Limits 761

Chapter 761

Back in the day, Cynthia was one of the brightest stars at Crestfield High School. She was born into a family of scholars and blessed with exceptional features, outstanding academic achievements, and an upbeat personality.

Yet, at Montclair Conservatory, it was a gathering place of the country's finest. The men were tall and exceptional-looking, and the women were graceful and breathtakingly beautiful.

Cynthia was the "it girl" that every boy in high school pursued, but now she was nothing more than average at Montclair Conservatory. She couldn't help but feel a sense of disappointment.

The world was a vast place, and when all was said and done, they were merely ordinary people living in this world. Even if they were one in 10 thousand, they were still simply one among 140 thousand in a nation this immense.

After exchanging pleasantries, Jack finally couldn't help it and asked, "Oh, Cynthia, do you know a woman named Bella Cole?" Cynthia blinked her eyes, and a surprised expression appeared on her face. "Are you talking about Bella Cole, the senior in the Department of Vocals?"

Jack thought about it and vaguely remembered that Bella was studying vocals at Alnewgo University. Still, he wasn't certain, so he said, "Yes, she's a senior who transferred from Alnewgo University."

"Then, it must be her." Cynthia nodded firmly. "But why are you asking about her?"

Before Jack could say anything, a surprised look appeared on Cynthia's face. "D- Don't tell me you have feelings for her."

"Why do you say that?" Jack was somewhat curious. "How would I not know what boys like you are thinking?"

Cynthia gave Jack a look of disdain before continuing, "Let me put it this way. There are just way too many people who like Bella. Even if she isn't a household name, she's still a sensation at our university.

"Since Bella transferred to our university, people have been fighting to confess their love to her. You know, she's even been crowned the most beautiful woman on campus at our university!"

To be crowned as the most beautiful woman on campus at Montclair Conservatory, where talent and beauty abound, took far more than just a pretty face. It demanded extraordinary talent and charm that was out of this world. In short, she was the cream of the crop.

Jack felt a stir in his heart. Recalling the photo that was hung on the wall, Bella was, in fact, much more beautiful and perfect than before.

He never expected that after not seeing her for almost a year, she had transformed into a lovely yet highly regarded person at Montclair Conservatory.

However, everyone was changing and growing-Jack was also the same.

So, Jack shook his head and said, "No."

Cynthia nodded slightly, and her tone sounded somewhat distant. "Thankfully, you don't have any feelings for her. Otherwise, you will be crippled by a lingering sense of inferiority. At our university, only those who consider themselves the best, be it the most handsome, the brightest scholars, or even budding celebrities, dared to pursue Bella.

"I heard that Bella will perform at Conady, a world-renowned stage, at the end of the semester. It's an official invitation by the Conady government, something money alone cannot buy! And you know what? It's not just students from our university who admire her; even students from Lightfield University came all the way just to see her."

Ordinary people would live ordinary lives, while those who stood out would continue to shine brightly. Bella lived a colorful and exciting life, and her reputation had preceded her, reaching the students of Lightfield University, where she had become the dream woman of many.

"Why are you talking about her all of a sudden?" Cynthia curiously asked.

"We used to go to the same university. We were close," Jack replied.

"Oh, I see," Cynthia said with a sudden realization.

Chapter 762

Didn't Bella transfer from Alnewgo University?

Cynthia gave a faint amused smile. "It's a good thing you know where you stand. Bella isn't the same woman anymore. She's like something out of a dream now- beautiful, distant, and completely untouchable."

Jack felt something stir in his chest. He had always considered himself exceptional, someone who could match her.

But after hearing Cynthia's words, he couldn't help but waver. That certainty he once had about his feelings for Bella began to slip.

Time wore love down faster than anyone expected. In just a year, Bella had completely transformed. She was now in a league of her own, surrounded by people far more brilliant than the boy she'd once known.

Would she even remember Jack-the guy she met by chance at Alnewgo, the one she shared a brief, complicated chapter with?

Maybe her mother's plan had worked after all. After seeing the vast sky, it was hard to feel at home in a small town again.

