

Faux Vows True Desires Chapter 21 - 30

Chapter 21

Now, Lucinda had a lot of money and also won over a lot of readers, who've showered her with gifts. So her income next month would surprise her.

Lucinda said to Stefan, all generous-like, "Stefan, I've decided to give you a bit of a bonus. When I get all this cash from the readers next month, I'll give you a bonus, get you some new threads, a bed, some good grub. Then, I'll rent a bigger place, one room each, so even if we're not playing house anymore, we can still be roomies."

Stefan's eyes were all mysterious, which Lucinda had gotten used to. He said, "Cool, I'll look forward to the bonus, and the new clothes."

They're not playing house anymore?

She thought she could just marry him and then leave him?

Dream on!

But Stefan wouldn't say that, of course.

That night, Lucinda was all smiles, even in her dreams.

No, she thought she was dreaming, that's why so many readers were tipping her.

When she woke up, the first thing she did was to log onto the website, open her own article, and found out that the number on the gift leaderboard had increased from the night before. But it wasn't skyrocketing like before, so it didn't give her such a shock.

She nibbled her finger gently.

She could feel the pain.

"Turns out I'm not dreaming, I really did struck gold!"

In no time, her article dominated all the gift leaderboards on the website.

By then, Stefan had prepared breakfast.

When he saw Lucinda came out, he took off his apron and greeted her, “Honey, breakfast is ready, all your favourite foods.”

“Stefan, stop calling me like that. My parents aren’t here now, we don’t need to put on a show.”

Lucinda went over to check out the breakfast Stefan had made. There was a variety of food, all stuff she liked.

Just by going home to meet his parents once, Stefan had already figured out her preferences.

He really was a considerate and caring guy.

She took a bite of the sandwich.

“Are the veggies fresh?”

Lucinda ran a coffee shop, so she knew about food. She could taste the freshness of the ingredients.

“Yes, they’re fresh. I bought them from the market this morning.”

“Stefan, did you get up early?”

Thinking about how she had made him sleep on the living room floor last night, Lucinda said apologetically, “Stefan, I’ll buy you a bed today.”

She could borrow some money from her brother for now and then pay him back next month. After all, she was rich!

She could even pay off all her debts with the tip money.

“I just woke up naturally. If you’re short on cash, don’t rush to buy a bed. It’s hot now anyway, sleeping on the floor is pretty cool.”

Lucinda nodded, “It is pretty cool.”

But she still needed to buy a bed.

After breakfast, Lucinda wasn't in a hurry to open the shop. Her coffee shop usually didn't open until 9 am.

Stefan had an important meeting in the morning. It was a meeting that he had postponed yesterday in order to get the certificate with Lucinda, but he couldn't postpone it again today.

Even though he was reluctant to leave her, he still left for work under Lucinda's watchful eyes.

Ascend Global was the largest corporate group in Pinehurst, with a wide range of industries. As long as the industry was profitable, Ascend Global would be involved. Even if the industries it invested in might initially make a loss, they would eventually turn a profit.

This was thanks to the leadership of Ascend Global, their management methods were very effective.

The 88-story office building stood in the bustling commercial center of Pinehurst.

As a leader of Ascend Global, everyone was surprised when Stefan from the Anderson family showed up at the company on a bicycle.

Stefan was in a good mood, smiling, and even humming a song. He completely ignored everyone's surprised looks, and rode his bicycle into the company.

"Is that Mr. Coleman?"

"Is something wrong with my eyes?" "Oh my God! Mr. Coleman is cycling to work? Is the traffic in Pinehurst really that bad?"

Traffic jams often occurred here during peak hours.

During traffic jams, cyclists and electric vehicle riders became the envy of car drivers.

No matter how expensive your car was, when in a traffic jam, it was not as good as a bicycle!

"I've decided, I'm going to cycle to work tomorrow, it'll also help me keep fit and lose weight."

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7 don't have a bicycle.”

“Go buy one!”

After all, even Mr. Coleman was cycling to work.

On the other hand, Stefan had no idea that his decision to cycle to work, in order to keep up his poor image in front of Lucinda, would spark a cycling trend among Ascend Global employees.

Back in his office, Stefan's expression became serious and cold.

Edgar knocked and came in.

He was Stefan's chief assistant and also his friend.

“There really is a difference between married and unmarried people.”

Edgar came over with the documents, put them on Stefan's desk, and joked, “Mr. Coleman, what's it like dating a female writer?”

Stefan looked at the documents and answered calmly, “You should try it yourself, instead of asking me.”

Edgar laughed, “I don't know any writers. Why don't you have the first lady introduce me to one?”

“Ascend Global has a subsidiary that specializes in online literature, go find the person in charge of that department, and ask him to introduce you to a young female writer, he'll be more than happy to help you.”

The person in charge of the subsidiary, whenever he came to the headquarters and saw Edgar, the chief assistant, would always try to please him as much as possible.

But Edgar was very loyal to Stefan and was also very fair in his work, so no one could bribe him.

Edgar laughed, “Never mind, someone like me shouldn't disturb those cultured people.””

“How come you suddenly got married? And you won’t let us announce it publicly, is this a secret marriage?”

Considering the many women who were openly or secretly pursuing Stefan, Edgar seemed to understand why Stefan chose to get married in secret.

He’s probably worried about those annoying women bothering his *author* wife.

“You’re awfully chatty today.”

Stefan finished reading the documents, signed them, stamped them, and then handed them over to Edgar, “Off you go, I’ve got a meeting.”

Edgar took the documents, checked they were all good, and said with a grin, “You’re really protective of your wife, huh? You won’t even let me ask about her. You’ve

I’ve

got time on my hands!” got a meeting, well, I’ve got one too. You make it sound like

As Stefan’s chief assistant, if Stefan was busy, Edgar was equally swamped.

Sure, a lot of people were green with envy over the deep trust Stefan had in him and the hefty paycheque he got. His annual wage was even more than some middle-sized company bosses. But they didn’t know that all of this came from hard graft and constant work.

Edgar was a year younger than Stefan. The year he graduated, he was brought over to Ascend Global by Stefan, a fellow alumnus, and gradually climbed up to the lofty position of chief assistant.

Nowadays, he’s very busy, still single at 28, watching his boss walk down the aisle.

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7 worked hard to marry her Who else would I spod if not her?”

Stefan’s words had Edgar staring at him

Edgar stood up, leaning on the table with his hands, leaning forward slightly, and said with a grin, Mr Coleman, Stefan, we're not just boss and employee, we're friends, and old schoolmates. You were the one who strongly recommended me to join Ascend Global I've worked here for several years, and there are many people willing to offer me higher pay to headhunt me, even your competitor Owen has approached me multiple times. Yet, look at me, still faithfully working for you You can't keep things from me, right? Is your wife that woman you love? The one you had a crush on for many years and finally won her over? Is it that girl named Ruby?"

Edgar had heard about Stefan and Ruby's story.

Other than Ruby, he couldn't think of any other woman.

His boss was a cold man, never involved with any woman in any scandal.

Ascend Global's entertainment company has signed many celebrities and models, anyone who has met Stefan would fall for him, of course, it could be because of his status and wealth.

But besides all that, Stefan himself was quite remarkable.

