

Love Spell 681

Chapter 681

With her arms crossed, Sarah said with a sneer, "Assault is against the law. I should remind you that our company has a lawyer."

Sarah was frustrated by Universal Finance's recent poor performance. Kurt's confrontation gave her the perfect excuse to vent.

After all, security guards were a dime a dozen. After firing them, she could easily replace Kurt and his partner.

Kurt's eyes reddened, the veins on his neck bulging. However, he remembered what his squad leader had told him before he retired, "Remember, your skills are meant to protect the country, not to stir up trouble. Regardless of where you are, never forget your responsibility and duty to this country!"

Kurt unclenched his fists and headed toward the stairway as he slowly regained his composure.

Before he could leave, he heard Sienna scream, "Why are you still standing here, old man? Why would someone as old as you still work as a security guard? Don't you have any children to feed you?"

Sarah, who still respected the elderly, tugged at Sienna's sleeve and said, "That's enough, Enna. We should get going, too. Maybe we can meet more big shots if we arrive at the venue early."

Outside Windex Building, Carlisle called Selena to gather Sean and the others.

His luxurious Rolls-Royce attracted curious glances from almost all passers-by.

Solomon, who happened to pass by with a recruitment sign, a folding table, and a chair, greeted Carlisle.

"Good day, Mr. Zahn."

Carlisle responded with a smile.

Noticing the recruitment sign Solomon was holding, he asked curiously, "I thought HR handles recruitment. Why are you, the head of IT, out here recruiting?"

Solomon explained, "Mr. Zahn, I'm also the head of the security department. The HR department has received quite a number of applicants who falsely claim to be retired veterans. They can't tell who's genuinely a veteran, so Mr. Swanson asked me to manage the recruitment of security personnel."

Given that document verification technology was not as advanced in this era, forgeries were quite common. Not only fake veteran identities but also fake IDs could look quite genuine. Carlisle didn't dwell on the subject.

Instead, he asked, "Have you looked into Kyle?"

"Yes. Kyle holds ten percent of Wonder Corporation and some shares of its six subsidiaries. He receives about 20 million dollars in dividends yearly, and his assets have accumulated to 200 million.

"He has three girlfriends and a boyfriend, on whom he spends over 20 million annually," Solomon reported with a complicated expression, not understanding why Kyle could be in a relationship with a man.

"Boyfriend?" Wendell and Francis exclaimed, their eyes wide in disbelief.

Given that the internet was relatively new, most people were still unfamiliar with homosexuality. Carlisle also learned about it after the internet became more popular in his previous life.

Solomon continued, "From my investigation, Kyle meets up with a personal trainer every month. They were caught hugging and kissing."

"You can skip the details."

Carlisle rubbed his arms, feeling slightly queasy.

Wendell asked anxiously, "Have you shown the information to Ms. Johansen?"

"Yes. She's read through it," Solomon said, chuckling.

"She felt so uncomfortable that she lost her appetite for lunch that day."

Wendell burst into laughter. Even Francis couldn't help but chuckle in the driver's seat.

"What's so funny?" Selena asked as she emerged from the main entrance.

Wendell and the others quickly stifled their laughter.

"Nothing. I should be heading upstairs now. See you, Mr. Zahn," Solomon said before hastily exiting.

Just as he turned around, he bumped into Kurt, who was stepping out of the building. Two teenage girls were walking behind him. Solomon immediately recognized them as the chairman of Universal Finance and her close friend.

"Not bad, bro. When did you become the private bodyguard for two beautiful ladies?" Solomon teased Kurt.

With a wry smile, Kurt shook his head.

"I just got fired."

"Fired?"

Solomon was taken aback.

"What happened?"

Sienna interjected calmly, "He talked back to his boss. That's why he got fired!"

Solomon nodded with a serious expression.

"That explains it. After all, the first rule in the workplace is respecting your superior."

Sienna chuckled.

"Did you hear that? No one will side with you with that attitude of yours. So, don't act like it's our fault you're fired!"

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Kurt sighed as he headed toward the job placement services next to Windex Building, his head lowered. Solomon wanted to call out to him but dismissed the thought after quick consideration.