Every now and then, Jack still dreamed about his time with Bella. But after a year, even those were starting to fade. Her face, once so vivid, had already begun to blur.

His expression turned distant, almost lost in thought. Cynthia noticed and gave his shoulder a light pat.

"Come on, wake up. I'm not trying to put you down, but Bella's like a cloud on the horizon. She's not someone we can ever really hold onto. Be realistic. Instead of staring up at the sky, why not hold on to what's already in your hands? Keep moving forward."

Cynthia still saw Jack as that boy from Perthter City. Yes, he'd been the top scorer in the city, and that made him stand out.

But compared to someone like Bella, he still seemed worlds behind. After all, Montclair Conservatory was one of the most elite institutions in the entire country.

Cynthia wouldn't have imagined that like Bella and Feena, Jack's life was about to be extraordinary. His brilliance would eventually outshine Feena and Bella. Jack nodded and replied, "Thanks."

Jack nodded. He understood that Cynthia meant well. Whether he liked it or not, Bella had already moved on with her life-and so would he.

He'd keep growing, keep improving himself. And who knows? If fate brought them back together someday, maybe they'd be able to surprise each other.

With that sense of longing still lingering, Jack left Montclair Conservatory and returned to the hotel.

That afternoon, he had lunch with Quintis and Emily. Each dish was carefully plated in the kitchen. Though the portions were small, the food was beautifully prepared, with vibrant color and aroma.

Although the Lycan family were wealthy, they didn't live extravagantly. Any family that hoped to preserve its fortune across generations understood the value of modesty and restraint.

The first time Jack had returned home, Emily hadn't known what he liked to eat, so she'd had the kitchen prepare everything he might possibly enjoy. Now that she knew his tastes, there was no need to go overboard. Just a few dishes he liked were enough.

"Jack, we've got a big real estate project launching in Alnewgo City. Want to come take a look?" Quintis asked casually as the family enjoyed their meal.

Jack hesitated for a moment before replying, "I'm in my senior year so things are pretty intense with school."

Quintis' brows furrowed slightly as he replied flatly, "If you get the chance, you should still go take a look. When would you be free? Actually, why don't I have Tristan bring you there? You're back now so it's time you started getting familiar with these large-scale projects. It'll be good for your future."

In truth, Quintis was growing anxious. He wasn't getting any younger. His original plan had been for Tristan to inherit the family business, but now that Jack had returned, that plan was shifting. It was only natural to begin involving him in the family's affairs."

More importantly, there was an agreement with the Dodger family's daughter. The two-year deadline was drawing closer by the day.

Chapter 763

To be honest, the gap between Jack and Wilhelmina was significant. When the two-year deadline came, how were they supposed to face each other?

No one was expecting Wilhelmina to marry into the Lycan family, but at the very least, they couldn't afford to lose face. They couldn't allow the Lycan family's son to be humiliated by a girl from another family.

In order to give Jack even the slimmest chance of defeating Wilhelmina, Quintis had no choice but to force his son's growth. Even if Wilhelmina ended up looking down on Jack later, at the very least, they couldn't allow Jack to be a disgrace.

So, when Quintis saw that Jack didn't seem to care, he started to get anxious.

And yet, Jack didn't seem interested in things most people dreamed of. Instead, he gave Quintis a rare smile and said calmly, "No need. I'm not that interested in real estate."

Emily, who had been listening, was caught off guard. She hadn't expected Jack to refuse. Even she started getting worried.

"Jack, stop being so stubborn. You need to understand this field. One day, your father's business will be yours to take over!"

Seeing that Jack wasn't listening, she tried another approach. "And don't forget your promise to Wilhelmina. You said two years. If you don't start learning these things now, how will you surpass her in two years?"

Even knowing Jack would refuse, Emily still said it. This wasn't just difficult-it was an impossible task.

But for the sake of Jack's pride, she chose her words carefully, her tone wrapped in gentleness. Even so, the worry in her heart was impossible to disguise.