In the past, some tried to create scandals, hoping to hype things up using Stefan, but that once famous actress was now forgotten, fallen from grace to working at a supermarket.

So, besides those wealthy young ladies, stars, and models, no one else dared to have any ideas about him, afraid of ruining their own careers.

Stefan stood up, pushed Edgar away, and walked around the desk.

"Edgar, remember, my wife is Lucinda Moore."

Lucinda?

Edgar immediately recalled the rich young ladies of Pinehurst, but couldn't remember the Moore family.

Which family's rich daughter was this Lucinda?

Edgar's curiosity was piqued.

He picked up the file, quickly catching up to Stefan's pace, curiously asked, "Stefan, what does your wife's family do? How did you meet? Did you get married right after you met?"

Edgar never thought Stefan would have a shotgun wedding.

If it wasn't for Stefan's social media update last night, Edgar wouldn't have known his boss was already married.

Oh right, the Lady Boss was also a writer.

"Let me tell you, my wife can only be Lucinda. Besides her, no other woman could possibly be the Lady Boss. Don't lump me together with Ruby or anyone else, to prevent my wife from misunderstanding that I'm cheating."

Edgar was helpless.

"Meeting!"

Stefan's tone was very serious.

Edgar knew he couldn't ask anymore.

"Okay."

Iris walked over, following behind Stefan and Edgar, heading towards the conference room.

This meeting was held on the 86th floor's conference room.

At this moment, all the senior management staff had arrived early, waiting for their CEO, Stefan.

In front of Lucinda, Stefan usually appeared elegant and kind, a perfect gentleman.

However, in the company, his image was cold and ruthless.

Other than Edgar, this chief assistant, who dared to be a little more frivolous in front of Stefan, no one else dared to act rashly.

“Boss.”

Iris pushed open the door of the conference room, behind her, Stefan and Edgar entered one after another.

All the senior management staff present stood up, unanimously calling out “Boss“.

Stefan acknowledged, signaling everyone to sit down.

He walked to his seat, pulled the chair, just about to sit down, his phone rang.

His eyebrows furrowed.

During meetings, Stefan didn't like to answer calls, and didn't allow others to answer calls, so everyone would mute their phones when entering the conference room.

Stefan took out his phone, intending to hang up the call, but seeing that it was Lucinda calling, he immediately answered the call.

“Lucy.”

Not only did Stefan answer the call, but his tone was also gentle, that “Lucy” surprised everyone present.

Their CEO actually used such a gentle tone to call a woman’s name.

Stefan usually used two phones, one for contacting senior management and partners, and the other for contacting friends and family.

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So, even though he posted an update on social media, the senior management of the company didn’t know their CEO was already named.

Even though Edgar already knew the side story, he was still startled by Stefani’s gentleness.

He even doubted if the Stefan in front of him was real.

“Stefan, are you busy?” Lucinda asked with a laugh.

Hearing her laughter, Stefani’s expression softened even more.

Everyone present remembered a woman named Lucy, she was the apple of their CEO’s eye, someone they needed to respect.

They absolutely couldn’t offend this woman named Lucy.

However, it appeared that no one named Lucy had ever come looking for their CEO.

I'm not busy, what's up? Do you need my help?"

Despite the fact that he was about to start a meeting, he was obviously very busy, but he said he wasn't

Edgar silently complained in his heart. Indeed, a man in love can't be seen as normal.

"No need for you to come over, I'm in a furniture store now, helping you pick a bed. I'll send you some pictures, you tell me which one you like, and I'll buy it."

There weren't many people in the store in the morning, and there were two sales assistants, Lucinda simply borrowed two thousand dollars from her brother. The gifts and tips she received, even after splitting it with the website and deducting taxes, she still had several tens of thousands of dollars on hand. Even though the money hasn't arrived yet, Lucinda was already very happy, borrowing two thousand dollars from her brother to take care of her husband.

"Okay, send me the pictures of the beds you like."

Even though he said so, he felt regretful in his heart. The chance to mooch off her bed was getting lesser and lesser.

And it was all his own doing.

"Okay, then I won't disturb you. I'll send you the pictures later. What time are you finishing work at noon? I can come pick you up and treat you to a meal. We can also stroll around the pedestrian street, I'll buy some clothes for you."

She would definitely fulfill the conditions she had promised

After all, the peace she could enjoy now was all thanks to Stefan's help.

Without him, she'd probably still be dealing with her mom's daily naggings about marriage, hell, she'd even be too chicken to go home.

Hearing this, a grin spread across Stefan's face, "I don't knock off till noon. It's gonna be blazing hot by then, no need for you to come. I'm afraid you'll get sunburned. Just wait for me in the shop"

Lucinda chuckled, "Alright, I'll wait for you in the shop"

Before hanging up, Lucinda added, "Stefan, you're seriously thoughtful."

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Stefan unwillingly slapped his phone onto the table.

As he lifted his gaze, all the senior executives of the room were silently watching him.

Lucinda quickly sent the pictures to his phone.

After carefully selecting for a while, Stefan picked out a bed and replied to Lucinda. Only then did he calmly address everyone, "Let's get this meeting started!"

His face was serious, his voice deep and cold. This was the Mr. Coleman they were familiar with.

The Mr. Coleman just now was really scary.

Had they not seen it for themselves, they would have never believed that Mr. Coleman could be so gentle towards a woman.

Meanwhile, at Ascend Estate, an unexpected guest arrived – Ruby.

Before her arrival, Ruby had called Savannah Blue Anderson, who was Stefan's grandmother.

In Ascend Estate, Stefan was the one in charge, but Savannah's status was higher than Stefan. Her favorite was her grandson Stefan, and Stefan was very filial to his grandmother. Their relationship was very close.

Ruby wanted to pursue Stefan again, but she needed someone to help her.

Savannah was the helper Ruby had chosen.

As long as Savannah was willing to help her, she believed that one day, she could make Stefan fall in love with her and want to marry her.

After all, they grew up together and liked each other.

In the past, she was too young and naive. After being rejected by Stefan, she went abroad out of embarrassment, wasting ten years of her life.

Now, Ruby regretted it very much.

She

thought that if she knew to be close to his family, she might have been his wife by now, and perhaps they might even have had a child.

In the garden, Savannah was wielding a pair of large scissors, trimming the branches in the flower bed.

Not far away, her

Amald led

Husband Patrick Anderson was crouching in the flower bed, loosening the soil and fertilizing the flowers.

over.

“Sir, ma’am, Ms. Scott is here.”

Savannah looked at Ruby and smiled, “Ruby, it’s been a while You’re still as beautiful and charming as ever, even more mature and capable than the last time you came back. It seems you’ve been doing well these past years.

Ruby came over, naturally took the watering can from Savannah’s hand, and took over watering the plants.

She laughed and said, “You haven’t changed a bit either. Life abroad is stressful, but I have to work hard, right?”

Ruby was successful in her career. She was in the fashion industry, and her designs were selling like hot cakes.

She worked so hard because wanted to be worthy of Stefan.

Stefan was the CEO of Ascend Global. If she didn’t have the ability, she couldn’t help Stefan in his business.

She wanted to be Stefan’s woman and also wanted to fight alongside Stefan.

This required a lot of

from her.

