

## Chapter 440 It Shocked Salem

The collective gasp in the conference room was audible. No one had expected Watkins' presence.

"Mr. Hoffman, the entire capital of Rinku Group stands behind your enterprise," Watkins said, addressing Liam with a tone of deference.

Silence enveloped the room. The surprise was palpable.

What possessed Watkins to place such faith in Liam?

Someone who was aware of Liam's act of saving Watkins' life inquired, "Mr. Vasquez, you needn't burden yourself with such financial risks in an attempt to repay Mr. Hoffman's benevolence. This venture is fraught with danger. Bankruptcy may spell the end for both our groups. You may think you're assisting him, but you could be causing more harm."

"Naturally. Mr. Vasquez, we urge you to convince Mr. Hoffman to reconsider his stance."

"Mr. Vasquez, keep in mind that the Rinku Group is supported by the influential Hoffman family. You may not possess the authority to make such a decision."

With that, a tense silence fell. All eyes were trained on Watkins, awaiting his response.

Undeterred, Watkins locked eyes with Liam.

These executives were unaware that Liam was the one pulling the strings at the Rinku Group. Otherwise, Watkins believed he wouldn't be in this mess.



"Rest assured, everyone. I can shoulder the consequences," Watkins assured, maintaining a grave demeanor.

Confusion rippled through the room, sparking another wave of heated debate.

Could this high-stakes gamble truly pay off?

Liam interjected, rallying the crowd, "Why the hesitation? Give Mr. Vasquez a round of applause."

Applause erupted, although it was half-hearted.

Liam pressed on, "Perspective changes everything. Having served as the vice president of the group with assets of tens of billions of dollars, Mr. Vasquez has accumulated decades of experience in the business world. He wholeheartedly pledges his support to me. What reason do we have to fear failure? Let's create another marvel. Let's elevate Funbuy from the low-cost market to the middle and high-end sectors."

His words sparked a fervor within the crowd.

The birth of Funbuy brought forth an industry miracle.

There was a possibility for Funbuy to have forged yet another extraordinary miracle.

Excitement pulsated through the room, their eyes glinting with anticipation.

Spontaneously, they all rose to their feet and applauded.

Applause echoed throughout the meeting room.

Expressions of support for Liam reverberated loudly.

"Together, let's usher in a new era with Mr. Hoffman."



Touched, even Liam was moved by the spectacle.

In that moment, the innovative and adventurous spirit of the Kingland Group was reignited.

The news of Liam's plan spread like wildfire, covered by all major media outlets.

This news sent shockwaves throughout the entire Salem, creating a sensation.

A sense of shock engulfed everyone, leaving them questioning if the Kingland Group had gone mad.

A company with a market capital of thirty billion taking such a perilous leap? They were courting disaster.

In the chairman's office of the Riley Group.

Dennis, eyes gleaming with adulation, updated Clarence on Kingland Group's developments.

Giddy with excitement, Clarence pulled Yolanda close, planting a passionate kiss on her lips.

Clarence said, barely able to contain his excitement, "Honey, it appears your strategy to provoke Liam has paid off. Look how frantic he's become."

"It's all thanks to your guidance, Mr. Norris," Yolanda responded playfully, her fingers lightly tracing over Clarence's chest.

The intimate scene between the two filled Dennis with a trembling anger.

Despite his seething anger, Dennis forced a smile and chimed in, "Liam must be infuriated to the point of madness this time, hence his



resorting to such a foolish strategy. It appears that the Kingland Group is perilously close to bankruptcy. You'll soon have Funbuy in your pocket, Mr. Norris. But it's beyond me why Watkins would willingly court disaster. Isn't he worried about the potential demise of the Rinku Group?"

Clarence buried his face in Yolanda's chest, taking a deep sniff. He said proudly, "There's a rumor circulating in Salem that Liam once saved Watkins's life. Now that Liam has returned to the Kingland Group, I believe Watkins is willing to gamble on Liam's ability to elevate Funbuy and reclaim the identity of the Hoffman family heir. By achieving this, Watkins would naturally ascend to become a prominent figure favored by the Hoffman family. Regrettably, he is consumed by an insatiable desire for personal gain. He will only meet his downfall alongside Liam."

Ha ha!

With a shared laugh, Yolanda agreed. "They're likely oblivious to how powerful you are. Crushing Funbuy will be a cakewalk. Liam is doomed."



## Chapter 441 The Plan Was Beginning To Bear Fruit

"You're so sweet. When Liam is gone, I'll take you back to my home."

Clarence was radiating enthusiasm. His fingers constantly traced the contours of Yolanda's form, igniting his desires.

Finally, he scooped up Yolanda and carried her away.