Jack calmly picked up a piece of steak with his fork and said casually, "I know what I'm doing. You don't need to worry. I'll never bring shame to the Lycan family."

His voice was steady, assured. Somehow, that conviction eased Emily and Quintis' worry.

Although they didn't know where Jack's confidence came from, it sounded like he meant every word.

Emily and Quintis wondered what kind of man had their long-absent son become?

If Jack really had the ability to stand on his own, then there was no doubt they could hold their heads high.

Quintis' parents had always placed great importance on bloodline and legacy.

Though they had their complaints about Emily, they weren't foolish. They understood that the prosperity of the Lycan family ultimately rested with the younger generation. No matter how vast the shelter of the older generation, the children would eventually have to step out from its shade and learn to fly on their own.

Quintis and his three brothers and sister weren't young anymore. The future would no longer belong to them, but to their children.

Vincent would undoubtedly be overjoyed if someone truly exceptional could emerge from Jack's generation. He would spare no effort in nurturing a real talent.

Emily had endured years of cold treatment from Vincent as Jack had once been presumed dead..

In fact, there was a time when Vincent sent Tristan to work at Sandalwood Group, grooming him to one day take over-just in case the family business fell into the wrong hands.

Even now, a faint hope still lingered in Emily's heart. She wished that Jack's return might be enough to change things-to have the family accept her again, to restore her place, and to keep Quintis from being caught in the crossfire.

After dinner, the family drove to the secluded hospital where Vincent was under special care.

The ride was silent. Jack sat quietly, gazing out the window, lost in thought. Eventually, they reached a high-security facility located behind the hospital. At the end of a quiet path stood the exclusive VIP wing.

Unlike the world outside, the VIP ward was quiet and calm. It was the perfect environment for recovery and rest.

But beyond its serene surface, the place was heavily guarded. Very few could enter at will. Everyone allowed past these doors was someone of immense power.

Chapter 764

Vincent resided in the innermost room of the villa-style ward, a private suite that even had its own garden. The setting was especially quiet and almost meditative.

A while back, a few high-ranking colleagues had come to visit Vincent. There were also guards stationed all around the ward, a gesture that spoke volumes about his influence.

After confirming their identities, the guards at the door politely asked the family to wait while one of them went inside to announce their arrival.

Moments later, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline came striding out, beaming with laughter-it was Norman Lycan, Quintis' brother.

Among the brothers-Norman, Quintis, and Augustine-Norman's son, Maverick Lycan, had already entered the public sector and risen to the rank of deputy director. Like Tristan, Maverick was now one of the most promising young stars of the Lycan family.

Augustine's son, Knox Lycan, had made a name for himself in the business world. Rumor had it he already owned a company worth over a hundred million dollars.

Knox, Maverick, and Tristan were thus the rising stars of the Lycan family and were deeply favored by Vincent and Samantha.

When Vincent, Quintis and his generation inevitably stepped back, it would be up to these young men to carry the family banner.

Quintis had once been the one expected to lead the family among the three brothers.

Though Norman held an esteemed provincial position, it still paled in comparison to Quintis' achievements with the Sandalwood Group. After all, the company was

a private enterprise that had broken through international borders and made Quintis a major player in the global capital market.

Quintis' only regret was his son, Nicholas, who had vanished without a trace.

Despite his return, Nicholas' standing in Vincent and Samantha's eyes had declined.

Too many years had passed. Who could say what sort of habits he had picked up out in the world?

A child raised among common folk-no matter how capable-would always carry the invisible limits of vision and ambition.

And so, Jack was no longer the child once showered with love and praise. His place in the family had fallen; he stood no different from any ordinary person.

Even so, Norman greeted Emily, his sister-in-law, with warmth and respect. In this vast and complicated family, he was perhaps the only one who hadn't let Samantha sway his attitude toward her. His kindness remained genuine.

After exchanging pleasantries with both Emily and Quintis, Norman's gaze finally settled on Jack. After all, Jack's tall and striking stature was hard to ignore.

Noticing Norman's questioning glance, Quintis smiled and said, "This is your nephew, Jack."