Ruby turned to the old man tending to the soil and greeted, “Patrick.”

Patrick seemed not to hear, still focused on his task.

“Ruby, Patrick’s getting on in years, his hearing’s not what it used to be. You have to speak up for him to hear.”

Ruby quickly said, “I bought Patrick a hearing aid.”

“He doesn’t like wearing that device, and we have a lot of children at home, he doesn’t need it.”

They had five sons and one daughter.

The five sons gave them ten grandsons. Their daughter who married into another family also gave birth to a son, but no daughters.

Maybe because they lacked granddaughters, Savannah adored young girls. She had always liked Ruby since Ruby was young and treated her like her own granddaughter.

“But, if it’s from you, he might wear it.”

Savannah changed the subject and said with a smile, “You can give it a try.”

“My dear, are you gossiping about me with Ruby again?”

Patrick straightened up after tidying up the garden, mumbling to himself, “I’m getting old, my back hurts after squatting for a while.”

“Patrick, we have gardeners at home, you and Savannah don’t need to do this yourself.”

“I’m just idle, taking care of the flowers kills the time and is also a pleasure. Savannah and I both love gardening.”

“Ruby, when did you get back?”

“I just got back. As soon as I finished unpacking, I came right over to see you and Savannah.”

After watering the flowers, Ruby put the watering can back in its place.

She came back, wanted to support Savannah, but was rejected.

“I’m not so old that I need someone to support me when I walk.”

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Savannah said spiritedly, “If Stefan could give me a great–grandchild, I could even help take care of the baby.”

The old couple were both seventy–nine this year, and next year they could celebrate their eightieth birthday.

Ruby’s eyes sparkled, and she still supported Savannah, the two of them going into the house together.

The old man didn’t follow them in, but continued to busy himself in the garden, enjoying the pleasure of gardening.

“Savannah, does Stefan not have a girlfriend yet?” Ruby gently asked.

They sat down in front of the sofa. A servant quietly served tea and snacks.

Savannah looked at Ruby and laughed, “Stefan doesn’t have a girlfriend, you know.

Ruby blushed slightly.

“Savannah...”

“What’s there to be shy about? Everyone knows that you and Stefan grew up together. If you hadn’t gone abroad for further studies and to develop your career, maybe your kids would be running around by now.”

Ruby blushed even more, but Savannah’s words gave her a sense of reassurance.

So everyone considered her and Stefan a couple.

Only Owen knew that Stefan didn’t like her.

“Ruby, how long do you plan to stay this time before leaving?”

“Savannah, I’m not planning to leave this time, I’ve transferred my work back home. I’ve been drifting abroad for ten years, it’s better to be home.”

Savannah said with a smile, “They say home is where the heart is, no matter how good it is outside, it’s not your real home. How nice it is to return to your own home.”

In Savannah’s view, staying within the country is just as good as going abroad.

No matter what, the Anderson family would never choose to immigrate.

The Anderson family has this ancient rule, if any of the descendants choose to immigrate, they would no longer be entitled to the Anderson family’s inheritance.

That’s all money!

“Who doesn’t love money? And who would complain about having too much of it?”

“Savannah was right. I feel the same way, that’s why I came back.”

Savannah nodded, “Does Stefan know you’re back? He’d be thrilled if he knew.”

Ruby’s smile was a bit stiff.

Stefan still hasn’t responded to her messages.

He couldn’t have possibly missed her messages, if he hadn’t replied, there was only one possibility – he didn’t want to deal with her.

Ruby told a little white lie, “I haven’t told Stefan yet, I wanted to surprise him.”

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Savannah burst into laughter, “You young people always love to spring surprises.”

She then asked with concern, “Are you staying at your place?”

Ruby hesitated before she answered, “I planned to stay at my place, but nobody’s home most of the time and the house is getting a bit old. I want to renovate it. It’s not so convenient staying in a hotel all the time, so I was thinking...”

Savannah chuckled and watched her without interrupting.

“Savannah, could I stay at your place temporarily? I’ll move back once the renovation is done. I’ll pay the rent.”

“Why should you pay rent? This isn’t a hostel, Savannah refused the rent but didn’t give Ruby a straight answer. “Ruby, I’m old and retired. I don’t bother with company or household matters anymore, it’s all Stefan’s job now. He’s the decision maker at home.”

“You need to negotiate with Stefan if you want to stay at our place. If he agrees, you’re welcome to move in anytime. Patrick and I would be delighted to have you.”

Ruby was taken aback, she didn’t expect Savannah to say that.

Go to Stefan?

Ruby knew very well that Stefan would never let her stay at the Anderson Manor. Despite the numerous guest rooms, he still held a grudge against her due to past incidents. It would be difficult for her to move in.

“I’ll go surprise Stefan at his office later.”

Besides herself, Stefan and Owen, Ruby hadn’t let anyone else know about her real relationship with Stefan.

Let everyone believe she’s the girl Stefan has liked since childhood.

Savannah agreed.

After a bit more chatting with Savannah, Ruby made an excuse and left the Ascend Estate.

An hour later.

Ascend Glóbal.

Stefan and Edgar talked about work as they walked from a meeting. Edgar nodded from time to time, occasionally offering his opinion.

“Stefan.”

A voice that was both strange and familiar rang out.

The voice was delicate, if it wasn't so crisp, Stefan might not have noticed someone was calling him.

He stopped in his tracks to see Ruby clutching a limited-edition luxury handbag, carrying two bags. As he looked at her, she came over with a sweet smile.

Edgar felt like whistling, but he dared not. He feared if he did whistle, there would be trouble.

“Stefan, are you busy?”

Ruby asked with a smile, glancing at Edgar.

Edgar got the hint. Did she think he was intruding?

“Mr. Coleman, I'll get back to work.”

After Edgar left, Stefan asked dryly, “What is it?”

Ruby felt a pang in her heart.

She looked at Stefan's still handsome face. In fact, she had thought about giving up on him. But this man was too exceptional, she just couldn't let him go.

If she couldn't let go, then she would fight for him.

“Can't I come see you?”

Stefan turned and headed for his office.

When he passed Iris, he shot her a glare.

Ms. Scott always visited Mr. Coleman when she returned home every year. Everyone said she was his childhood sweetheart and that he had stayed single waiting for her to settle down in the country.

So, when Ms. Scott showed up this time, Iris didn't stop her.

And now, trouble.

Mr. Coleman was angry.

Ruby bit her lip. Stefan's attitude made her want to turn and leave. She had her pride too.

In fact, if she was willing, Owen would marry her instantly.

In the end, Ruby followed Stefan.

Stefan's face was grim.

Anyone looking at him now would know he was angry and that he detested this woman.

Sitting down at his desk, Stefan didn't look at Ruby, he just busied himself with his work.

Ruby poured herself a glass of water and one for Stefan too.

She put the two bags she was holding on the desk, then sat across from Stefan.

"Stefan, do you dislike me that much? I've been away for some time."

Ruby sighed as she looked at him.

"Even if you don't love me, we grew up together. There's friendship if not love. After not seeing each other for so long, you don't have to treat me like this!"

Ever since her failed attempt to seduce him into bed, he had never looked at her kindly.

Everyone thought they were a couple because she kept up the facade, making everyone believe that Stefan was staying single to wait for her to settle down.

