

Love Spell 541

Chapter 541

Ivan spotted Heath sitting in his wheelchair when he stepped out of the car. He looked very displeased.

"That's enough..."

Ivan stepped forward and slapped Karen twice. Even though Karen was his aunt, he felt that it was better for him to deal with her than to let Seth do it. Seth wouldn't stop at just two slaps.

Karen was stunned by the slaps. Her cheeks swelled rapidly. She stared at Ivan in disbelief. "Ivan, are you crazy? Why did you hit me?"

She had called Ivan for support, but he hit her instead. She felt that Ivan had lost his mind.

Ivan slapped her again and leaned forward, whispering through clenched teeth, "Don't drag me into your mess. Do you know who you've crossed?"

"Who? Is there someone in Rainville even you fear?"

Karen saw the seriousness in Ivan's face and felt a shiver run down her spine.

She had some influence in the area and considered herself a local queen. But there were many people to be feared.

"The man in the wheelchair is Prince Heath Walton of Riverland. The man behind him is his brother, Benjamin Walton. The only reason I have any influence is because of Heath's subordinate, Seth Clayton," Ivan explained in a low voice.

Karen didn't know who Heath was, but she understood the implication.

Heath had a subordinate named Seth, and Ivan was only in his position because of Seth. That meant that the man in the wheelchair was Seth's boss.

And she had just insulted him.

Karen felt a wave of terror wash over her, her body trembling uncontrollably.

"Ivan, what am I going to do now? Why is Prince Heath in Gordon's shop?"

Karen's voice was shaking as she clutched Ivan's arm.

Ivan spoke sternly, "Don't ask questions you shouldn't. Just tell me what you did."

Karen's eyes darted around nervously.

"I-I bought cookies at the store and saw that they were about to expire, so I..."

"So you tried to get them for free?"

Ivan knew Karen well. It wasn't the first time she had pulled a similar stunt. Other shopkeepers might have allowed her to get away with it to avoid trouble, but she had chosen

the wrong target that day.

"Ivan, it's all my fault. I won't do it again. Please help me!" Karen begged, clutching Ivan's arm in fear.

She was truly afraid she wouldn't see the light of day.

"This is the last time I'll help you. If this happens again, you're on your own," Ivan said coldly.

"Now, do exactly as I say, or not even Tony can save you."

Seth mentioned that Heath and Carlisle were as close as brothers, which was why Heath was staying at Carlisle's house to recuperate. Heath and Benjamin might look harmless, but that was just to keep Carlisle's parents from learning their true identities.

Karen would be in serious trouble if Heath weren't happy about the unfolding situation.

She nodded desperately.

"I'll do whatever you say. Just don't let them kill me!"

Ivan thought momentarily before saying, "Go and apologize to everyone you have offended. The situation might be resolved if they forgive you."

"Apologize? Like, actually apologize?"

Karen was horrified. She had a reputation to uphold. She wouldn't face anyone after that day. Ivan noticed her hesitation and sneered.

"If you don't do what I say, I guarantee your whole family won't sleep well tonight."

Terrified, Karen didn't dare defy Ivan. She trembled and reluctantly walked over to Benjamin as he chatted casually with Heath.

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Benjamin's face darkened.

"Heath, that bitch is shameless. I'll have Scar teach her a lesson tonight!"

Heath said nothing, but his icy expression spoke volumes about his mood. He was no saint, but at least he didn't bully the weak or extort businesses. Karen's attempt to confiscate Gordon's nearly expired products could be considered daylight robbery.

Just then, Gordon, Hilda, and Hayley emerged from the store. Hayley had just finished her phone call and was waiting for Owen by the side of the road.

Karen finally approached Benjamin with heavy footsteps.

Before Benjamin could speak, Karen fell to her knees with a loud thud. Tears streamed down her face.

"Mr. Benjamin, I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me just this once!"

"Apologizing to me won't help. You need to apologize to the people you have offended," Benjamin said coldly.

Karen turned to look at Hayley, who was also looking at her. Karen crawled over to the latter on her knees.

Hilda stared at Heath and Benjamin, her eyes reflecting a complicated mix of emotions. Even Ivan's aunt was afraid of them. She wondered who exactly Carlisle's friends were.

Gordon had already figured it out, but his expression was uneasy. He didn't want Carlisle to go down the wrong path. It looked glamorous, but it was all too easy to cross the line into crime.