As soon as the identity was confirmed, Norman's face lit up. He stepped forward eagerly, giving Jack a long, searching look before breaking into hearty laughter.

"This is wonderful! You've really come back! I've missed you all this time!" Norman's eyes glistened as if he were just a breath away from tears. His affection was unmistakable.

Jack felt a rare flicker of emotion stir within him. He remembered Norman clearly —in a family that had often felt cold and distant, Norman had always been a rare source of warmth.

Jack flashed a rare faint smile. "Hello, Uncle Norman."

Norman nodded again and again, overcome with emotion.

"It's good you're back. That's all that matters." He paused, then added with a grin,

"Your mother told me you were the top scholar of the state in the college entrance exams. Is that true?"

Seeing Jack's nod, Norman's face broke into a proud, beaming smile.

"I wasn't sure whether to believe her at first. Now I have no doubt. The Lycan family is truly impressive!"

Chapter 765

Unlike Wilhelmina, Norman understood all too well the hardships faced by students who managed to top the state exams. It was an honor to stand out among millions of students.

Achieving such a feat wasn't just about hard work; it required excellent genes and a sharp mind.

In short, even in a family as prestigious as the Lycans, Jack's accomplishments were truly remarkable. It was something the Lycan family should be proud of.

After a brief exchange of pleasantries at the door, Norman led the group to the room where Vincent was being treated.

Vincent's ward was equipped with the highest level of care-an entire team of nurses, staff, and top-tier international doctors tending to him around the clock.

When the Lycan family entered the room, they saw Vincent lying in bed, reading the newspaper, while a young girl around Jack's age idly played on her phone.

This was his grandfather. As Jack took in the sight of the elderly man, he noted that, while Vincent's health appeared stable, he looked aged over the years. Vincent's posture had once been straight but it was now slightly hunched. His hair was also now completely white.

Time, it seemed, had been fair to everyone.

Though they hadn't seen each other in over a decade, Jack didn't feel much affection for Vincent. After all, his grandfather had failed to rein in his wife and allowed Emily to endure so much hardship and mistreatment over the years.

Seeing his grandfather again stirred no particular warmth in Jack's heart. The way Vincent had treated Jack's family all those years ago had left a shadow that time hadn't erased.

The girl about Jack's age looked trendy. Her long, wine-red hair flowed over her shoulders, and her large eyes swept curiously over Jack and his parents.

She was Jack's cousin-Greta Rabine, the daughter of Quintis' sister, Josie.

Jack remembered Greta as a bratty, snobbish, and proud child. He didn't have a fond impression of her then.

When Greta looked over at him, Jack responded with a faint smile. It was neither friendly nor distant-just polite, as if greeting someone for the first time.

Greta, however, wrinkled her nose in disdain and turned her head away. She didn't even bother to say hello.

Jack's face stayed calm, but his eyes turned cold.

Greta stood up and walked over to Vincent and said sweetly, "Grandpa, it's a little stuffy in here. Mind if I step out for a bit of fresh air?"

Vincent lowered his newspaper and said gently, "Go ahead, but don't wander too far. We'll be heading home for dinner soon."

"Okay!" Greta nodded obediently before turning to Norman, "Uncle Norman, I'l just step out for a bit."

"Don't be long," Norman replied with a nod.

Greta glanced briefly at Quintis and gave him a polite smile before walking straight past Jack and Emily and out of the ward. She acted like she didn't know them.

Her behavior was undeniably rude, but not unexpected.

Raised in an environment where subtle power plays were routine, Greta had never liked Emily and Jack.

Especially Jack. Word was that he'd grown up in the countryside. That alone was enough to deepen her disdain.

After Greta left the room, Vincent finally set down his book. His gaze slowly swept across the family-one face at a time—before finally resting on Jack.

He studied Jack intently for several long seconds. Then, with a subtle nod, he said to Quintis, "So, you've come."

There were no emotional outbursts, no tears of joy or anger.

Years of age and authority had taught Vincent to conceal everything behind a calm, unshakable façade.