Stefan didn't look up, he said coolly, "If there's something, say it. If not, the door's over there, please."

Ruby was lost for words.

His attitude towards her was getting worse.

This meant her actions were becoming more and more disgusting.

Looking at his handsome face, Ruby swallowed her anger.

"Stefan, I'm not leaving this time."

"What's that got to do with me?"

Where she wanted to go or whether she wanted to return was none of his business.

Ruby was silent for a moment before saying, "I'm planning to renovate my house. It was built twenty years ago, it's too old and needs renovation."

"No money? I don't have any to lend."

Ruby was once again at a loss for words.

He had no money? Nobody would believe that!

As the CEO of Ascend Global, he was the richest.

"I didn't plan on borrowing money from you for the renovation!"

"Even if you wanted to, I couldn't lend it."

He now had a family. If she wanted to borrow money, she had to get his wife's approval first.

Ruby was so furious with Stefan she wanted to explode.

She held her tongue for a bit, then finally got it all out, "Look, I'm not short of cash, alright? I got a pretty good job, and I'm earning more than I can spend. What I'm saying is, my house is being renovated and I got no place to stay, so I thought I could crash at the Ascend Estate. Savannah told me to run it by you, said you're the boss around here."

And then, she added, "I'll pay rent, of course."

"Sorry, but the Ascend Estate isn't up for rent, and we don't need your money. There are plenty of hotels out there, loads of five-star ones too, you're free to take your pick. If you're not a fan of hotels, the Martinez family is more than willing to put you up."

"I can't really stay with the Martinez family."

"So you're cool with staying at my place then? Maybe you're cool, but I'm definitely not."

He's a married man now, and if his wife finds out that Ruby's crashing at their place, he'd be in a whole heap of trouble.

Ruby took a few deep breaths, but she didn't blow her top. She found that when dealing with Stefan, she could become very calm, very quickly.

"Stefan, I got you a tie and a watch."

Ruby picked up two bags and handed them over to Stefan.

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“I received your kindness.” Stefan didn’t take the two bags, he said simply, “But I ain’t short on ties and watches.”

He never overlooked his needs.

He had so many ties at home that he couldn’t even keep track.

As for watches, he only had two hands, how many could he wear?

But, he couldn’t accept gifts from any woman other than Lucinda.

“Ruby, I’m busy right now.”

Stefan’s words were like shooing her away.

Ruby’s face changed, she hurriedly picked up the two bags, picked up her limited edition designer bag, held her head high, strutted away in her high heels.

Even if Stefan didn’t accept her gifts, there were plenty of people who would love to have them.

Ruby stormed out of Ascend Global and saw Lucinda at the entrance. These two strangers couldn’t help but size each other up.

She’s such a beauty. Ruby complimented Lucinda in her mind.

But Lucinda thought Ruby’s makeup was too thick to not look good.

She usually wore light makeup, most of the time no makeup.

She’s young, with tender skin, even without makeup, she looked better than those with makeup.

Since she was a child, people had said that her beauty didn’t resemble the Moore family.

The Moore family wasn’t ugly, but they couldn’t be said to be very attractive. In short, Lucinda’s beauty wasn’t inherited from the Moore family because she didn’t resemble them,

Her mother said her beauty was inherited from her grandmother, who was also very beautiful in her youth.

Lucinda never met her grandmother, as she passed away early, leaving no photos behind.

At this moment, these two strangers, even if they met, had no intersection.

Buby headed for her red Ferrari.

While Lucinda sat on her electric scooter, took out her phone and called Stefan.

When Stefan answered the phone, Lucinda laughed and said, “Stefan, you’re knocking off soon right? I’m at your office entrance waiting for you, let’s grab a bite together.”

Ruby, who was about to drive off, heard Lucinda calling Stefan’s name, paused for a moment, and listened attentively to Lucinda.

“I finished my morning work early, can knock off ten minutes early. I’ll be right out.”

Seeing the intense sunlight outside, Stefan felt bad for his newlywed wife waiting for him under the hot sun, so he unusually wrapped up his work early and hurried out of the office.

Iris wanted to look for him, seeing him come out, she called out, “Mr. Coleman,”

Stefan had already breezed past her.

Lucinda put her phone back in her pocket.

She felt the sun was too intense, but looking around, there was nowhere to shelter, she could only wait for Stefan.

Fortunately, Stefan could knock off ten minutes early, otherwise, if she had to wait here for ten more minutes, she’d really get roasted.

“Excuse me.”

Ruby got out of the car, walked over, and politely said to Lucinda.

Lucinda looked at her and instinctively said, “Haven’t you left yet?”

She looked at Ruby’s convertible again.

Riding an electric scooter, you’d get sunburned.

People driving convertibles also get sunburned.

It's just that the convertible drives much faster than her electric scooter, you wouldn't feel the heat.

"Do you know me?" Ruby asked curiously.

She had no recollection of the beauty in front of her.

"I don't *know* you, I was just passing by. I saw you get in the car, thought you had left. Need any help?" Lucinda asked, her voice full of concern.

"What's your relationship with Stefan?" Ruby asked, expressionless.

Lucinda was taken aback, she looked Ruby up and down.

"What's your relationship with Stefan? Why do you want to know our relationship, do you fancy Stefan?" Lucinda retorted.

Stefan was an outstanding man. If no one fancied him, that would be weird.

It's just that Stefan had always been picky, that's why he'd been single. She felt very lucky, only had to rent Stefan for five hundred dollars to be her husband.

Ruby admitted openly, "Yes, I like Stefan, we've known each other since we were little, liked each other and grew up together."

"Oh, you're that Ruby." Lucinda suddenly remembered Gabriel mentioning a Ruby.

"You're Ruby, right? I heard Mr. Turner mention, you're the girl Stefan has fancied since childhood, why aren't you two together?" Lucinda asked.

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Ruby saw Lucinda suddenly become enthusiastic. Mentioning Stefan, Lucinda had no other intentions.

Ruby was surprised. Could she have misunderstood? The girl in front of her isn't the one Stefan fancies?

"Gabriel mentioned me to you?" Ruby asked.

"Yes, he said Stefan has been waiting for you." Lucinda replied.

At this moment if Gabriel was present, he might ask, did I really say that?

Lucinda would reply, I remember you said it anyway I know you mentioned Ruby.

Gabriel would be helpless.

Hearing this, Ruby showed a slight smile, she asked Lucinda, "Who are you? How do you know Stefan's been waiting for me, did he tell you?"

"He didn't say, but when Mr. Tumer said it, he didn't deny it. My brother and Stefan, are college buddies, Stefan recently did me a solid, I'm really grateful and want to treat him to a meal." Lucinda explained.

Turns out she's not a rival in love.

Ruby breathed a sigh of relief.

But Lucinda's looks are too attractive, she must stay on alert.

Therefore, she said, "Stefan's always the kind to help without expecting anything in return, he helped you probably because of your brother, you don't have to worry too much, he might not agree to have a meal with you. It's too hot you should go home, don't wait anymore."

Finally, she added, "I used to be overseas, but now I've moved my business back home. This time, I'm not planning on leaving again."