Karen knelt before Hayley.

"I'm sorry. It was all my fault. Please forgive me..."

Hayley was taken aback. A moment ago, Karen had been arrogant and overbearing, but now she was on her knees, begging for forgiveness after asking for Ivan's help.

She glanced at Heath in his wheelchair and Benjamin beside him and realized that the duo were not ordinary.

Karen continued to apologize. Her knees were red from kneeling, but she didn't stop.

Suddenly, a black Mazda pulled up to the side of the road and honked. Hayley looked out the window and saw Owen exit the car. He had a buzz cut and wore a tailored suit that made him appear sharp. Hayley almost didn't recognize him.

"Mom, what are you looking at?" Owen asked, smiling as he walked over.

Hayley snapped out of her daze and hugged Owen excitedly.

"You little rascal. You've changed so much..."

Owen used to have dyed blond hair and a rebellious attitude. Now, with his clean-cut look and suit, he looked like an adult.

Owen noticed Karen kneeling on the floor and asked, "Mom, what's going on?"

Hayley turned to Karen.

"You can get up now. I forgive you."

"Thank you, thank you!"

Karen was overwhelmed with gratitude.

Then, she crawled over to Gordon and Hilda.

"I was just trying to get free stuff from you. Please forgive me."

"We accept your apology. You can get up now!" Hilda urged.

Karen was overjoyed. She quickly stood up and ran over to Ivan. Ivan was talking to

Benjamin, bowing and scraping.

"Heath, Benjamin, Karen isn't very bright and doesn't know any better. I'll make sure her family leaves Rainville and never bothers you again."

Benjamin's face remained stoic.

"For Scar's sake, let's leave it at that."

"Thank you, Benjamin. Thank you!" Ivan said repeatedly before pulling Karen away.

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"You rented a car? How much did it cost?"

Hayley looked at the black sedan parked by the side of the road and frowned.

She had no money, so she turned to Hilda and said, "Hilda, can you lend me some money? I need to pay for my son's car rental."

Hilda pulled a handful of bills out of her apron pocket and handed Hayley three hundred- dollar bills.

"Mom, you don't have to pay for the car. I borrowed it from a friend!"

He wanted to say it was his car, but he was afraid Hayley would ask for the paperwork. So he decided to be honest to avoid unnecessary trouble.

Hayley's frown deepened.

"You borrowed it? Do you even know how to drive? What if you damage it? Can you afford to fix it?"

The car looked expensive, and any damage would probably cost thousands to repair.

Owen stiffened. He knew she was worried about him, but he wondered if she had to publicly embarrass him.

Just then, Hilda chuckled.

"Hayley, Owie just got back. Give him a break!"

Hayley looked around and noticed several people watching. She nodded.

"Gordon, Hilda..."

With a smile, Owen greeted them.

"Look at you. You're looking better every day. Got a girlfriend yet? If not, I can have Hilda set you up with one!"

Gordon laughed heartily.

Hayley shot Gordon a glare.

"Save it for your son. My boy's not even an adult yet!"

Owen walked over to Heath and Benjamin.

"Heath, you're finally awake!" Owen said with tears in his eyes.

Heath stared at Owen in surprise.

"Is she your mom?"

"Yeah. She wasn't any trouble, was she?"

Heath shook his head and smiled.

"No. She even invites us over for dinner sometimes."

"That's good to hear!"

Owen patted his chest in relief. Hayley could be harsh sometimes and he was worried that she might have upset Heath.

The air grew colder as the sun went down.

Benjamin said to Owen, "I have to take Heath back now. You should spend some time with your mom."

Heath was still weak, and while some sunlight was good for him, he needed to avoid catching a cold.

Benjamin pushed Heath in the direction of Franklin Complex while Owen returned to Hayley's side.

Gordon suddenly asked, "Owie, do you know those guys?"

"Yeah. I introduced them to Carlisle."

"So, what do they do?"

"They're..."

Owen almost gave away Heath's true identity. He figured that Gordon he didn't know who Heath really was if he was asking.

excuse.

"They're Carlisle's business partners," Owen said, making up an excu

Gordon could tell that Owen wasn't being entirely truthful, but he didn't push any further.

He just smiled and said, "Well, don't just stand there. Come in and have a drink!" "Wait, Gordon. I brought you some presents!" Owen said and ran to the back of the Mazda.