Even if his heart surged with emotion, his face remained as composed as ever.

Quintis stepped forward and answered, "Yes. We heard you weren't well, so we came to see you."

Chapter 766

Vincent turned to Jack and said, "You must be Jack. Whenever your mother calls me now, every conversation eventually comes back to you."

For the first time, there was a hint of softness in his eyes-the kind a grandfather might show his grandson.

Jack met his gaze with a polite smile. "That's me."

Since Vincent had greeted him with warmth, Jack returned it with courtesy.

Emily quickly nudged him forward. "Jack, greet your grandfather."

Vincent looked at Jack, eyes filled with quiet expectation. However, Jack simply stood there, looking at the old man in silence. He didn't intend to greet Jack.

Perhaps one day, when he was ready, Jack would call this man "Grandpa". But that was not today.

Vincent's expression darkened slightly. He let out a sigh and said, "It's alright. He'll call me when he's ready. Jack, you've grown into a fine young man, taller and stronger than the others. It's a shame I wasn't there to watch you grow every year. You must've been through a lot these past years, haven't you?"

Jack shook his head. "Thank you for your concern. I've been well."

"Oh, even if you had suffered, you wouldn't admit it."

Vincent blinked a few times, and for a moment, there was a shimmer in his eyes. He had heard from Quintis that Jack had grown up in a rougher part of town. How could a child live well growing up in a place like that?

It was ultimately his parents fault for making him suffer.

Norman interrupted, "Jack, your grandfather often looks at your childhood photos. He always says he remembers how chubby you were before you left. He never imagined you'd grow up to be so tall and handsome."

But Jack's expression didn't change. He gave no response, and the silence that followed was slightly awkward.

Trying to ease the tension, Emily quickly stepped forward and placed a neatly wrapped box on the table beside Vincent.

She smiled and said, "Dad, I heard your heart's been acting up lately, so I had someone gather some special supplements that are good for cardiovascular health."

Vincent looked at the gift and praised, "You're always so thoughtful, Emily. Quintis never thinks of these things."

Everyone in the room laughed, the mood in the room suddenly lightened.

Norman added, "Dad's been talking about you all week, especially now that Jack's back. He's been thrilled. Don't rush off after this. We've prepared a family dinner back home. You should all come."

Jack looked slightly reluctant. However, Emily quickly responded, "Sure! We'd be happy to."

It was obvious that Emily still longed to be accepted by the Lycan family. Whatever bitterness she felt from the Lycans' mistreatment, she seemed ready to let it go.

Both Vincent and Norman silently acknowledged her benevolence.

Back then, neither Vincent nor Samantha, had believed Emily was a good match for Quintis. They thought she was reaching above her status-especially Samantha, who had opposed the marriage from the very start. She hadn't even shown up on their wedding day.

However, Quintis' and Emily's feelings ran deep, and he hadn't hesitated to defy the family to be with her.

Eventually, Vincent realized that his opposition had been useless.

Over the years, Emily had proved herself time and time again. No matter how badly she was treated by Vincent and Samantha, Emily endured it all in silence. Not once did she complain to Quintis.

Emily humbled herself, again and again, going out of her way to appease Vincent and Samantha, to win them over with patience instead of defiance.

Her one wish had always been to be acknowledged by Vincent and Samantha as part of the family. However, Samantha still looked down on Emily and continued to mistreat her.

Chapter 767

Vincent couldn't help but feel a deep sense of regret. Time had proven Quintis was right; Emily truly was a remarkable daughter-in-law.

Especially now, seeing Jack return home, and witnessing Emily's quiet humility, Vincent found himself ashamed of the prejudice he'd once held against her.

As the patriarch of the family, it was not in Vincent's nature to admit fault so openly even though he was apologetic to Emily. Pride and dignity restrained his words. Still, he showed a positive change in attitude toward Emily.

As the elders continued chatting, Jack grew uneasy. He had no desire to become the center of the conversation, especially when he held so little affection for most of them. So, Jack made an excuse about needing the restroom and slipped away.