Witnessing the spectacle, Dennis was seething inside.

But he had to suppress it.

His anger boiled but he bit his tongue.

After all, he wasn't in a position to confront an heir of a family worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

The only solace Dennis had was that he could get rid of his arch-nemesis, Liam.

Every hardship was worth that.

The subsequent day, at the Kingland Group, every stratagem of Liam's was executed to the letter.

The initial investment in quality assurance and logistical development had hit a billion dollars.

The group's financial reserves were teetering on the edge.

Yet the Kingland Group personnel were fired up and committed to executing the plan flawlessly.



Meanwhile, under Clarence's direction, a multitude of media outlets were lambasting Funbuy, swaying public sentiment unanimously.

"It is announced that the 'self-destruction' plan unveiled by the Kingland Group yesterday has started today. According to financial pundits, the Kingland Group's maneuver is a desperate bid to retain customers by depleting their cash reserves. It's a ruthless pricing war. None of this can mask the inherent issues of Funbuy. In fact, it might hasten Funbuy's downfall."

Clarence even cast doubt in the media. "The alleged ten-billion-dollar rebate program of the Kingland Group is a mere spectacle. It won't truly benefit the customers."

As soon as these reports surfaced, internet users started to lambast Funbuy on Facebook.

Even those who defended Funbuy were viewed as outcasts and attacked by others.

However, a moment of vindication came quickly.

Guided by Liam, and through relentless efforts, the marketing department convinced Funbuy to form alliances with multiple brands.

If their products were on sale on Funbuy, the platform would waive commissions in the first phase. Moreover, it also facilitated warehousing and logistics, significantly reducing the sellers' expenses.

For customers, Funbuy implemented a seven-day return policy, with free shipping offered by the platform, greatly simplifying user experience.

Warehousing and logistics, the two costliest operations, were handled by the Kingland Group. The group was burning money, which incentivized the brands to slash their prices.



The ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign truly lived up to its name.

When some vendors noticed a spike in sales, they dropped their prices, sparking an even greater frenzy.

This was a genuine pricing war.

Moreover, some mid to high-end electronic products disrupted Funbuy's existing market landscape.

Many old users gambled on these electronic products.

They quickly reaped the rewards, lavishing praise on Funbuy and spreading the word.

Soon enough, the phrase "Funbuy's ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign is real" topped Facebook's trending topics.

Clarence's criticism of Funbuy was disproven.

The common folk didn't worry about Kingland Group's fate.

All they knew was that Funbuy genuinely helped them save money.

In the CEO's office of Kingland Group, top executives convened.

They received data from the tech department. "Ever since the ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign was launched, Funbuy's transaction volume has tripled."

This news brought a mix of joy and concern.

They rejoiced because the platform saw increased activity. If this continued, Funbuy would command a majority of the market share.

Their worry stemmed from the fact that the increased transactions meant more expenses. Yet the group's finances were strained.



After a debate, they turned to Liam for his perspective.

At this point, Liam was solely basking in happiness, because finances were not his concern.

As long as the plan was successful, the resulting profits would be significant.

He reassured, "Don't stress about the funds. I'll handle it. What you need to do is to secure partnerships with more quality brands. Simultaneously, recalibrate the inventory of the products included in the ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign and control the costs. In conclusion, the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan should be publicized as soon as possible. Let the users witness Funbuy's audacity to reward."

The group plunged into another heated discussion. Despite their worries, no one challenged Liam's viewpoint.

After all, they chose to trust the visionary leading them.

"Stay motivated! Once the ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign concludes, each of you will receive a bonus equivalent to a month's salary," Liam added.

He was well aware that faith alone wasn't sufficient.

Only profit could truly motivate others.

As expected, the employees perked up and passionately executed their tasks upon hearing Liam's words.

Eventually, Liam was the only one left in the office.