Gordon was pleasantly surprised.

"Well, look at that. The kid's thoughtful enough to bring presents!"

Owen pulled out two bottles of Smirnoff and a gift bag from a jewelry store.

"Kid, you must be making a lot of money now!"

Gordon's eyes widened.

Owen handed Gordon the liquor and smiled.

"I've made some, but I wouldn't call it big money just yet."

Before he returned, he asked Felicia for an advance on a year's salary. He owed his success to

Carlisle, so bringing gifts to Carlisle's parents was the least he could do.

"I've never had Smirnoff. I guess I'll have to enjoy it!" Gordon said, grinning as he accepted the liquor.

Owen handed Hilda the gift bag.

"Hilda, this is for you!"

"This is too expensive. You should keep it."

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Hilda shook her head and declined the gifts. She then took the Smirnoff from Gordon and handed it to Hayley.

Owen wore a solemn expression.

"Gordon, Hilda, Carl is the reason I make money now. These are gifts of appreciation. You must accept them."

with that, he firmly placed the gift bag into Hilda's hands and turned to Hayley.

"Mom, give the booze back to Gordon."

Understanding Owen's intention, Hayley handed the Smirnoff back to Gordon.

"This is a token of his appreciation. Please accept it."

Gordon glanced at Hilda for her approval.

"Fine. We'll accept it this time, but don't make it a habit!"

Hilda sighed.

Gordon suddenly asked, "Didn't you get your mom a present?"

"I don't need any gifts!"

Hayley pouted.

Having her son home was more than enough. Gifts were the least of her worries.

"Of course. I got something for my mom, too. The rest of the gifts in the car are all for her," Owen said, opening the car door to reveal the backseat filled with gift bags and branded clothing.

It was his first time buying gifts for his mom, and he had spent almost half a year's salary. Hayley looked at the mountain of presents in disbelief.

"You... you bought all this?"

"Mom, I'm all grown up and financially independent now. You don't have to work so hard anymore."

Hayley's eyes filled with tears. She covered her mouth as she held back the tears.

Gordon checked the time.

"Sylvester will be home soon. It's too late to cook now. Let's eat out tonight."

"I'll just finish up with the customers first," Hilda agreed while nodding.

The city lights flickered on in Willow Grove in Riverland as night fell.

Carlisle worked on his computer. Sean had emailed him Alumni Network's latest user registration numbers. It also contained the news that they had signed an advertising contract with Fortbird.

According to the contract, Fortbird would pay a monthly fee to place ads on its site. The amount paid depended on the ads' click-through rates.

Carlisle replied to Sean's email, instructing him to accept more ads as long as they were limited to two ad spots on the entire site.

Around nine o'clock, Carlisle received a call from Wendell.

"Mr. Zahn, Brenton is returning to his hometown in three days. We're planning a delivery on the fourth. You can come with us. You might get a chance to see Wanda."

"Got it," Carlisle replied, excitement evident in his voice.

Wendell continued, "We've been spending a lot of money on connections lately."

Carlisle had already given him a million dollars, which he spent on bribes. He had managed

to buy off almost all the hospital security staff. Wendell couldn't help but marvel at the power of money.

"I'll transfer another million tomorrow."

Carlisle didn't hold back.

After the call ended, there was a knock at the door. Francis' voice came through.

"Mr. Zahn, someone's here to see you"

Carlisle got up to answer the door. Out came Austin and two women dressed in professional attire.

Carlisle, who was about the same height as Austin, looked him in the eye and smiled.

"Mr. Gust, what brings you here so late at night?"

"Aren't you going to invite me in?"

Austin had a calm expression on his face,

After a moment's hesitation, Carlisle stepped aside and motioned for them to enter. Austin

and his two assistants headed straight to the sofa and sat.

Carlisle returned to the living room and sat across from them. Francis got some bottled water from the refrigerator and placed it on the table.

Undeterred by Carlisle's hospitality, Austin got right to the point.

"Alumni Network has great potential, but it's limited in your hands. Name your price. How much would you sell it for?"

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Carlisle wore an insincere smile and asked Austin, "Who told you I was going to sell Alumni Network?"

"50 million!"

Austin skipped the explanations and went straight to the offer.

Francis, who was standing, behind Carlisle, felt his heart skip a beat. Alumni Network had only been around for a little over a month, yet it was already worth 50 million dollars.