The hospital was beautifully kept; it was way better than the high-end private facilities under the Quintis Sandalwood Group.

After using the restroom, Jack wandered aimlessly through the hallways. That's when he heard faint voices coming from a corner.

Jack looked over and realized Greta was speaking on the phone.

He didn't mean to eavesdrop and was just about to walk away until he heard a giggle.

"Knox, that guy's a country bumpkin. He looks clueless and totally out of place. Seriously, why did he even come back? He's been living in the countryside for years. What if he's some kind of thug? I'm not acknowledging him as my cousin. I have three cousins, and he's not one of them. How embarrassing would that be?" Whatever was said on the other end made her laugh again.

"Okay, it's settled then. We'll make sure he shows his true colors and gets kicked back to Perthter City where he belongs."

More murmurs through the phone, and Greta said enthusiastically, "Right, and when it happens, his mom'll be humiliated too—"

Jack popped up and interrupted, "Talking about me?"

Greta yelped, whirling around in shock. Her face drained of color upon seeing Jack. She stammered, red with embarrassment. "W-what's wrong with you? Why are you eavesdropping like some kind of creep?"

Knox's voice could be faintly heard asking what was going on. Greta quickly raised the phone and

explained, "I'll call you back later. That guy heard everything."

She shoved the phone into her pocket and glared at Jack. "Don't you have any manners? Have you been in the countryside so long you've forgotten how civilized people behave? Do you know how strict our family is? If Grandpa hears about this, you'll be in real trouble!"

Jack smiled faintly, pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and took a long drag. "Yeah, I might not have much class. But at least I'm not some two-faced little brat talking trash behind people's backs."

Greta's face twisted in fury. "What did you just say? You called me a brat? How dare you insult me?"

But even as she raged, she knew she was in the wrong. Still, being looked down on by someone she considered a nobody only made her angrier.

"Aren't you? You're talking behind someone's back. That's so mean of you."

Jack exhaled slowly, letting the smoke drift between them. Since she called him a

loser, he figured he might as well show her what one really looked like.

Greta glared at Jack and bellowed, "Smoking too? Trash."

And with that, she stormed off.

Jack let out a cold laugh and strolled the halls a while longer before finally returning to the room. Inside, the mood had warmed considerably.

Vincent might have known Quintis still resented him, so he had been even more attentive to Emily.

Emily was overjoyed as she responded to him patiently.

Chapter 768

Jack noticed Greta had returned. That sweet, innocent smile plastered across her face could've fooled anyone—she looked like a walking advertisement for purity. But Jack, having heard what he had, saw right through the act.

The moment he stepped back into the room, Vincent beamed and gestured toward Greta warmly.

"Jack, this is your cousin Greta. She was only three when you left. Do you remember her at all?"

Jack gave a slight nod and extended his hand. Greta hesitated, clearly reluctant, but under Vincent's watchful eyes, she forced herself to respond. Their hands barely touched before she quickly pulled away.

Neither Vincent nor Norman realized there was already a rift between the younger generation.

Vincent let out a soft sigh and said, "Emily, I deeply regret the mistakes I made in the past. If your father were here, I would offer him a formal apology myself."

Emily replied, "Sadly, my father isn't here. He's been traveling the world for some time now."

Vincent stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Your dad was free spirited, a man far ahead of his time. I didn't understand him twenty years ago, but I see how narrow my own thinking was now. I was nowhere near his level."

The usual authority in his voice was gone. It was rare for a man like Vincent, so used to being revered, to speak so humbly and admit his shortcomings. It showed how impressive Emily's father must have been.

As the sky began to dim, Norman suggested, "Dad, how about I take Quintis and his family back home? They've had a long day."

Vincent nodded. "Go ahead. Drive safely."

Due to his condition, Vincent wouldn't be attending the family dinner that evening.

With that, the group bid their farewells and left the hospital, making their way toward the family estate inside the red brick wall.

For most people, the red brick wall was shrouded in mystery and status. Jack, too, found himself filled with curiosity.

Though Jack had stepped inside behind the red wall compound as a child, those memories had long since faded into a blur.