He agreed that Kurt shouldn't have talked back to his boss. As employees, they were expected to serve their superiors like Gods, accepting criticism even if it was unfair.

After all, not every employer was as understanding as Carlisle.

"Kurt!" Carlisle suddenly called out.

Kurt halted and looked back, wondering why Carlisle, the chairman of Aurora Holdings, would know his name.

Carlisle got out of his car, looking somewhat thrilled.

In his previous life, the sales of the advertising company where Carlisle worked skyrocketed after the smartphone's release. With money to spend, his boss had hired a personal driver- the very Kurt Watkins standing before him now.

Carlisle and Kurt got along quite well in his past life. They always enjoyed chatting with each other at company dinners. When Carlisle fell sick and was hospitalized, Kurt visited him and even gave Carlisle his savings to pay his medical bills.

Carlisle had planned to scout Kurt from that advertising company a few years later, but he hadn't anticipated running into him here instead.

"Mr. Zahn."

Kurt greeted Carlisle as he approached. Despite being only five feet tall, he was all muscle.

Carlisle smiled and asked, "Did you say you just got fired? How about coming to work for Aurora Holdings?"

"Huh?"

Kurt was stunned by the offer, not expecting a job invitation from the chairman himself. Solomon quickly chimed in, "Mr. Zahn, I tried to bring him onto the security team last week because he's a genuine veteran. Just look at the calluses on his hands. It's the sign of someone who regularly trains in boxing. I believe he can take down a group of people alone!" "Yes. That's why I invited him to join us."

Carlisle nodded in agreement.

In fact, he knew Kurt way better than Solomon did. He vividly recalled how easily Kurt had handled a few problematic employees for their boss in his previous life.

"What are you still waiting for, Kurt? Hurry up and take the offer already!" Solomon urged Kurt, who was still in a daze.

Kurt regained his composure and nodded.

"Yes. I'm more than happy to join Aurora Holdings!"

Carlisle smiled warmly.

"Great. You'll work by my side from now on!"

While most companies didn't set high requirements and salaries for security guard posts, Aurora Holdings' security team was mostly made up of retired elite members from the Dragon Special Force and Leopard Strike Team. Their role was more that of bodyguards than security guards, hence their four thousand-dollar starting salary.

While the Dragon Special Force was responsible for the company's and executives' safety, the Leopard Strike Team protected Carlisle specifically. Therefore, the starting salary for the Leopard Strike Team members was five thousand dollars.

As the leader of the Leopard Strike Team, Wendell held the manager position and received a salary of 6,500.

Francis, Carlisle's earliest recruit and personal driver, was paid eight thousand dollars. Kurt wasn't from the special forces. If he were assigned to the security department, he would receive a salary of four thousand dollars. However, Carlisle decided to keep Kurt by his side, ensuring the latter would receive a salary of five thousand instead.

Carlisle wanted to repay Kurt's kindness from before. He planned to keep Kurt by his side until he had more funds to open a security company for him.

"Aren't you a lucky one, Kurt? You just got here, yet you already get to work with Mr. Zahn!" Solomon said, staring at Kurt with envy.

"Mr. Zahn, c-can I undergo Mr. Potter's training before I start working by your side? I think I might need to fix some of my work habits!" Kurt said, scratching his head embarrassedly. After Solomon agreed that Kurt had some issues with his attitude, Kurt reflected on his earlier behavior and realized he was at fault. He understood that he shouldn't have talked back to his employer.

Sarah suddenly said, "A word of advice, Carlisle. This man has serious attitude problems. He even tried to assault us earlier. You're placing a ticking time bomb by your side!"

"Are you telling me how to do my work?"

Carlisle shot Sarah a cold look.

"I know you, Sarah. I believe you're the one who started this. Otherwise, he wouldn't have talked back."

Carlisle was well-acquainted with Kurt. He knew the latter was a headstrong and honest man who wouldn't disrespect a superior without cause.

Sarah sneered.

"Why don't you ask him what he's done?"

Irritated, Carlisle frowned and said, "Don't you have anything better to do? You've already

fired him, and he's now my personal bodyguard. If you keep badmouthing him, I might consider suing you for personal attacks."