Lucinda said with a grin, "I'm sure Stefan must be happy. He promised to grab lunch with me. Ms. Scott, if you're free, you could join us, but I don't have much money lately, so we might not be able to hit up anywhere fancy."

Eyeing Ruby's Ferrari, Lucinda blushed, "Ms. Scott, just forget what I said, alright?"

Stefan's childhood sweetheart was clearly a wealthy heiress with a successful career, a perfect match for Stefan.

Considering he worked at Ascend Global and lived in Diamond Ridge Estates, Stefan might be some big shot at Ascend Global.

"People in top management at major corporations make more money in a year than most people do in their lifetime."

It's not impossible for him to marry the daughter of a rich family. "Stefan agreed to have lunch with you?"

"Yeah, I just called him. He said he'd be down in a jiffy. He's done with his work for today and can clock out ten minutes early. He asked me to wait here for him."

Suddenly, Ruby's face fell.

Chapter 26

"Lucinda."

Stefan pedaled his bicycle out from inside.

On seeing Lucinda and Ruby chitchatting, Stefan felt uneasy, so he pedaled faster.

Ruby was flabbergasted when she saw him riding a bicycle out.

Where was Stefan's fancy car?

She remembered Stefan loved luxury cars, and the garage was packed enough for a car show.

"Stefan, you're out."

Lucinda greeted him with a smile and whispered to Stefan, "Stefan, when did Ruby come back? She seems upset. Did you guys have a fight? I invited you to dinner and invited her too, but she said you wouldn't eat with me."

She subtly nudged Stefan's arm, lowering her voice even more, "Don't mind her. She just returned from abroad. All her family is overseas. You're the only one she can rely on here."

Upon hearing that Lucinda invited Ruby for dinner, Stefan felt heavy-hearted.

However, he could not confess to Lucinda, for fear that he would scare her if she knew his real identity. Now Lucinda always thought that he was just a staff member working at Ascend Global, and did not know that he was the head of Ascend Global.

“Lucinda, get in, let’s go. We’ll talk during dinner.”

Stefan gestured for Lucinda to get on his bike, sending Ruby a glare.

Lucinda looked at Ruby, then at Stefan. Something felt off between the two, but as an outsider, she had no idea about their history, so she remained silent.

“Oh.”

Just as Lucinda was about to sit on Stefan’s bike, she remembered she came here on a bike. So she told Stefan, “Stefan, leave my e-bike. It’s faster. It’s too hot to cycle.”

She mumbled to herself, “After dinner, I’ll get a sunshade for the e-bike, so we can avoid the sun when going out.”

Stefan also wanted to leave as soon as possible, not wanting Ruby and Lucinda to chat more.

So, he told a security guard, “Can you help me put the bike inside?”

“Yes, Mr. Coleman.”

Stefan quickly glanced at Lucinda, finding that Lucinda had no reaction.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

Our bike in the company and ride

As they were about to leave, Ruby blocked the e-bike. She stared at Stefan and sarcastically laughed, “When did our Mr. Coleman start riding an e-bike? Where’s Mr. Coleman’s fancy car? Did Ascend Global hit a rough patch and you sold all your fancy cars?”

Lucinda gawked at Ruby. Before Stefan could reply, she poked her head out from behind Stefan and said to Ruby, “Ms. Scott, you just returned from abroad. You may not know

the situation in Pinehurst, which is understandable. But there's no way Ascend Global is having financial issues. If Ascend Global is in trouble, other companies in Pinehurst would have gone belly up."

Ascend Global offered a large number of job opportunities for residents in Pinehurst and was also the city's major taxpayer.

If Ascend Global was in trouble, other small companies' survival would also become difficult.

Lucinda didn't want Ascend Global to have issues. If these companies collapsed, her coffee shop would be hit, as many of her customers were Ascend Global employees.

Only the white-collar workers liked the hand-ground coffee in her shop.

Ordinary workers rarely patronized her shop.

But the more important reason was that Stefan worked at Ascend Global, and she didn't want him to be jobless.

"Lucinda, put on your helmet."

Stefan put on a helmet and passed one to Lucinda. Once Lucinda put on the helmet, he rode the e-bike, carrying Lucinda past Ruby. He didn't say a word to Ruby's mockery.

"Stefan." Ruby reached out to stop the e-bike, but Stefan immediately sped up. The e-bike sped away, leaving Ruby behind quickly.

"Stefan...hey, you promised me a drink. Come back, come back!"

Ruby's words were directed at Lucinda.

Lucinda had previously invited Ruby to dinner.

But now, Lucinda and Stefan left.

Lucinda looked back at the increasingly distant Ruby, feeling a bit sorry for her. She was the one who invited Ruby to dinner, but Stefan obviously didn't want to deal with Ruby..

It was quite awkward for her.

She even felt like she might have done more harm than good.

The relationship between Stefan and his childhood playmate Ruby didn't seem to be as Gabriel said.

“Hold me tight!”

Stefan ordered in a deep voice.

Chapter 26

Lucinda responded, reaching her hands under Stefan's arms and holding his waist.

With her movement, Stefan's tense face relaxed a bit.

He liked the intimate gesture she made towards him.

“Stefan, what's going on with you and Ms. Scott? Didn't Mr. Turner say you've been sweet on each other since childhood? Now that she's back from abroad, aren't you planning to rekindle the old flame? Is it because we signed a contract and it feels inconvenient? The contract says that it can be terminated once we find true love.”

Stefan initially wanted to stop, but seeing Ruby chasing them in the rearview mirror, his face hardened. He said in a deep voice: “Hold on tight, I'm going to speed up.”

Lucinda responded and held onto his waist tighter.

Stefan hit the gas, but their e-scooter didn't stand a chance against Ruby's car. He took a hard right at the next intersection, weaving through the criss-cross of city streets and back alleys. The alley was a narrow one-way street, just wide enough for one car. Even if Ruby caught up, she couldn't give chase like on a main road.

Before long, they'd left Ruby eating their dust.

Only when he was sure Ruby couldn't catch up, did Stefan emerge from the alley, back onto the main street.

Ruby was still stuck in the alley, a car coming head-on. She hoped they'd give way, but they seemed to have the same idea. Too bad the alley was too narrow. Unless she backed out, even if they made room, she couldn't squeeze through.

Looking ahead, Stefan was gone without a trace.

Ruby slammed her hand against the steering wheel in frustration.

She sensed something off about Stefan's attitude towards Lucinda.

It wasn't like Lucinda said, that they were just friends.

Stefan wasn't one for dining with girls. She and Stefan had grown up together, and the only reason they ate together was because their parents brought them along.

In private, he wouldn't have a meal with her alone.

But he was willing to have a meal with that girl, which was really odd.

What was that girl's name again?

Ruby never got her name, only that she was the sister of Stefan's college mate.

She needed Owen to do some digging. How many of Stefan's college mates had a sister?

She, Ruby's target, could not be *snato*

away by someone else!

Absolutely not!

Stefan could only be hers!

Chapter 27

“Honk honk-”

The car across gave a couple of honks.

Ruby decided to give up chasing Stefan and retreated.

She reversed all the way to the end of the alley before she had enough space to turn the car around. Parking on the side, she grabbed her bag from the passenger seat, pulled out her mobile and dialed Owen.