Carlisle crossed his legs and smiled.

"I might consider it if you offered me Evermore Properties in exchange."

Evermore Properties was a leading company in Riverland's real estate industry with a market value of over a billion dollars. Austin couldn't make that decision, and Yuriel definitely wouldn't agree to the trade. Carlisle was just trying to kill Austin's idea of buying Alumni Network.

But Austin thought Carlisle was simply dissatisfied with the 50 million offer.

He pressed on, "How about 100 million?"

Francis was stunned. He wondered if rich people were that extravagant in their business dealings. They had jumped from 50 million to 100 million in a heartbeat. Alumni Network had only cost about 20 million to set up. If Carlisle sold it now, he'd make a profit of 80 million.

It seemed like a great deal.

"100 million? I wouldn't sell it to you even if you gave me 500 million. If you want Alumni Network, trade it for Evermore Properties," Carlisle said firmly.

There was no humor in his tone.

Real estate was a gold mine. He was confident he could surpass Wendy Group if he could acquire Evermore Properties.

He had Inside knowledge of future development schedules for key economic zones and a keen understanding of housing market trends. Seizing this opportunity would allow him to make a fortune in real estate.

Austin picked up a bottle of water from the table, twisted off the cap, and took a sip.

He stared at Carlisle.

"Do you think this is funny?"

Evermore Properties was one of the top real estate companies in the entire Cascade State, while Alumni Network was just a locally known social networking site. They weren't even in

the same league. Austin felt that Carlisle was insane to make such a request.

"You're the one who started the joke."

Carlisle chuckled.

According to his projections, Alumni Network's advertising revenue alone would reach 100 million next year. More importantly, his future mobile and gaming ventures would rely on Alumni Network for outreach. It was just the beginning of Carlisle's internet empire.

Once smartphones emerged, Alumni Network would evolve into a short-form video platform.

Realizing that Carlisle had no intention of selling Alumni Network, Austin frowned.

"You just got lucky. It's hard to tell if you're going to make it big. Business isn't that easy." His words contained a veiled threat. They hinted at trouble down the road if Carlisle didn't sell Alumni Network.

"Bring it on. I've been ready for any challenge since I started this business. I'm also someone who holds a grudge. I'll bide my time if I'm outmatched, but if I'm stronger, I'll pay you back double," Carlisle replied calmly after picking up on Austin's threat.

Austin snorted.

"You think too highly of yourself."

"At least I don't think highly of you," Carlisle retorted.

If it had been Yuriel, Carlisle might have shown some restraint. After all, Yuriel was the wealthiest man in Riverland, with connections and power far beyond Carlisle's current capabilities. However, Austin was a child of wealthy parents. Without Yuriel, Austin was nothing

"We'll see about that," Austin said coldly before getting up to leave with his two assistants. Carlisle chuckled.

"Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

Austin snorted before walking away without looking back.

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At that moment, Francis asked, "Boss, aren't you afraid that Yuriel will eliminate Alumni Network?"

Austin was Yuriel's son, after all. He had most likely come to talk because Yuriel had instructed him to do so. Brushing Austin off was akin to brushing Yuriel off.

Yuriel would undoubtedly take the steps to eliminate Alumni Network afterwards.

Carlisle was silent momentarily before taking out his phone to call Gareth.

"Hey, Carlisle. Are you asking me out for a drink?" Gareth asked as soon as he answered the phone.

It was very noisy on Gareth's end of the line. There was even the sound of cars honking. It seemed he was on the road.

It was Owen's birthday tomorrow and Gareth planned to get him a gift.

"I met Austin just now."

"What did he want?"

"They want to acquire Alumni Network!"

"Oh? For how much? Did you agree?" Gareth asked, interested.

"They offered 100 million, and I refused it. I predict that Alumni Network will face some hurdles in the near future."

Gareth sneered.

"They wanted to buy Alumni Network for just 100 million? Did Yuriel hit his head?"

Anyone could see the potential of Alumni Network. Yuriel was the wealthiest man in Riverland, yet he was bullying Carlisle due to the latter's young age.

After he said that, Gareth furrowed his brow and asked, "What do you plan to do if Yuriel does act against Alumni Network?"

Carlisle replied calmly, "I'd return the favor."

Whatever Yuriel chose to do, Carlisle would retaliate in kind.