Carlisle's defense touched Kurt. He wondered why Carlisle was so different from Sarah despite being a businessman like her.

"Sarah, let's just go. He's no longer the Carlisle we knew!" Sienna urged, tugging at Sarah's sleeve.

"So much for my kindness!" Sarah scoffed, dragging Sienna toward the parking lot.

Vincent had been waiting in the car. As soon as he saw Sarah approaching, he quickly got out to open the door for her.

"Welcome, Ms. Gates!"

The moment Sarah got into the car, she felt nauseous. Clutching her chest, she dry-heaved a few times.

"What's wrong, Sarah?" Sienna asked with concern, gently patting Sarah's back.

"I feel like I'm going to throw up," Sarah said while patting her chest.

"Is it because of the car's smell?" Sienna asked, noting the pungent odor of a mix of plastic, leather, and chemicals as soon as she entered.

"Oh, please! Why does this luxury car smell so awful?" Sarah complained, wrinkling her nose.

"I don't think it's the car. Even when I'm not in a car, I feel nauseated these days!"

Sarah leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes.

Vincent suddenly realized something.

"Ms. Gates, could it be that you're pregnant?"

Sarah's eyes flew open in panic.

"Impossible! I've only slept with Austin twice, and he told me I wouldn't get pregnant since he didn't finish inside!"

As he reversed the car, Vincent said, "As long as you didn't use protection, there's always a chance. Trust me. I've been there, so I know."

Sarah snapped, "Nonsense! I know my body! It's probably just a cold from this sudden temperature drop. Go get me some cold medicine later."

Sarah trusted Austin's words. If he said she wouldn't get pregnant because he ejaculated outside, she believed it must be true.

Vincent chuckled.

"Did your period come last month?"

Sarah was stunned into silence. She hadn't had her period the previous month. However, she had learned from older women at her office that periods can be delayed for various reasons, such as hormonal imbalances, excessive exercise, irregular eating habits, or stress. Given how busy she'd been with work and skipping breakfast to stay in shape, she believed these were likely the reasons for her delayed period.

Glancing at Sarah in the rearview mirror, Vincent said, "You should probably go to the hospital for a check-up. Something tells me you might be pregnant."

"Shut up!"

Sarah shot Vincent an angry look. If her family and friends found out she was pregnant right after starting university, she'd be buried under their judgment.

Vincent stopped talking as instructed.

Sienna, understanding Sarah's concern, cautiously tried to comfort her.

"Sarah, I honestly don't think it's such a bad thing if you're pregnant with Mr. Gust's baby. This child could be your ticket into the Gust family. Remember how royal consorts in history were always desperate to bear the king's child?"

"Just shut up!" Sarah snapped, clearly frustrated.

Sienna stuck her tongue out and fell silent.

The parking lot at Imperial Hotel was packed with luxury cars. The venue was surrounded by uniformed security personnel, highlighting the event's significance. Even Gabriel was

present to oversee things personally.

Austin stood outside with the hotel staff, greeting the invited entrepreneurs.

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Each guest was escorted upstairs by a hotel staff member.

Soon, Sarah and Sienna arrived.

"Austin!" Sarah greeted sweetly.

Austin responded with a gentle smile.

"Head on up first. I'll catch up with you after I finish here."

"Okay!"

Sarah nodded and linked arms with Sienna as they headed to the banquet hall. Meanwhile, Shein and Zachary got out of their BMW. Austin greeted Shein with a smile and a handshake. "Mr. Thompson."

"Thanks for the invitation," Shein said, his smile faint.

"The pleasure's all mine!" Austin responded, extending his hand to Zachary.

"Mr. Zachary."

Zachary ignored the greeting and walked to the car behind them to open the door. Queenie and Luna emerged from the car, both wearing thick down jackets and looking like chubby penguins.

"I-it's freezing!"

Luna shivered and clung to Queenie's arm while Queenie held Zachary's arm and pouted. "Do I really have to change into a dress? I feel so embarrassed!"

It was her first time attending such a big event, and Zachary had asked her to wear an evening gown. He even showed her photos from other business banquets, where all the women were dressed glamorously and revealingly.

