one of which Carlisle had just bought.

This also meant Carlisle likely bought the authentic one.

Yuriel leaned back in his chair, lighting a cigar.

While he had no interest in antique paintings, he needed land for a construction project.

With multiple developers eyeing the same plot, competition had turned fierce.

The father of the official responsible for approvals had a particular fondness for Harold Delacruz's paintings. This led competitors to buy authentic works by Harold Delacruz as a bargaining chip.

The landline phone rang, and Yuriel picked it up.

A deep voice on the other end said, "Mr. Gust, people from Windex Corporation have also gone to Retrovintage!"

Yuriel's face darkened instantly.

Carlisle and Cameron were in a taxi, crossing over Laguna Bridge.

Laguna was a river that crossed through Riverland.

At one stretch, the river widened, resembling the belly of a python that had swallowed a large ox.

This area was called the Riverwatch District.

Carlisle gazed out the window into the distance.

The Riverwatch District was about to undergo development. It would become the most development area in Riverland.

Various Property prices were expected to soar from the current 320 dollars to 900 dollars per square foot.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, property prices across the country skyrocketed. The Riverwatch District experienced a second wave of growth, breaking the 2000-dollar mark per square foot.

By 2014, after years of rising prices, the market began to soften.

Purchase restrictions were lifted, leading to a surge in property acquisitions by many businessmen, pushing prices to new highs.

Carlisle pursed his lips, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

Riverwatch District was a golden opportunity for investment, and he was determined to seize a significant portion of it.

Suddenly, Carlisle narrowed his eyes.

He was curious as to why Yuriel had personally gone to Rainville to search for antiques.

If he truly valued the painting, Carlisle wondered why he would sell it for a mere

3.86 million dollars.

To an ordinary person, 3.86 million dollars would be an astronomical sum. But for Yuriel, who was worth billions, it was merely a drop in the ocean.

## **Chapter 109**

### Chapter 109

As Carlisle pondered over the situation, his phone rang again.

The number displayed was unique, featuring four eights in the middle and four sixes at the end.

"Hello, who is this?" Carlisle answered the call.

A soft and sweet female voice came through. "Hello, did you buy a painting at Retrovintage?"

Carlisle supposed she was also interested in the "Gallopers painting," so he admitted, "Yes, I bought Harold Delacruz's 'Gallopers' painting."

Excitedly, the woman asked, "How much are you willing to sell it for?"

After a brief pause, Carlisle responded, "How much are you offering?" Without hesitation, she replied, "Three million dollars!"

Carlisle chuckled, "Sorry, Mr. Gust just offered 3.2 million dollars."

"Mr. Gust? You mean Yuriel?" the woman asked softly.

Carlisle confirmed with a simple "yes."

After a moment of hesitation, the woman said, "I'll give you four million dollars."

Carlisle was taken aback by the offer. Four million dollars was a sum beyond his wildest dreams. In his past life, he had struggled with debts even toward the end of his days.

After a moment, he replied, "I'll consider it."

The woman grew anxious with Carlisle's indifferent reply. She said, "If you're not satisfied, we can negotiate further."

Though Carlisle knew little about antiques, he sensed the painting was worth much more than 4 million dollars from her urgent tone.

After a pause, Carlisle said, "I'll check with Mr. Gust."

The woman exclaimed, "No, don't contact Yuriel!"

In the manager's office at Windex Corporation's headquarters, a woman in her thirties dressed professionally looked anxious.

On the couch sat an elegant lady in her forties, calmly tidying up a tea set.

"How dare he hang up on me? It's really getting on my nerves!"

The woman in professional attire stamned her hand on the desk in frustration.

During the call, she had it on loudspeaker the whole time..

The elegant woman could tell from the voice on the phone that it was a young man. She chuckled softly and said, "I've told you before to keep your emotions in check. By the time you panicked, he already had the upper hand."

She continued thoughtfully, "Judging by his voice, he couldn't be older than 20 years old. I wonder whose kid he is?"

Shania Warbane picked up her phone from the desk and moved to sit m

opposite the elegant lady on the sofa, saying, "Lyrene, maybe it's time for you to take charge again. I don't think I can handle this project."