Aurora Holdings still had 200 million dollars. If they invested all of it in a commercial war, they might be unable to bring down Evermore Properties, but they would at least cause the company significant damage.

If necessary, he could get Wade to stir up some trouble at Evermore Properties' construction sites. Even a worm would turn, after all.

Carlisle called Gareth because he would soon be leaving Riverland. He needed to inform

Gareth of this matter in advance so he could brace himself.

"This is a minor issue. Let's see what Yuriel's next move is."

Gareth had been doing business for years, and his contacts in the business world were not to be underestimated. It was more than enough to deal with the wealthiest man in the city.

After ending his call with Carlisle, Gareth parked his Ferrari in the parking lot outside Pennmart downtown.

After a moment of contemplation, he took out his phone and called Yuriel. Although he didn't have shares in Alumni Network, he did own shares in Aurora Holdings, whose profits came from all of Carlisle's companies. Thus, Alumni Network's profits would determine Gareth's future dividends.

If Yuriel intended to target Alumni Network, he needed to give him a heads-up.

At that moment, Yuriel was on a call with Austin. Austin had just informed him about Carlisle's attitude.

Austin added fuel to the fire, stating, "He doesn't take us seriously at all. If we don't teach him a lesson, he'll think we're all bark and no bite."

Yuriel pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Handle it yourself. Just don't get into trouble."

Austin's lips curled into a smile.

"I know what to do..."

Yuriel didn't respond any further and hung up.

His focus wasn't on Alumni Network. Instead, it was on becoming the chairman of Thompson Group. The preparations were almost complete, and all that was needed was a spark to start the battle with Shein officially.

Shortly after he hung up, he received a call from an unknown number. He hesitated for a moment before rejecting it. He didn't answer calls from unfamiliar numbers outside of working hours.

When Gareth couldn't reach Yuriel by phone, he sent a text message instead.

He wrote, "Hello, Mr. Gust. I am Gareth, the former chairman of Scarlet Corporation. I have shares in Alumni Network. Please be merciful!"

Yuriel received the message and frowned after reading it. Alumni Network was not to be touched if Gareth had invested in it.

Yuriel immediately pressed the call button on the messaging app's user interface.

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Gareth picked up the phone.

"Mr. Gust..."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Spencer. I was busy with work, so I couldn't answer your call."

Yuriel showed Gareth plenty of respect as he explained himself.

Gareth laughed and replied, "It's fine. You've probably seen my message just now, right?"

Yuriel chuckled.

"I saw it. Had I known that you had invested in Alumni Network, I wouldn't have wasted my time meeting with Mr. Zahn to discuss the acquisition."

Gareth chuckled in return and said, "It's not too late. Alumni Network is a networking platform meant for youths. I think that a young person understands another young person better.

"I believe Alumni Network will go far under Carlisle's leadership. So, Mr. Gust, don't snatch this opportunity from me, alright?"

Yuriel quickly replied, "Your words are very logical. It seems that I didn't think this through.

He froze immediately after he said those words.

He realized that Dragonaire Studio was Carlisle's as well and that Gareth had invested two billion in it.

Back then, there was even a signing ceremony at Imperial Hotel where the governor of Riverland was invited to officiate. Ever since the signing ceremony, Dragonaire Studio had disappeared from the public eye. It seemed the business world had almost forgotten the

company.

In other words, Dragonaire Studio, which was currently under Carlisle's control, was worth a few billion. On top of that, he had Alumni Network that was very popular with universities.

Yuriel took a deep breath. The two industries within Carlisle's management would surely disrupt the business world of Riverland in the future.

After a moment of silence, Yuriel added, "Carlisle has such strong business acumen at such a young age. It truly is worth the investment.

"Besides, I view Alumni Network favorably. I wonder if there's still an opportunity to invest in it."

He suddenly found himself fearing Carlisle a little. Even if he were to defeat Shein in the future, Carlisle would be another threat to him.

He was inconvenienced by Gareth's investment in Carlisle's company. Since he couldn't afford to offend Gareth, he figured that he might as well invest in the company, too.

"Well, Mr. Gust, you might be disappointed... but we're not short on funds right now!" Gareth replied smilingly.

If Carlisle were truly short on funds, Gareth would have to suck it up and ask his father for money.

Even if it were just one percent, the shares would become insanely valuable in the future.