Queenie didn't mind wearing such an outfit in front of Zachary, but the thought of doing so in front of strangers made her very self-conscious.

Zachary chuckled.

"You can always go for something less revealing. Like the long dress my mom wears!" Queenie sighed in relief.

"That's a relief. I'll have Josie help me pick one out later!"

Seeing that everyone had brought their partners as plus ones, Luna sighed.

"You know what, Queenie? I shouldn't have come with you. Everyone else is here in paired up but me. This is so awkward."

Zachary chuckled.

"Most of Riverland's entrepreneurs are gathered here today. Maybe one of the young entrepreneurs will be your perfect match."

Luna perked up when she heard that.

"You're right! Keep an eye out for any rich, handsome guys for me later, will you?"

The trio walked ahead, with Shein, Josie, and two bodyguards following behind.

"Whoa, a Rolls-Royce!" a young entrepreneur suddenly exclaimed, drawing everyone's attention.

"Who's the big shot inside that car?"

"Looks like it's the chairman of Aurora Holdings!"

"Aurora Holdings? Doesn't ring a bell."

"Me neither."

"You may not have heard of Aurora Holdings, but surely you've heard of Alumni Network?"

"Of course! Alumni Network has been the talk of the town lately! I even heard Hermès is looking to collaborate with them!"

"Alumni Network is one of the companies under Aurora Holdings. So is Dragonaire Studio!"

"Really? The same Dragonaire Studio that's developing Journey Games?"

"Exactly!"

Everyone gasped in disbelief upon hearing this.

Although Journey Games was still in development, it had already made waves online. Even the gaming experts in the Widetalk Community were anticipating it would become a legendary title.

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After the Rolls-Royce pulled into the parking lot, it was closely followed by a yellow Ferrari, two BMWs, two Mercedes, and a black seven-seater Honda.

As soon as the car stopped, Wendell quickly exited the passenger seat and opened the door for Carlisle. Carlisle stepped out as Selena descended from the other side on her own.

Dressed in black suits and sunglasses, Francis and Wendell walked by Carlisle's side, scanning the surroundings. The sunglasses not only shielded their eyes but also concealed their expressions, adding an air of authority and helping them blend in with the occasion.

"Oh my gosh! The boss of Aurora Holdings looks so young!"

"Is he even legally an adult?"

"He's so handsome! I've got to meet him later."

The young entrepreneurs buzzed with excitement.

Austin greeted them with a smile.

"Mr. Zahn."

"Mr. Gust."

Carlisle shook Austin's hand.

Noticing the two bodyguards behind Carlisle, Austin joked, "Your bodyguards seem to be sticking close by. Are you in some kind of trouble lately?"

"Yeah. Someone's been trying to kill me. I even wondered if you were so frustrated about not being able to acquire Alumni Network that you hired someone to take me out," Carlisle replied, grinning.

"Murder? Who in their right mind would hire killers these days?" Austin exclaimed, taken aback.

Although Austin didn't mind taking extreme measures to achieve his goals, he had never considered hiring someone to eliminate an opponent. After all, money might be able to compensate those he had wronged, but it could never bring someone back from the dead.

"Well, money is the root of all evil. With the right amount, people will always be willing to risk their lives for a job!" Carlisle responded, still smiling as he retracted his hand.

From Austin's reaction, Carlisle could tell that the former wasn't the one who hired the assassin.

"Why don't you head up to the third floor first, Mr. Zahn? I'm a bit tied up now, so I can't escort you personally," Austin said.

"Okay," Carlisle replied, leading his group toward Imperial Hotel.

Behind him, Gareth had brought Christine, Phoebe, Jenny, and Oscar along. His secretary accompanied Hank and Logan. Sean arrived with Lily and Isla, while Owen was with Laurel and Sunny. Ryan came with his secretary, Daniel, and two bodyguards for added security.

The banquet hall on the third floor was sparsely arranged and filled with over 30 round

tables. While this number might have seemed packed in an ordinary hotel, Imperial Hotel was the only five-star hotel in Riverland. Its expansive banquet hall spanned over 16,145 square feet.