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

The office door opened. Lethan Warbane walked in with bandaged hands and a few thorny branches on

his back.

"Lethan, you're here. You've really gone above and beyond to apologize, Shania exclaimed.

However, Lyrene remained focused on her tea.

"Lyrene, Shania..." Lethan lowered his head as he approached them.

Act Fast: Free Bonus Time is Running Out!

## **Chapter 110**

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"Thud" Lethan dropped to his knees and said, "Lyrene, I promised Shein that if Quinn really cheated, I'd come to you to apologize!"

Lyrene carefully placed the freshly washed blankets on the table using a pair of tweezers and then poured tea from a ceramic teapot.

"Shania, make the call again. Offer six million dollars to secure that painting." Lyrene instructed.

"Six million dollars? That's too much, isn't it?" Shania was taken aback. That amount was almost the monthly salary for all the company employees.

Lyrene gave Shania a brief glance. Without hesitation, Shania dialed the number again. However, the call went straight to voicemail.

Shania started to fret. "Oh no, could he be talking to Yuriel?"

Lyrene sighed in exasperation. "Evermore has a much better reputation than Windex. If he gets that painting, Windex will lose its competitive edge completely."

Meanwhile, Carlisle was indeed on the phone with Yuriel. And Yuriel had just raised the price to 8.6 million dollars.

At the Evermore headquarters, Yuriel exhaled a puff of smoke and said, "That's my final offer..."

He had invested heavily in this painting.

"Deal. I'll send you the account details. Once the funds are transferred, have someone contact me," Carlisle replied.

After ending the call, Carlisle texted his bank details to Yuriel.

Upon receiving the text, Yuriel instructed his financial manager to transfer 8.6 million dollars to Carlisle's account.

Yuriel's financial manager happened to be his wife, Jennie Helm. She said confidently, "With our company's credentials, we could easily overshadow Windex Corporation."

Yuriel smirked. "You've been by my side for so long, but you still underestimate the intricacies of this game. Credentials are meaningless if they don't secure us the land. It all comes down to those above us."

Jennie pressed her lips together/contemplating. "Hasn't Lyrene already distanced herself from Windex? Even if they acquire that land, it shouldn't affect you much, right?"

After a brief pause, she added, "Besides, I've heard that Lyrene and Shein's marriage isn't going well. They've been separated for three years and only meet occasionally at family gatherings."

Jennie thought Yuriel was being overly cautious.

Yuriel lit his cigar with a flick of his lighter. "Don't underestimate Shein. He's a master of mind games, and he's likely scheming to mislead me. Once Windex Corporation gains traction, that duo will take back control of both Windex and Iso. They'll outsmart me, putting all our businesses in jeopardy."

Jennie looked at her husband with admiration. "So, how do you plan to deal with them?"

Yuriel took a deep drag from his cigar. He narrowed his eyes and said, "You go ahead and make the transfer."

Carlisle's heart raced uncontrollably as he saw 8.6 million dollars transferred into his account.

With this amount of money in the bank, the interest alone would be able to cover the family's expenses.

But with a second shot at life, settling for a mere 8.6 million dollars felt like selling himself short.

Plus, 8.6 million dollars wouldn't even catch the Thompsons' attention.

"Carl, making money again?" Cameron chuckled from beside him.

Carlisle calmed his restless heart and grinned. "Yes, I sold that painting for 8.6 million!"

Cameron felt a pang of bitterness.

Earning money was no small feat, m

and Carlisle seemed so easily ve pleased with just over eight million.

Even the five hundred he'd lent himself felt like a small fortune in comparison.

Carlisle's phone rang again. It was Windex Corporation calling. Without waiting for the caller to speak, Carlisle said, "Sorry, the painting's been sold. Please don't call again."

He hung up without hesitation. Having already offended them, he reckoned a little more rudeness seemed inconsequential.

Back at Windex, Shania sat despondently on the couch, while Lyrene let out a slight sigh.

It wasn't just Shania who had doubts, Lyrene had hesitated earlier, toam After all, several million dollars wasn't En pocket change.

Lethan looked up in confusion. "Shania, who were you talking to on the phone?"

That voice sounded familiar."

He wondered if it was Carlisle.