Yuriel sounded slightly disappointed.

"That's really unfortunate. The youths are the future, so I'm very willing to invest in them."

After exchanging some pleasantries, Gareth ended the call. From the conversation, he sensed that Yuriel had started to fear Carlisle.

He couldn't help but say in awe, "Oh, Carlisle. I'm really looking forward to realizing your dream now!"

He couldn't help but think Carlisle was a madman for aiming to be the world's wealthiest man.

Carlisle's businesses were booming especially his smartphone business. Gareth could hardly imagine the global impact it would have if it succeeded.

Suddenly, a familiar voice sounded.

"Hi, Mr. Spencer..."

Gareth turned to look at the owner of the voice. His dark eyes lit up with recognition.

"Why are you here, Luna Brooke?"

"It's Saturday. I'm here to shop with Queenie."

Gareth did not see Queenie.

"Where is she?"

"She went to park her car," answered Luna.

"Oh."

Gareth opened his car door and got out. He then walked toward the mall with his hands in

his pockets.

Luna's brows furrowed.

"Hey, don't you have any manners?"

However, Gareth didn't even bother looking at her.

He wondered why he should mind his manners when they weren't familiar with one another.

Luna stomped her foot in frustration. Queenie, who had parked her car, walked over at that moment.

"What's wrong?"

Luna pouted and clung to Queenie's arm.

"I was ignored by a jerk..."

Queenie looked surprised.

"Really? Someone ignored you?"

After all, Luna was the famous campus belle of Riverland University.

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Luna's line of secret admirers could reach Yorksle. Yet, a man had actually ignored her. Queenie doubted that it was true.

Moreover, Luna was angry that a man had ignored her. Queenie felt that Luna wouldn't feel that way unless she was interested in him.

With that in mind, Queenie chuckled and asked, "Is that guy from our university? Could it be Jason Yaxley?"

Jason was a sports major and the current president of the Riverland University Basketball Association. He was tall and handsome, the dream guy of many girls, and a classmate of

Luna.

Luna pouted.

"Of course not! I don't have any feelings for guys like Jason!" Queenie froze.

"So, you have feelings for the guy who just ignored you?"

As she spoke, she noticed the yellow Ferrari parked not far away. She questioned if it was Gareth's car.

Queenie instantly figured out who Luna was referring to.

"Oh, stop asking so many questions. Let's go shopping for clothes!" exclaimed Luna as she blushed furiously.

She then dragged Queenie toward the mall.

Carlisle also went out shopping after he ended his call with Gareth. Pennmart was the largest department store in Riverland. Carlisle, accompanied by Francis, headed to the largest tobacco and liquor specialty store on the first floor.

"Boss, has my order arrived?"

Carlisle had pre-ordered two cases of 1988 Smirnoff and five boxes of Ghurka Royal cigars. "Yes, it has. It arrived yesterday."

The shop owner smiled as he fetched a case of Smirnoff from the storage room.

"The supplier only had one case. If you want the second, you'll have to wait until tomorrow night."

Carlisle furrowed his brows.

"Why wasn't I informed before this? Didn't you guarantee that you could get me two cases?"

Looking embarrassed and unsure, the shop owner replied, "This drink is very scarce, and it is quite expensive. You didn't leave a deposit. I was worried you might back out."

Carlisle didn't want to argue with him about it and replied, "Fine. One case will do. Where are my cigars?"

"Just a moment!"

The shop owner went back to the storage room and returned with two Ghurka Royal cigars. He glanced nervously at Carlisle and awkwardly said, "We're currently out of stock. Both of these cigars are from the store's inventory."

Carlisle narrowed his eyes at the shop owner.

"Is it really out of stock, or did you sell it to someone else?"

The shop owner replied somewhat anxiously, "It's truly out of stock. In this line of business, reputation is everything. We wouldn't dare deceive our customers."

Carlisle nodded upon seeing his earnest behavior.

"Alright. I'd like to pay."

"Each bottle of Smirnoff is 16 thousand dollars. Four bottles are 64 thousand.

"A Ghurkha Royal cigar is 30 thousand dollars per cigar, so two cigars are 60 thousand. I'll round it off, so it'll be 120 thousand dollars."

Carlisle placed his bank card on the counter.

"Card payments are fine, right?"