The hall was luxuriously decorated, with stunning crystal chandeliers that sparkled brilliantly. Beautiful paintings adorned the walls, adding an extra touch of elegance. Hosting an event here truly made a statement of sophistication and grace.

The room greeted its guests with pleasant warmth with the heating set to a cozy 80.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

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"Dear esteemed guests, you will find the changing rooms to your right," the attendant said, smiling, at the entrance of the banquet hall.

Carlisle asked his secretaries, "Would you like to change into formal attire?"

The secretaries all nodded in agreement. Owen and Sean looked confused. They didn't even know what formal attire referred to.

Selena explained, "Changing into formal wear is more appropriate for an event like this. It showcases a professional image and reflects our company's strength and respect for the host of this charity event.

"It also enhances our communication with other business professionals, as we'll be exchanging information and understanding market trends."

Lily glanced at her down jacket and asked cautiously, "Do I need to change into formal wear, too?"

Isla smiled and said, "You're Mr. Woodsen's plus one, so it's best to change into a dress as well."

Lily felt her outfit didn't match Sean's suit and glanced at the shoulder-bearing and backless dresses in the hall, her face flushing.

"But those dresses look so revealing. The most revealing outfit I've ever worn is a knee-length dress!"

Selena chuckled.

"Wearing formal attire at important social occasions is basic etiquette. It not only shows our respect for the event but also reflects our elegance and taste.

"Furthermore, a dress can highlight your unique charm and style. If you prefer not to wear something too revealing, Ms. Donegan can help you pick a more conservative dress later." "Come on, Lily. Let's see how you look in a glamorous dress!" Sean said, dragging Lily toward the changing room.

"Mr. Zahn, I should get changed too," Selena said, subtly requesting permission from Carlisle.

"Sure. Go ahead."

Carlisle nodded in agreement.

Having absorbed a lot from Selena's explanation, Christine and Phoebe whispered to each other before heading toward the changing room.

Daniel leered at Christine's back and smirked, "Christine is going to look so stunning in a dress! My heart is already racing!"

Ryan smacked Daniel on the back of the head and scolded, "That's quite some scheming you have in your young head. If only you would put this kind of effort into your studies, I wouldn't have to worry about you constantly!"

Rubbing his head, Daniel grumbled, "You should be proud of me for thinking about the future of the Scott family at such a young age."

"Why, you little rascal!"

Ryan raised his hand, ready to give Daniel another slap.

"Hey, no hitting in the public!"

Daniel quickly fled.

As soon as Carlisle and Gareth found a table to sit at, the waiter promptly came over to serve them tea and water.

"Carlisle," Shania suddenly called out from behind.

Carlisle turned around and saw Shania, dressed in a blue-and-white long dress,

approaching with a glass of red wine. Nathan followed her in a tailcoat, along with Queenie and Luna.

Queenie wore a long dress with a nature motif, showcasing her curvy figure, while Luna wore a white evening gown with a unique neckline that slightly exposed her charming, fair collarbone. Her silky, long hair was styled in a loose updo with a few strands framing her face. A delicate hairpin completed her graceful appearance.

"Ms. Warbane, Mr. Olson," Carlisle greeted them, smiling as he rose from his seat.

He had met Nathan, a shareholder of Holly Fisheries, several times at the company. "Mr. Zahn," Nathan replied, his eyes showing admiration for Carlisle.

Holly Fisheries currently stocked 98 thousand tons of fish. Experts predicted a surge in the fish market before New Year. If they could sell the fish during the festival, they could earn at least 1.5 billion dollars in profit.

However, processing 100 thousand tons of fish in such a short time was nearly impossible. They would need to start selling before and after the festival, with a profit of 1.2 billion, almost guaranteed.

Nathan firmly believed that Carlisle had a knack for predicting the future. He even planned to consult Carlisle about his and Shania's future one day.

Shania glanced at the people seated at Carlisle's table and whispered, "Yuriel tried to ridicule you, didn't he? Yet, you played along and brought all the CEOs of Aurora Holdings' subsidiaries here!"