Owen picked up so quickly that Ruby wondered if he had been waiting for her call.

“Ruby, what’s up? Wanna grab dinner? I can pick you up,” Owen’s proposal took Ruby by surprise.

Even though Ruby hadn’t given up on Stefan, Owen was over the moon that she reached out to him.

He believed that one day, Ruby would choose him.

He was the perfect match for her.

He could give her the happiness she desired.

He thought Stefan was nuts for still not having any romantic feelings at almost 30. Ruby wanted to develop a relationship with Stefan, but he seemed unresponsive and distant.

Owen thought to himself that if Ruby wanted to be with him, he would not reject her but would be extremely happy.

“I...” Ruby was a bit confused.

Was she taking advantage of Owen by asking for his help?

“Ruby, do you need my help with something?” Owen guessed what Ruby was thinking.

Ruby was always like this, reaching out when she needed him, but cold when she didn’t.

Owen felt a bit bitter, but the fact that she thought of him first when she was in trouble meant he still had a place in her heart.

“Owen, let’s have dinner. You treated me last time, now it’s my turn,” Ruby said.

“Sounds good, where are you? I’ll come pick you up,” Owen replied joyfully.

“No need, I’ll drive myself to your family’s hotel. Meet you there,” Ruby replied.

She intended to discuss the matter with him during dinner.

She also hoped to bump into Stefan and that woman at the hotel.

She knew it was wishful thinking as they were going to Pinehurst Hotel, a Martinez family property, which Stefan was unlikely to visit. Ascend Global owned a few five–star hotels. Stefan had no need to go to Pinehurst Hotel.

“Alright, drive safe,” Owen reminded her.

After hanging up, Ruby took several deep breaths, trying to suppress her rage, and then took out a compact mirror to touch up her makeup.

After fixing her makeup, she took out a small exquisite brocade box from her bag, inside was a necklace Owen gave her when he treated her to dinner the day she returned.

She needed to cheer him up since she was going to meet Owen and ask for his favor.

Ruby removed her own necklace and put on the one Owen gave her.

The tie and watch she had intended to gift Stefan, which he rejected, could now be given to Owen.

Unlike Stefan’s cold demeanor, Owen would treasure anything she gave him, regardless of its value.

Once when she visited Owen’s house, she accidentally walked into his room and found several folders in his bedside drawer, filled not with photos, but her previous artwork, all failed pieces.

Her exquisite works were all given to Stefan and the Anderson family. When Stefan was young and they were just innocent friends, he would accept her artwork.

But as they grew older and realized the feelings between a man and a woman, Stefan stopped accepting her gifts.

Not only that, but she couldn’t find any of her gifts at Stefan’s place. When she asked him about it, he said he threw them away, which infuriated her.

In contrast, Owen cherished her gifts. Even a blade of grass would be preserved as a specimen.

For a moment, Ruby thought about giving up on Stefan and choosing Owen.

But when she thought about Stefan's higher status than Owen, and in Pinehurst, the Anderson family's status also being above Owen's, she had to choose the best if she were to get married.

The title of the Anderson family's mistress was something she craved!

The slight guilt she felt towards Owen was once again suppressed by Ruby.

Lucinda and Stefan went to a fast-food restaurant. They parked the car right in front of the restaurant, and Lucinda said while leading him in, "Stefan, the food here is pretty good. I come here a lot."

She joked, "Stefan, isn't it a bit out of character for a big shot like you to come to a place like this?"

Stefan gently tapped her forehead and said, "Don't make me out to be some big wig. I'm just an ordinary worker."

He was the head of Ascend Global, but Ascend Global was not solely his, but the Anderson family's. He just had a larger share as the leader.

Ignoring his leadership position at Ascend Global, Stefan was also the CEO of several companies he founded himself, unrelated to Ascend Global, his personal ventures.

It was also something he had wanted to prove, even without Ascend Global, that he could create a world on his own. As it turned out, he succeeded in creating his own world.

"Stefan, what's your position at Ascend Global? Everyone calls you Mr. Coleman respectfully," Lucinda casually asked.

Being a frequent diner, Lucinda was familiar with the couple who owned the restaurant. When she saw the lady owner, she greeted with a smile and said, "The usual, but make it a big one. I'm treating today."

"Sure thing. I'll make sure it's enough!"

The moment the shop owner laid eyes on Stefan, she was floored. Even though she was middle-aged and a mother of two, she was struck by his good looks.

She joked to Lucinda, “Lucinda, is this your boyfriend? He’s such a handsome young man.”

He was neatly dressed in formal clothes and looked like a successful professional. Did Lucinda set up a blind date? Or was she just on a blind date now? Lucinda mentioned something about treating him to a meal...

“He’s my boyfriend.”

Stefan didn’t expect Lucinda to admit it without hesitation.

The shop owner laughed, “You’ve a good eye.”

She leaned in towards Lucinda’s ear and whispered, “Lucinda, this guy looks very nice. You must cherish him and don’t miss him.. And keep an eye on him, he’s too handsome for his own good.”

Just as a pretty woman could stir up trouble, a too-good-looking guy could do the same.

Chapter 28

Lucinda chuckled, “I believe that if destiny decides he’s meant for me, then he will be. If not, no amount of effort will change that.”

Take her relationship with George, for instance. They were in love for years, yet they still broke up. It was clear that they were not each other’s true love.

“You’re right. You can’t force something that’s not yours, and if it is yours, no one can take it away.” The shop owner smiled and started preparing their meal.

Lucinda led Stefan to a table by the window and said, “I come here a lot. I really like this spot.”

Stefan smiled back, “Since you enjoy eating here, that must mean the food is good. I can’t wait to try it.”

“As long as you’re okay with it. You’re a high-level executive, must be used to fancy restaurants.”

“Not really, I’m pretty laid-back. I don’t fuss over food or places.”

Lucinda remembered the day he brought clients to her café. Despite having high rent and nice décor, her place wasn’t exactly high-end. But he still brought clients over, proving that he truly didn’t care about appearances.

Of course, it could also mean his clients weren’t elite either.

“Stefan, you haven’t told me what your position at Ascend Global is.” Lucinda leaned in and whispered, “Tell me, I can use it to show off.”

She wanted to know how outstanding her hired man really was.

Stefan chuckled, “There’s nothing to brag about being an employee. I’m the assistant to the CEO.”

If the real assistant Edgar heard that, he would probably complain, “Boss, you stole my job.”

And Stefan would just calmly reply, “Just borrowing it temporarily.”

Lucinda immediately gave him a thumbs up and praised, “Stefan, you’re really something. Ascend Global is the largest company in our city, owned by the Anderson family, right?”

She remembered Stefan saying the wealthiest family in their city was the Andersons. Such grandeur was unreachable for an ordinary citizen like Lucinda.

“You’re already impressive for working at Ascend Global, let alone being the CEO’s assistant. I feel like I’ve struck gold. Considering the little fee I pay you, I feel kind of guilty.”

Hiring the assistant to the CEO of Ascend Global for just \$500.

I’m helping you because of your brother, not for your money!

They chatted for a while until their food arrived. They continued their conversation while eating.

“Lucinda.”