After returning again more than a decade later, the place felt both imposing and unfamiliar.

There was no warm homecoming, no crowd gathered to greet them with open arms. The only "welcome" came from a curious pet dog, who poked its head out, barked twice, then scampered off.

Inside the courtyard, lively voices echoed. Plenty of people were chatting, laughing, clearly enjoying themselves, but none came out and received them.

People stood up when Norman walked in. After all, he held a powerful position in the family, second only to Vincent. Moreover, Norman was a regional governor with vast influence, and a future that seemed limitless.

Vincent had four children in total-three sons and one daughter. And by Jack's generation, the family had already grown sprawling, with grandchildren aplenty- some even married with kids of their own. Vincent had a four-generation household in the truest sense.

However, Jack's family received little warmth from their relatives. While they were willing to speak briefly with Quintis, they either ignored or regarded Jack and Emily with curiosity, and in some cases, even contempt and mockery.

Though Vincent had started to soften his attitude, Samantha remained unchanged.

When Quintis arrived, Samantha only spoke with him briefly in the room. A loud argument soon followed. The details were unclear, but not long after, Samantha stormed out in a huff, heading straight for the hospital to visit Vincent.

Samantha didn't even meet Jack or Emily, making it clear that they were nothing more than invisible to her.

Chapter 769

With Samantha gone, the responsibility of hosting the family banquet naturally fell on Noman.

Norman was deeply fond of Quintis and Samantha, but that didn't mean everyone else felt the same.

Quintis was the second eldest in the family. He had a younger brother, Augustine, and a younger sister, Josie.

Still, blood runs thicker than water. The family made an effort to catch up with Quintis, inviting him to sit and talk about the past few years.

The Lycan family had grown large over the years. So, the older generation had taken up all the chairs. Jack, therefore, was placed at the table with the younger generation.

That table, too, was full. Among them was Greta, who had described Jack as a country bumpkin.

Tristan wasn't present as he was currently busy taking over operations at the Quintis Sandalwood Group and usually worked in Alnewgo.

Having been away for so many years, even the cousins Jack used to play with as a child now seemed distant.

To make matters worse, Greta had stirred up the group beforehand, urging everyone to make things awkward for the country bumpkin.

So, the moment Jack sat down, the previously full table suddenly echoed with the screeching sound of chairs being dragged away.

The seats around him were quickly vacated. The others preferred squeezing in together rather than sitting next to Jack. It was as if he were a stinking fly from the countryside.

This was clearly premeditated; everyone knew who was behind it.

Norman's son, Maverick, was nearing thirty and already held the position of assistant-director level. Word had it he was about to be promoted again.

Like his father, Maverick was a source of pride for the family and had become a leading figure among the younger generation.

Maverick frowned slightly when he noticed everyone was ostracizing Jack. "What are you all doing? Jack is your cousin. Aren't you going to greet him?"

The younger ones looked at each other awkwardly, then collectively turned their eyes to another influential figure among them-Augustine's second son, Knox. He was just two days younger than Jack.

Unlike Maverick who pursued a political path, Knox had gone into business since college. Before he even graduated, he already owned a company valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars, with his own shares worth tens of millions.

Though family support undoubtedly played a role, Knox always insisted that the company had grown step by step through honest effort.

Hence, Knox and Maverick were the rising stars of the younger generation. Aside from Maverick and Tristan, Knox held the most clout.

Since Maverick was slightly older and stern, the others found it easier to gravitate toward the more easygoing Knox.

So long as Maverick wasn't angry, the younger cousins weren't particularly afraid of him.

So they all looked toward their "leader", Knox, ready to follow his lead.

Knox cast a sidelong glance at Jack, then said lazily, "Jack? I don't recall anyone by that name."

Greta chimed in with a nod, "That's right. I remember Grandma saying I only had three male cousins-there's you, Maverick, and Tristan. When did we get another one? I don't know him at all."

Maverick's expression darkened immediately. "Knox, what's wrong with you? Is that how you talk to Jack?"