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"Aurora Holdings doesn't represent all of its subsidiaries. Each company is an independent entity with its own culture and spirit," Carlisle explained.

"Take Alumni Network, for example. It now has eight million registered users and owes its success to the support of college students.

"Many of these students' hometowns may be affected by the cold wave, so it is our responsibility to act and contribute to disaster relief."

In truth, he would've pushed for Alumni Network to donate even without the charity dinner. Dragonaire Studio was not yet profitable, but Alumni Network was in the spotlight. If they didn't contribute during the disaster, it would surely be used against them.

Shania was stunned but quickly raised her wine glass in appreciation.

"Well said. To social responsibility!"

Carlisle and Shania clinked glasses before taking a sip. Shania looked modest in her slit dress, but she drank boldly as she downed half a glass of red wine in one gulp. It was a shocking contrast.

As the evening continued, Carlisle got into a discussion with Shania and Nathan about Holly Fisheries. Gareth, however, kept his eyes on Luna as he sipped his wine.

He wondered why Luna was at the charity dinner. He thought her provocative outfit seemed out of place.

"Excuse me, miss... May I have the pleasure of meeting you?"

Suddenly, a handsome young man approached Luna with a glass of wine. She looked up and found him rather dashing-reminiscent of an actor.

She nodded and said, "Sure. I'm Luna Brooke, a student at Riverland University."

The young man smiled as he handed Luna a business card.

"I'm Tobias Cavill, chairman of Riverland's Cavill Limited. Here's my card."

"N-nice to meet you!"

Luna accepted the card and then turned to Queenie.

"Queenie, have you heard of Cavill Limited?"

"Zachary mentioned it before. It's a company that makes single-player games. They were responsible for titles like 'Martial Heroes' and 'Golden Legends'. You played those games with me at the internet cafe, remember?"

Queenie then raised her glass at Tobias.

"Mr. Cavill is quite impressive. With just those two games, he captured the hearts of many fans and earned a billion in just four years."

"The journey has been full of hardships."

Tobias clinked glasses with Queenie, a hint of melancholy in his eyes. Luna smiled.

"There are bound to be hardships in business, but at least you succeeded. Many entrepreneurs work hard for years and still fail!"

"You're right," he agreed.

"Becoming your friend seems like the right choice."

"O-oh? We're friends already?" Luna stammered.

Tobias teased, "Am I unworthy of your friendship?"

"No, no. That's not what I meant."

"Of course you aren't."

Just then, a deep voice came from behind Luna. She turned around to meet Gareth's eyes. Luna felt a shiver run down her spine.

"Mr. Spencer..."

Gareth walked up to Luna, his eyes fixed on Tobias.

"Do you really think you're impressive just because you have some money?"

Tobias raised an eyebrow and replied calmly, "In 2003, I was named one of Riverland's top ten outstanding youths. Isn't that impressive enough?"

"And what about 2004?"

Gareth smirked. He had been in Yorksle's Top Ten Outstanding Youth for three years in a row without bragging about it, so he didn't understand why Tobias was so full of himself. "In 2004, I was listed as the 15th richest youth in Riverland!" Tobias said confidently.

"You still haven't told me who you are."

"And I never will," Gareth said flatly, then dragged Luna back to his table.

Tobias's eyes darkened.

"Do you know him?"

"Yeah..."

"Who is he?"

"He's with Aurora Holdings."

Queenie didn't mention Gareth's true identity. After all, Gareth's Scarlet Corporation had collapsed, and bringing that up would only give Tobias more ammunition for his ridicule. Moreover, Queenie was reluctant to reveal Gareth's other role.

"So this is how Aurora Holdings treats its people?" Tobias scoffed before turning on his heel and walking away.

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Just a moment ago, a group of friends were discussing Aurora Holdings and Alumni Network. With eight million users, Alumni Network had immense potential and could very well become a leading internet company like Penguin Group.

Crossing Aurora Holdings would be like asking for trouble.

Gareth pulled Luna into a corner, his gaze dark and intense.

"Mr. Spencer... What's this about?" Luna asked, obviously irritated.

She was simply trying to make a friend. He didn't have the right to interfere, nor could he tell her who she could interact with.