Stefan poured Lucinda a drink and asked cautiously, “I’ve helped you out a lot and now you’re comfortable. If I need your help, would you…”

“Stefan, stop being so formal. If you need anything, just say it. As long as I can help, I’ll definitely do my best,” Lucinda interrupted, declaring that she would help him unless it involved huge risks.

“It’s nothing serious. Due to my position, I often have to attend social events at night. My secretary has a boyfriend, and I’m afraid he might misunderstand if I bring her along. Could you accompany me instead? Don’t worry, you won’t have to entertain guests, just be there with me.”

He wanted to slowly bring her into his world, into his social circle.

“Of course, I can have my employees watch the café at night. It’s not busy anyway. I can accompany you whenever you need me to. I can handle my drinks well.”

Lucinda was more than willing to accompany Stefan to social events. Little did she know she was slowly falling into the trap Stefan had set up for her. Once she realized something was off, it would be too late for her to escape.

“And would you accompany me to gatherings with friends?”

Lucinda laughed, “You’re asking so nervously as if it’s something very important. Sure, I can accompany you to that too. Your friends probably already know about us, right? Mr. Turner even informed Ike, how could the others not know?”

Stefan cursed inwardly, “...Gabriel, that big-mouthed jerk!”

Then, could you accompany me to a business cocktail party tonight?” Stefan asked.

Lucinda nearly choked on her food. She quickly swallowed her food, took a sip of her drink, and then said, “Are you setting a trap for me? A business cocktail party tonight, and I don’t have an evening dress. If you don’t mind my casual attire, I can go with you.”

In summer, she usually wore a T-shirt and shorts. It was light and cool..

Stefan served her more food and laughed, “Don’t make me out to be a bad guy. I can take care of the evening dress. No worries.”

“Alright, as long as I show up, you handle the rest.”

Stefan nodded and said, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of everything you need as long as you accompany me to the party. If anyone asks about our relationship, just ignore them and let them speculate.”

“What if we run into your friend Ruby? She has a misunderstanding about our relationship.”

The mention of Ruby made Stefan’s smile fade. He said calmly, “Just ignore her. And *she’s* girl I’ve liked since childhood isn’t her.”

a friend I grew up with, not someone I’ve liked since childhood. The

Lucinda was the one he had liked since childhood. It took him eleven years, watching her grow up, and an accidental opportunity made him her legal husband.

Upon hearing this, Lucinda’s eyes lit up. She asked curiously, “Who have you liked since childhood? Is she better than Ruby? Everyone says you’ve liked Ruby since childhood, but you say you like someone else. Have you been using Ruby as a decoy to distract everyone and protect your lover’s safety?”

Hearing this, Stefan couldn’t help but flick her forehead lightly.

Rubbing the spot he just flicked, Lucinda pouted and said coyly, “Ouch, that hurt.”

Tblow on it for you.”

“No, it’s okay. I was just joking. You didn’t hit hard. It didn’t hurt, really*”

“You have such a wild imagination. No wonder you’re an outstanding novelist. Do you think I’m the kind of guy who can’t protect his woman?”

Instinctively, Lucinda shook her head. Stefan had a very gentle nature, giving her a feeling of a gentleman. But she knew it was just the surface. At the age of twenty-nine, Stefan rose to the position of Executive Assistant to the CEO of Ascend Global. How could he possibly be a gentle person?

“So, stop overthinking. When the time is right, I’ll tell you who I’ve really liked since I was a child.”

Lucinda laughed happily. The more time she spent with Stefan, the more he felt like a thick book to her, each page full of surprises.

Chapter 29

Over in one place, a young couple was getting along pretty well.

But over in another, Ruby was restless. The dinner table was covered with all kinds of delicious food, most of which were her favorites.

Owen saw her lost in thought and put down his fork and knife.

“Owen, what’s up?” Ruby, seeing him put down his cutlery, couldn’t help but ask, “You’re not a fan of the food, are you?”

She glanced over the dishes on the table. Owen had ordered mostly her favorites, but many of them were dishes Owen didn’t particularly like.

“Ruby, if something’s bothering you, spill it. I’ll help however I can, or at least find someone who can,” he told her.

After a moment of silence, Ruby grabbed two gift bags and put them in front of Owen. A smile crept onto her pretty face. “Owen, these are a tie and a watch I got for you. Do you like them?”

Owen took the bags, checking out the tie and the watch. Both were high-end brands, but the color of the tie was one Stefan would prefer. He suspected these were meant for Stefan and only given to him because Stefan refused to accept them.

Owen kept his suspicions to himself. Regardless of who they were initially intended for, the fact that they’d ended up in his hands meant they were gifts for him, a token of her affection. With this self-deception, Owen comforted himself and said, “Ruby, I love both the tie and the watch.”

Seeing him happily accept her gifts, Ruby relaxed and made her request. “Owen, could you look into something for me? How many of Stefan’s college friends have younger

sisters? Around 23 or 24 years old, pretty, with big, beautiful eyes, and a friendly demeanor?”

The gifts he just received suddenly lost their charm. The smile on Owen’s face gradually disappeared. He didn’t flat out decline Ruby’s request, nor did he agree to it. Quietly, he poured a full glass of wine for Ruby, and then one for himself. Setting down the bottle, he picked up his glass and said, “Cheers.”

Ruby clinked glasses with him.

Owen downed his in one go.

Ruby only took a couple of sips and didn’t drink anymore. She was always on guard around Owen, afraid that if she got drunk, Owen might...

After downing three glasses in a row, Owen set his glass down heavily on the table.

“Owen, if you don’t want to do this for me, it’s fine. I won’t blame you. It was my fault for asking you to look into Stefan, given your tense relationship with him.”

Ruby, looking guilty, apologized, “But I just got back, and I don’t know who else to ask. In Pinehurst, you’re my best friend. You’re the only one who can help me, and the only one capable of doing so.”

Most detective agencies wouldn’t accept a job involving Stefan, fearing they’d offend him, or even the Anderson family, and be unable to survive in Pinehurst.

The Anderson family had ten young heirs in this generation. Although they were only cousins, they were very close and respected and loved each other, treating Stefan, the eldest cousin, as their leader.

They held important positions in various fields. If anyone offended Stefan, his brothers would join forces and very few could withstand the retaliation from these ten young heirs of the Anderson family. Therefore, very few people were willing to investigate matters involving Stefan.

Owen was one of the very few

“Ruby, I can help you, but I need to be

compensated.”

Owen’s sharp gaze locked onto Ruby’s beautiful face. His voice was low, “Investigating matters involving Stefan requires a lot of resources and caution. The risk’s are also high. Without a reward, I feel like I’m getting the short end of the stick.”

Ruby breathed a sigh of relief, “Don’t worry, I won’t let

you

at

“I don’t need money, and I don’t want yours.”

work for free. Name your price, and I’ll transfer the money to you right away.”

As she spoke, she grabbed her phone, ready to make the transfer

any moment.

Although the Martinez family wasn’t as powerful as the Anderson family, it was still one of the top five families and not to be underestimated.

“So what do you want? I’ll buy it for you!

Owen’s eyes were burning, focusing on Ruby’s red lips.

Ruby, feeling a bit nervous under his gaze, guessed his intentions. Just as

Ruby, “Owen, you’re drunk.”

was about to speak, he beat her to it, “I just want a kiss from you, a French kiss.”

conservative.”