But Knox didn't back down. "That is how I talk. If you don't like it, go ask Grandma. She feels the same way."

With Samantha backing him, Knox wasn't afraid of Maverick. Then, the former looked at Jack with contempt.

Samantha had always treated Jack's family with disdain-especially Emily, whom she absolutely loathed. She believed Quintis had disgraced the Lycan family by marrying her.

Moreover, Samantha was biased against Jack as she felt that after years away from the family and presumably living a rough life, he had likely picked up all kinds of bad habits and was no better than a thug.

Chapter 770

Whenever Samantha spoke about Quintis and his family in front of Knox and Maverick, the remarks were always laced with hostility.

By contrast, Samantha showed nothing but affection for Knox, Tristan, and Maverick. After all, they were seen as the most promising of the younger generation—the ones destined to uphold and expand the Lycan family legacy. The family's future rested on their shoulders.

Maverick was caught off guard by Knox's dismissive comment and was momentarily speechless. In the end, he turned to Jack with an apologetic look and said, "I'm really sorry. They are just being disrespectful." He looked genuinely remorseful.

Though Maverick was the eldest among them, there was little he could do. Since the younger ones hadn't outright insulted Jack, but had merely chosen to keep their distance, he couldn't force them to act otherwise. It was, after all, their choice.

Jack didn't hold it against Maverick. He had more or less figured out why Knox and Greta treated him with such blatant contempt.

First, Samantha had long harbored resentment toward Emily, and by extension, to her children as well.

Second, there was the ingrained class prejudice. They saw Jack, who'd grown up at the lower social class, as someone crude and lacking refinement.

Greta's tone during that phone call had already made that bias abundantly clear.

What's more, Jack had lashed out at Greta, calling her a brat and humiliated her. She now used the family banquet as an opportunity to rally others and ostracise him in return.

There was likely a fourth reason. Jack's sudden reappearance posed a direct threat to Tristan's standing within the Lycan family, which may have fueled the quiet hostility from everyone else.

Whatever the reasons, one thing was clear-Jack wasn't going to get through this family banquet peacefully.

The younger crowd at the table chatted and laughed among themselves, ignoring him completely. Every now and then, a few would shoot him glances and whisper to one another, as if he were some kind of oddity.

And maybe he was. What else would you call a guy from the lower rungs of society stepping into the heart of a powerful, prestigious family?

Still, there were two exceptions. Aside from Maverick, who occasionally asked about how Jack had been doing over the years, there was one quiet girl who seemed genuinely curious about him. She kept sneaking glances in his direction with her big, bright eyes.

Noticing she wasn't ignoring Jack, Maverick took the opportunity to introduce her. "Jack, this is my younger sister, Tatiana Lycan."

Jack vaguely remembered Tatiana. She was a few years younger than him, and when he left the family years ago, she'd still been a toddler just learning to walk. He hadn't expected her to grow up into such a graceful young woman.

Jack smiled and greeted her. "Hi."

To his surprise, Tatiana smiled back and asked, "What are you doing now? Are you still in college?"

Jack replied, "Yes. I'm studying in Alnewgo. What about you? Where are you studying?"

Tatiana responded, "I'm a freshman at The Montclair Conservatory. Why didn't you apply to a university here in the capital? The schools here are amazing, and it's closer to Grandpa."

Jack gave a faint smile and replied, "I think Alnewgo is great. It's an international city, and I really like the vibe there."

As soon as he finished speaking, Greta sneered, "Tatiana, you're way too naive. You think people from the countryside can just waltz into a top university in the capital? You're really underestimating the standards here. Even the vocational colleges in the capital require high scores!"

Around the table, several cousins and relatives snickered, as if convinced Jack couldn't even get into a two-year program, let alone a proper university.

Jack couldn't be bothered to engage. He simply picked at the dishes near him and replied, "Though the capital's great, there is no need to be arrogant."

Still, Jack was caught off guard. He hadn't expected Tatiana and Bella to be at the same school. If the opportunity came up, maybe he could ask Tatiana about her.