In this era, most shops couldn't process card payments, but high-end tobacco and liquor specialty stores usually had POS machines. The shop owner retrieved a POS machine from the drawer and processed the payment.

Francis watched dazedly.

Smirnoff was a renowned brand of liquor. Selling an 88-year-old Smirnoff for 16 thousand dollars was understandable, but he felt the cost of the cigars was too much.

"30 thousand dollars per cigar? Are they made of fucking gold or something?" Francis thought.

Carlisle then went to a wellness store where he ordered nearly 100 thousand dollars worth of goods. It took two trips for them to load all the gifts into the car.

At that moment, Gareth had reached Imperial Hotel. The sofa was full of premium foreign liquors and health supplements. There were also three Ghurka Royal cigars and several pieces of valuable jewelry and gold.

"This is less than half a million dollars. Does it seem too stingy of me?"

Gareth rubbed his chin, deep in thought. He planned to go out again to find better gifts.

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The next day, Carlisle called Sean after waking up.

"Hey, Carl," answered Sean.

"Do you want to go home together?"

"You go on ahead. I have something to do at the university, so I'll probably be late."

"Alright."

After Carlisle hung up the phone, he called Gareth, who said he would come over right away. Carlisle freshened up and packed two changes of clothes before heading out.

Carlisle bumped into Melanie and Callie when the elevator doors opened.

"Carlisle..."

Melanie's eyes brightened as she smiled and greeted him.

With a smile, Carlisle nodded.

"Hi, Melanie!"

She looked at his suitcase and asked, "Are you traveling somewhere?"

Carlisle nodded.

"I'm heading back to my hometown."

She asked curiously, "Where's your hometown?"

"Rainville."

"Oh! What a coincidence," Melanie replied, her eyes wide.

Carlisle looked surprised as well.

"You're from Rainville too?"

Melanie nodded.

"That's right. I'm from Stonebrook."

"That's pretty close by. I'm from Harveston, so I must pass through Stonebrook on the way to Rainville."

Carlisle hadn't expected Melanie's hometown to be so close to his own.

It was no wonder Stonebrook developed rapidly in recent years. It turned out that Gabriel was the reason behind it. The investors in Stonebrook wished to tap into Gabriel's connections.

Melanie was even more surprised.

"Wow! A lot of my high school classmates are from Harveston. So, did you go to Rainville High School or Rainville Beta High School?"

"Rainville High School," Carlisle replied.

"Oh!"

Melanie was surprised once again.

She then asked, "So, who was your homeroom teacher?"

Upon seeing Melanie's expression, Carlisle knew she must have graduated from the same school.

He smiled and replied, "My homeroom teacher was Lucy Turner."

Callie chuckled.

"Did you both have the same homeroom teacher?"

Melanie shook her head this time and said, "No, mine was Elise Quill. She resigned and became a full-time housewife two years after my graduation."

Callie grinned and said, "The two of you were fated to meet!"

The elevator reached the first floor with a ding.

Melanie said politely, "After you, Carlisle."

"Thanks, Melanie."

He went ahead and left after thanking her.

Once Melanie and Callie stepped out of the elevator, Callie muttered softly, "Why haven't we seen his girlfriend lately? I've seen him come back alone several times."

Melanie had also paid attention to Carlisle on campus.

She replied, "His girlfriend seems to have taken a leave of absence to focus on her health."

"What's she sick with?" asked Callie.

"I'm not sure."

"Okay. Let's not talk about that. Recently, there's been a Rolls-Royce parked in our neighborhood. Rumor has it that the owner is a handsome guy in his 20s.

"Let's go try our luck today. Maybe we'll encounter love!" Callie suggested mischievously.

"Did you break up with that stingy guy?" Melanie turned her head and asked Callie.

"Yeah, we broke up. Didn't I tell you last week? What was the point of keeping him around?" Callie replied, looking annoyed as she glared at Melanie.

Melanie pretended to feel sorry for her and answered, "He was great at budgeting, yet you

rejected him. Aren't your standards too high?"

Callie glared as she said, "You think making me use a cloth instead of sanitary pads makes him good at budgeting?"

Melanie couldn't help but laugh.

"I was just kidding!"

The two continued chatting and laughing as they walked outside. They happened to see the Rolls-Royce pull out of the parking lot.

The windows were open, allowing them to glimpse Carlisle sitting in the back seat.

