**Limits 19**

Chapter 19

On the other end of the line, Shane's voice carried a stern edge.

"Come to my office," he said curtly before hanging up.

Arthur frowned in confusion. What could have gone wrong? He racked his brain, but he couldn't think of anything he might have done to offend Shane recently.

Shrugging it off, he decided it was probably nothing serious. Humming a tune, he made his way to the principal's office at a leisurely pace.

Knocking lightly on the door, he heard Shane's voice. "Come in."

Arthur stepped inside, only to find Shane sitting behind his desk, holding a tea cup with a dark expression.

His assistant, Jake Carter, was standing nearby, organizing documents in a tense silence.

Arthur forced a smile and approached cautiously. "Uncle Shane, what can I do for you?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

Shane set his tea cup down with a sharp clink and fixed Arthur with a cold stare. "In formal settings, don't call me 'Uncle Shane.' I'm Principal Sayer here."

There was a tightly controlled anger in Shane's voice, like a volcano teetering on the edge of eruption.

Arthur's nerves began to fray. "Uh, Principal Sayer, is there something wrong?" he asked carefully.

Shane opened a drawer and pulled out a notebook, tossing it onto the desk in front of Arthur.

His expression grew darker. He asked, "Did you expel a student named Jack Holland from your class? He lives in the suburbs, and his phone number ends with 6789."

Arthur felt a flicker of unease. Something about the situation felt off, but he couldn't figure out how Jack might be involved in any of this.

He admitted hesitantly. "Yes. Why? What's going on?"

Shane took a deep breath, clearly struggling to contain his anger. He gestured to Jake and said, "Jake, step outside for a moment. Shut the door behind you."

Jake nodded, clearly understanding the gravity of the situation. He exited quickly, closing the door softly behind him.

Once the office was left with just the two of them, Shane abruptly stood up and hurled his teacup at Arthur with all his strength.

He shouted furiously, "Arthur, you shameless idiot! What the hell did I do in my past life to deserve this? You're nothing but a useless bastard! I swear, I'd break your damn legs if I could!"

Arthur barely dodged the cup, still getting clipped enough to leave him bruised. Clutching his head in confusion, he asked, "Uncle Shane, why are you so angry? I really don't know what's going on."

"Stop pretending to be clueless!" Shane roared, pointing at a stack of documents scattered across the floor. "Look at that! Look at what you've done! You've completely ruined Crestfield High School's reputation for the next 20 years!"

Arthur was trembling. He bent down to pick up the papers. As he scanned the contents, his hands shook even harder. The documents listed the top ten scorers in the state exams.

His eyes landed on a name that made his heart nearly stop-Jack Holland. Next to it was a note that said, "Former student of Crestfield High School".

Arthur froze, his mind reeling. His voice quivered as he stammered, "T-This... Could it be..."

"Could it be?' You damn fool!" Shane bellowed, grinding his teeth with rage. He was practically shaking as he jabbed a finger toward Arthur.

He snapped, "Do you have any idea what you've done? Crestfield High School spent three years nurturing a top scholar, and you expelled him! You handed him over to Seaton High School on a silver platter! Do you even comprehend the damage this has done to the school? To my reputation? I should flay you alive!" "This can't be... This can't be happening..." Arthur muttered in denial.

Shane, seeing Arthur's refusal to accept reality, picked up a chair and swung it at him.

Arthur scrambled to dodge, his heart pounding in terror. By now, he knew he had completely messed up.

Never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that the student he expelled was this year's top science student in the state. It was like a bolt of lightning striking him out of nowhere.

But Shane wasn't done. He grabbed a potted cactus from the desk and hurled it at Arthur.

"Get out!" Shane roared, his voice booming through the office. "Get out of Crestfield High School and never come back!"

Arthur stumbled out of the office, battered and humiliated. His body ached, but his heart hurt even more. He couldn't believe what had just happened.

Jack Holland, the same Jack who could barely scrape together a score of 300 or 400 in the past, had somehow transformed into the state's top scholar.

It was a miracle.

Arthur's mind spun. If Jack's achievement had remained under his purview, Arthur could've been looking at tens of thousands in bonuses, not to mention a probable promotion.

But now, the bonus was gone. His career at Crestfield was likely over. The thought filled Arthur with bitter resentment.

He couldn't figure out how that slacker, Jack, had pulled this off.

There was only one explanation Arthur could cling to-cheating. But who would cheat their way to the top spot in the state?

Dazed and furious, Arthur staggered out of the office. His legs gave way on the stairs, and he tumbled down in a heap. By the time he hit the bottom, his head was bleeding.

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The stars sparkled brightly, and the grass swayed gently in the breeze.

It was a season destined to be one of abundance.

In the undeveloped riverside suburbs, Jack, Wesley, and Eddie rode their bicycles, with the fishing nets in hand, weaving freely along the winding paths by the river.

Their laughter echoed along the riverbank, blending seamlessly with the world around them.

"What? You're the top scholar in the state?"Wesley's sudden shout broke the peaceful atmosphere, startling a chorus of frogs into croaking.

Jack nodded calmly.

Eddie helped Wesley out of the shallow pond he had stumbled into, his eyes wide with disbelief as he stared at Jack.

The three had grown up together. It was shocking to them because they knew Jack so well, and the news felt like a surreal dream.

Yet, miracles had a way of sneaking into life when one least expected them.

After the initial shock wore off, Wesley and Eddie took turns punching Jack in mock frustration. "You'd better treat us to barbecue and all-night gaming sessions this summer!" they demanded, only letting him off the hook once he agreed.

As they rode along the riverside, they began talking about their dream colleges and future plans.

"I'm aiming for Alnewgo University," Jack said casually. For him, it didn't matter where he applied. After all, his acceptance was guaranteed.

Wesley, though, sighed wistfully. "I'd love to go to Alnewgo too, but my scores will only get me into a decent second-tier college."

Eddie chimed in, "I'm thinking of studying medicine. I'm not sure where yet, though."

The three of them dreamed of the exciting college life ahead as they pedaled under the clear blue sky.

When Jack arrived home, he found his front yard crowded with reporters, education officials, and even sponsors looking to promote their brands.

They all hoped Jack would share his study tips, with some even offering generous bonuses and perks if he chose to enroll in their colleges.

As the hype around the state exams gradually faded, so did the constant bustle around Jack's home.

In the weeks that followed, Jack spent most of his time immersed in music composition and guitar practice. When not lost in melodies, he dove into computer training courses.

Jack's learning speed far outpaced that of the average student. Soon, he was no longer just a learner.

He became a collaborator with Patrick, a college senior who was deeply involved in designing gaming cheat softwares.

To Patrick, Jack possessed extraordinary talent and insight. Within a short time, Jack advanced from being a novice to a trusted partner.

Jack had a knack for pinpointing problems in cheat designs and offering creative solutions.

His ideas, like adding new features to enhance gameplay or implementing tools to make gaming easier often transformed ordinary projects into extraordinary ones. These tweaks gave Patrick's plug-in studio a stellar reputation in the industry. With the rise of online gaming, plug-in studios had become a booming business. While Patrick, a computer science major at Alnewgo University, had started dabbling in plug-in design as a freshman, his small studio mainly relied on imitation. Compared to the industry's giants, it struggled to stand out. Even so, Patrick had built a comfortable fortune over the years, thanks to the steady income from plug-in development.