Gareth spoke flatly, "That guy is up to no good. Stay away from him."

"And how do you know that?" Luna demanded.

"A man's sixth sense..."

"You're crazy!" Luna snapped before turning to leave.

Gareth grabbed her arm and pulled her back, pinning her against the wall. Luna winced as her back hit the wall. Her eyebrows furrowed, and her eyes misted over with tears.

Gareth tilted her chin with his hand, a smirk playing on his lips.

"Luna, are you playing hard to get?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Luna bit her lip and turned her head away.

"Oh? A psychologist who doesn't understand what I'm saying?" Gareth asked, forcing her to look at him.

Luna brushed his hand away.

"Mr. Spencer, please behave."

Just then, a janitor cleared his throat. Luna blushed and quickly stepped away while Gareth inspected his fingertips with a hint of mischief in his eyes.

Meanwhile, at Carlisle's end, Shania and Nathan had moved on to mingle with the other guests. Selena and the others had changed into their evening gowns. Owen and Daniel kept their heads down, afraid to look too much. Even Carlisle could feel his face warming up.

Some of the female employees had dressed provocatively at previous company events, but their style and grace were nothing compared to those of the three secretaries. Selena, Isla, and Laurel had become the epitome of high-society elegance.

Selena wore a tasteful white floor-length gown with a slit down the left side, revealing her legs with every step. Meanwhile, Isla wore a fiery red gown cinched with a red belt that exuded confidence and allure. Laurel's black gown with gold accents was a bold choice that she wore effortlessly. Her commanding presence perfectly complemented the high-class look.

Laurel sat next to Owen, who couldn't help but steal a glance at her. He swallowed nervously. Carlisle took a sip from his wine glass and then checked his phone. It was already 7:10 pm.

Most of the media reporters had arrived, but the governor was still missing, which meant the event would probably be delayed.

He scanned the room for the familiar face of his former boss and soon spotted him at the back of the room, chatting animatedly with an old acquaintance.

Carlisle's lips curved into a smile. He took his glass and walked over. "Ms. Johansen, please come with me."

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Selena followed Carlisle with a glass of wine in her hand. The sight of her back was so captivating that Wendell couldn't tear his eyes away.

Francis nudged Wendell with his elbow.

"Wendell, you should go protect the boss..."

"I'm not up to it... You go," Wendell protested, shaking his head vigorously.

Wendell -feeling overwhelmed by Selena's elegance in her dress-thought of himself as nothing more than a country bumpkin. He felt unworthy of someone so perfect.

"You coward... If you're too scared, I'll do it," Francis said as he started to get up.

Wendell pushed him back to his seat.

"No way. Sit down!"

Wendell believed that Selena was beyond anyone's reach, including his own and Francis'.

"Don't forget. There's a hitman after the boss."

Francis pushed Wendell away and stood up, but Wendell pushed him back into his seat.

"Sit down. I'll protect the boss!"

Wendell ran off.

"He's simply chasing rainbows," Oscar commented, taking a sip from his highball glass. Francis grinned.

"At least he has ambition. What about you?"

"I'm not interested in women!"

"Wait, are you interested in men?"

Francis had recently learned that men could be romantically interested in each other and wondered if Oscar was like that.

"Get lost."

"How much are you planning on donating, Bob?"

"Well, I can only manage about two to three hundred thousand with my small business," Bob said, holding his cigar.

He felt slightly down in the dumps. Even though his hotel and electronics factory only made a profit of about 300 thousand last year, he had been invited to the charity event.

Still, the personal invitation of the wealthiest man in Riverland and the governor's presence made it worthwhile to donate 30 thousand just to gain some visibility among the big players. Bob took a puff from his cigar and asked Jordan Holman, "Mr. Holman, how much are you planning to donate? With a well-known company like yours, you should be giving a million dollars or so, right?"

"Bob, you're overestimating me. I only made about 600 thousand last year, and with some

long-time clients not renewing their contracts, it's even tougher this year."

Jordan sighed as he sipped his glass of white wine.

His company, Creative Advertising, was a leading player in Riverland's advertising industry. It offered advertising planning, design, production, and media promotion services and was Sean's go-to company for outsourced advertising.