Callie exclaimed in shock, "Oh my God! Is that Rolls-Royce Carlisle's?"

Melanie shook her head, stunned.

"Wasn't his car a Mazda?"

Callie grabbed Melanie's arm and said excitedly, "Melanie, do you think I have a chance with

Carlisle?"

She wondered how rich Carlisle was, given that he drove a Rolls-Royce.

He was rich and handsome. Which girl wouldn't like that?

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Melanie watched the Rolls-Royce turn and disappear around the corner.

She then looked away and smiled knowingly, saying, "Why don't you give it a try?"

Melanie knew Callie wasn't materialistic and was simply joking around with her best friend.

Callie chuckled and replied, "I know my worth, but who knows? You're so beautiful. You might stand a chance!"

Melanie was slightly taken aback.

She then answered nonchalantly, "I think I'll pass. I don't like younger guys."

Callie pursed her lips, saying, "I think Carlisle's a pretty mature guy. He's nothing like his peers."

Melanie had noticed this, too. Carlisle had previously saved her at A1 Seafood Restaurant and had later shown remarkable composure in front of her father.

In their subsequent meetings, Carlisle appeared very composed as well.

She was fond of him due to that.

However, he had a girlfriend. Melanie could tell that Carlisle deeply loved his girlfriend. Although Wanda was on a break, she believed he would wait for her return.

Meanwhile, in the evening, at Franklin Complex, Hayley invited Hilda over to her house to cook. Owen's dad, Sylvester, took the day off to help out at home.

Hayley also invited Rory and his wife over. Besides them, she had also invited a group of close friends.

Hayley's house was massive. The monthly rent was 500 dollars.

After moving the sofas in the living room aside, there was still plenty of room to fit four tables.

Gordon and Rory were playing chess at the coffee table when Sharyl went and kicked Sylvester out of the kitchen.

With a cigarette between his lips, Sylvester approached the coffee table and began to point away.

"Gordon, use your bishop to get the knight..."

Rory glared at Sylvester.

"Hey, what are you doing? Don't you know that you should keep quiet while watching a chess game?"

Gordon noticed that Rory's knight was in his bishop's path. So, he took his bishop and knocked the knight over.

He even pretended to be an expert as he gloated, "I saw it some time back. He didn't change his course, so it's too late now!"

Rory said unhappily, "That's bullshit. Do you think I don't know how shitty you are at chess?"

At that moment, Owen asked, "Dad, is aunt coming?"

Rory's and Gordon's expressions soured as soon as he asked that.

Sylvester's grandfather used to be the landlord. Before he was criticized and denounced, he had gathered a lot of wealth.

Later, he lived an extravagant life. Once he had had enough fun, he used the remaining wealth to marry and have children. In reality, his wife was bought with his wealth.

He had a son in his 50s, and before that, he adopted a daughter named Yvette Barlow. She was abandoned by her family because she was born with leukemia.

He used the remainder of his savings to seek treatment everywhere. Ultimately, Yvett's illness was cured in Yorksle.

Sylvester's father had treated Yvette like his own daughter. However, 15 years ago, Yvette embarked on a journey to find her biological parents. It took her ten years to find them.

Since then, she has had little contact with Sylvester's family. She would return occasionally, but she would merely stay for a meal and leave immediately after.

Three years ago, Sylvester's father suffered a stroke and was paralyzed. Even then, Yvette did not return. It wasn't until his funeral that Yvette had someone send a few wreaths.

Sylvester tapped the ash off his cigarette.

"Don't tell them."

It had been a year since their father's passing. Sylvester had never once contacted his sister.

Hayley entered the living room to grab a drink and said mildly, "You still remember your aunt, huh? That ungrateful person might not remember you at all."

Owen smiled awkwardly.

"Mom, you've misunderstood me. I merely wanted her to see us having a good time."

"Oh, you silly boy!"

Hayley smiled and shook her head. She then returned to the kitchen.

Owen was puzzled.

"Dad, what did Mom mean by that?"

Sylvester thought momentarily before saying, "Your aunt's biological family is very wealthy. I heard they have leased over five thousand acres of fish ponds and earn three to

five million dollars annually."

Owen looked disappointed upon hearing this.

With his annual income of 200 thousand dollars, he couldn't compete with his aunt.

Just then, the neighborhood security guard suddenly approached the door and shouted, " Sylvester, your sister has returned!"