“I’m not.” Owen smiled. “What, not willing to pay the fee? Or are you shy? You can’t be that

“I’m not asking you to sleep with me. I just want a deep kiss.”

He really wanted her, but he was not going to force her. He was waiting for her to offer herself willingly.

But a kiss, he could press her for that.

Whenever she needed something, she always came to him for help. Especially when she wanted to pursue Stefan, she often sought his help.

She should have been aware of Owen's feelings for her; he'd told her already. But she still used him, turning him first whenever she needed help.

In the past, he'd helped her a lot for free. Now, he just wanted some compensation. That was not too much to ask,

"Owen, we're just friends. I... I'm uncomfortable." Ruby looked for excuses.

Owen's voice was low, "Ruby, I don't want to just be your friend!"

He wanted to be her lover.

"You're uncomfortable, fine, I'll do it. Just don't resist."

was it?

Owen poured himself another glass of wine. Leaning back and swirling his glass, he watched the liquid inside tracing a beautiful arc.

"Did you notice a woman around Stefan recently that you don't recognize?" Owen began to bait her. "You think she's your love rival, but you don't know who she is or where she comes from."

Ruby's eyes lit up, "You knew?"

"When I wanna know, I know. When I don't wanna know, I don't know a thing. It all depends on if the payoff's worth it."

Ruby's cheeks flushed a bit. She looked at Owen.

He was a looker, she had *no* feelings for him, but she didn't dislike him either. She did, however, enjoy the benefits his affection brought her. Giving him a peck wouldn't really be a loss.

According to him, after all her years gallivanting abroad, apart from not giving her virginity, her kissing game was on point.

“Owen...”

“I’ll only take a kiss, let’s leave it at that.”

Ruby’s breath hitched for a moment.

Chapter 30

“Owen, you really shouldn’t..”

Chapter 30

Owen cut her off, “Why shouldn’t I? You expect me to help you for free? I can do some things for free but for others, I need to be paid.”

She hurt him. Even though she knew he loved her, she was asking him to investigate her romantic rival. It was like stabbing him in the heart. If he didn’t love her, her coldness would be enough to piss him off.

“Ruby, I’ll give you a minute to think it over. After that, even if you agree, I won’t help you anymore.”

Ruby bit her lower lip lightly. She quickly stood up, walked over to Owen, got him up, made him face her, and kissed him.

But as soon as she touched Owen’s lips, he pushed her away. Ruby didn’t expect Owen to react like this. She lost her balance and fell to the ground.

She just stared at Owen. He had just said that if she kissed him, he would help her. She did what he asked, but he still pushed her away.

Owen turned around and left.

“Owen.” Ruby called out to him. Had she done something wrong?

“Don’t worry, I’ll do what I promised.” Without turning around, Owen coldly said this and left Ruby behind.

Ruby was willing to do anything for Stefan. This deeply hurt Owen’s heart and his pride.

There was no difference between him and Stefan. They had known each other since childhood, growing up together. Why was he only her friend, but Stefan was the one she loved?

Were there no other men in the world? Why did she have to choose Stefan?

Owen was worried that if he didn’t leave, he might’ve lost control due to jealousy and hurt Ruby.

3 p.m.

Regal Raiment.

A bicycle stopped in front of the store.

A handsome man in a suit got off the bike and walked into the store.

“Oh my?” The staff in the store looked surprised when they saw the man. He rubbed his eyes and muttered, “I must be seeing things. Stefan cannot possibly be in my store at this hour.”

The man grabbed him by the collar, pulling him close to face the handsome face.

He tried to kiss the man but was pushed away before their lips touched. “Ah, what a pity to miss such an opportunity.”

Holt lamented.

“Holt! Don’t look at me like that!”

Stefan warned his friend, Holt, the fourth son of the Wilson family who didn’t need to take over the family business and could do what he liked. He loved designing evening gowns, so he opened Regal Raiment. The business was booming, and he had opened many branches in various places.

“Because you’re just too handsome.” Holt acted as if it was all Stefan’s fault.

Stefan chuckled, “Look at you now, who could tell you’re a man? You’re even more feminine than women.”

If they hadn’t played a prank and pulled down Holt’s pants to confirm that he was a man, they would have thought he was a woman.

“Please sit.”

Holt invited Stefan to sit, his gaze briefly scanning outside the store to a bicycle. He asked with a smile, “The CEO of Ascend Global, not only goes out without bodyguards, but he also doesn’t even have a car? I saw you on the road and I couldn’t believe it was you.”

“Do you guys only identify me by my vehicle?”

Holt, “... Well, I certainly wouldn’t expect you to be on a bicycle.”

“I like cycling. Is there a problem? Do you look down on me for biking? If you like, you can gift me a luxury car as a means of transport.”

Holt helplessly said, “Go away, your garage is like a car showroom. What type of car don’t you have? If I gave you another one, could your garage fit it?”

“I could expand the garage.”

“Go away, I’m broke!”

“I’ll bring you money right now. Help me choose some evening gowns. My wife needs them.”

Holt, Was that post you made online real?”

“Don’t think you can skip out on a wedding gift.”

Holt laughed, “When you have your wedding, I’ll definitely give you a big gift. Remember to reserve a spot for me as a groomsman. I want to borrow the great Mr. Coleman’s luck to see if I can find a suitable husband.”

Stefan laughed, “Aren’t you planning to find a wife?”

“My mom has always raised me as a daughter. Her wish for me was to find a suitable husband.”

As they joked around, Holt got up to select some evening gowns, not forgetting to ask Lucinda’s size.

Stefan gave him an approximate size. Holt selected a few gowns and handed them to Stefan, “Take a look, these are new arrivals in my store. Your wife won’t have to worry about wearing the same dress as someone else.”

Finally, he curiously asked, “Who did you get married with? What’s her name?”

“Lucinda.”

“Lucinda... Why does that name sound so familiar?”

Stefan flipped through the gowns. He was very satisfied with Holt's taste and craftsmanship. The gowns at Regal Raiment were all designed by Holt. Each gown took a lot of time to make, so they were very expensive. Despite the high prices, his gowns were very popular with the ladies of Pinehurst's high society.

Stefan just smiled without answering.

Holt tried to think hard. After a while, he muttered, "I remember my college neighbor Ike had a sister named Lucinda. He always doted on his sister and bragged about her."

"Stefan, Ike was your classmate, right?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Did you marry Ike's sister?"

Stefan just smiled.

Holt understood. His eyes widened in surprise, "Aren't you afraid Ike will beat you up?"

Stefan answered confidently and narcissistically, "*An* excellent man like me becoming his brother-in-law, will only make him feel happy for his sister. He wouldn't dare to lay a hand on me."

Ike's internal monologue would be, "I'm biting my tongue here!!!"

"Stefan, you absolute dog, do you only fancy much younger girls?"

"I'm only five years older than Lucinda," Stefan replied grumpily, "I'm not even thirty yet, how am I old? Lucy and I are of the same generation."

Holt eyed his friend for a while, then said, “You got hitched lightning fast, so willing and so fast, and you didn’t even announce your marriage to the world. Stefan, did you have your sights set on Ike’s sister a long time ago?”