"600 thousand is still a lot. It would take me years to make that much. To be honest, money isn't everything. As long as I make enough to get by, that's good enough.

"Look at me. I leave the management of my hotel and company to professionals. I don't expect them to make me a fortune. They just need to keep me from losing money," Bob said contentedly.

"I've never aimed for billions. I just want to stay in my small town, keep my family safe and healthy, and live without worry."

"Bob, your attitude is refreshing. If I had half your attitude, I wouldn't be dumping my problems on you!"

Jordan forced a smile. Bob chuckled heartily.

"Life is short. Enjoy it while you can. Don't wait until you're old to realize it. It might be too late by then."

Just as he finished speaking, a familiar youthful voice called out, "Mr. York... Long time no see!"

Carlisle approached Bob with a beaming smile. He glanced at Jordan, who looked visibly distressed. Jordan's somber expression only widened Carlisle's smile.

In his previous life, Carlisle had joined Creative Advertising through an old friend of Hilda's who worked in business development.

The company was notoriously exploitative. Jordan squeezed his employees dry, failing to provide basic benefits such as social security and insurance, and often promised enormous rewards for free overtime. He even withheld commissions from the sales team.

All of those factors contributed to Creative Advertising's declining performance. Despite those problems, the business department managed to secure the company's future. Carlisle and his colleagues won several major international advertising contracts for Creative Advertising. With the rise of smartphones and the digital age, Creative Advertising capitalized on these trends to become a multi-billion dollar company.

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Later, Carlisle ended up in the hospital due to organ failure from extreme dieting. Jordan gave Carlisle ten thousand dollars to help him recover. However, Carlisle received a termination letter from their HR team the following day.

"Carlisle?"

Bob took a drag from his cigar and looked Carlisle up and down. He noticed his smart clothes and the impressive bodyguard accompanying him. He raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"It looks like you've made it big."

Carlisle raised his wine glass, smiling.

"Yes, I've done quite well for myself."

"So you're Carlisle of Aurora Holdings?"

Jordan's face twitched in disbelief.

"Aurora Holdings?"

Bob's hand shook as he processed the news. His eyes widened in shock.

"The company behind Alumni Network?"

"That's right."

Impressed by Carlisle's performance, he immediately raised his glass.

"Mr. Zahn, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Jordan Holman, founder and CEO of Creative Advertising."

Seeing Jordan stand up to toast Carlisle, Bob quickly snuffed out his cigar and stood up with his wine glass in hand.

"Mr. Zahn, I was unaware of your association with Aurora Holdings. I apologize if I've been disrespectful. Please allow me to make amends."

He then downed the rest of his wine in one gulp. Bob was always careful in his dealings. He knew a few unsavory characters back in Dragonville, but none of them caught his eye. Riverland, however, was another entirely different matter. Here, even a small-time businessman could have significant power.

Bob wasn't fully aware of the extent of Aurora Holdings' influence, but he knew that Alumni Network, with its reputation and eight million registered users, was a significant player in the industry.

In fact, with such a large user base, Alumni Network was one of the top ten internet companies in the country. The chairman of such a prominent company was not someone he could afford to offend.

In this context, Bob understood the importance of being tactful.

"Mr. York, there's no need for such formalities. Let's just sit down and talk," Carlisle said, pulling up a chair.

Jordan then turned to Selena and smiled.

"Mr. Zahn, who are these two?"

Selena replied warmly, "Mr. Holman, I'm Selena Johansen, Mr. Zahn's secretary. And this is his bodyguard."

"Mr. Zahn, you have an eye for talent. Your secretary and bodyguard stand out. They must be top performers in their field, I assume?"

Jordan was eager to win him over.

Carlisle ignored Jordan's question and focused solely on Bob.

"Mr. York, how's your company been doing lately?"

Caught off guard, Bob stammered, "I-it's doing okay."

Jordan asked Carlisle a question, but Carlisle ignored the former. Bob wondered if something had happened between them. He looked at Jordan, growing irritated. "Mr. Zahn, isn't it rude to ignore the person you're talking to?"