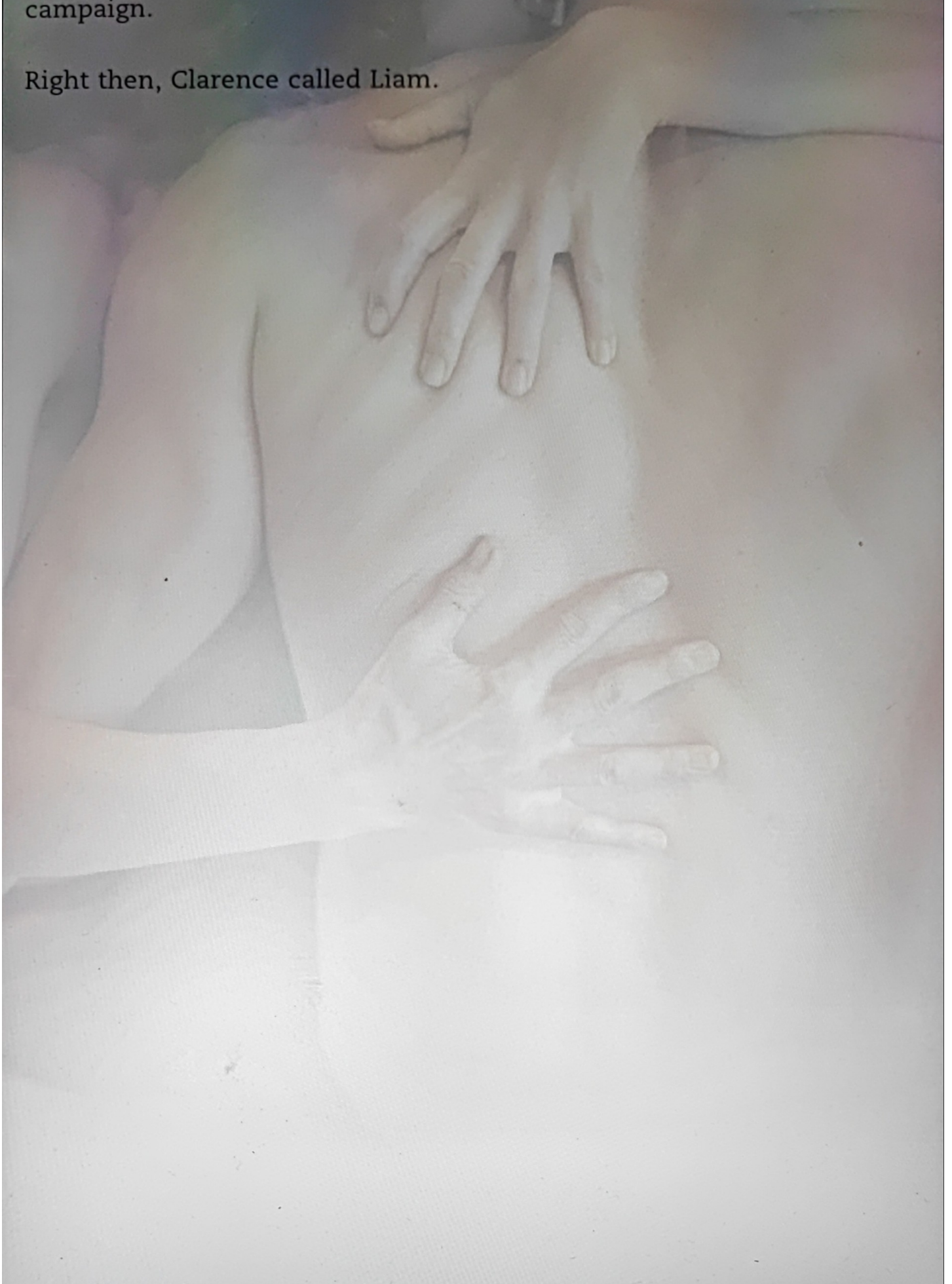
The mental strain was so intense that he collapsed into his chair.

Yet his face bore a constant grin of satisfaction.



Because he had foreseen the evolution of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy campaign.

Right then, Clarence called Liam.





## Chapter 442 A Tit-for-tat Phone Call

Clarence's voice took on an unusual pitch as he exclaimed, "Wow, your Funbuy is seriously next level! You spent lots of money on it and gained nothing in return, yet it became the hottest talk of the town. I hope you can hold on for a longer time! I am hosting a party for Julie's birthday next week. You better come. At the event, I plan to announce our engagement news to all media outlets in an extravagant manner!"

When Liam heard this, his mood took a sudden dip. It was obvious to him that Clarence's call was intended to get under his skin.

With a smirk, he responded, "You should probably pay attention to your Riley Group. You wouldn't want me to take it over out of your neglect, right? I will indeed attend the party. Hopefully, you'll be free enough to host it by then!"

Fury surged through Clarence, making him grind his teeth. His intention was to see Liam lose his composure, but Liam's firm stance thwarted that plan.

He wanted to further humiliate Liam, but Liam had already disconnected the call.

In his CEO office, Liam rested against his chair. Although he portrayed indifference earlier, inside, he was shaken to the core.

When it came to Julie, his rationality tended to slip.

His eyes reddened. He didn't believe Julie and Clarence were a couple, let alone the fact that they had sex.

With clenched fists, Liam declared with resolve, "Julie, no matter what happens, I won't let you end up with such a scoundrel!"



At the Riley Group.

Clarence, after the phone call, brought Yolanda to his office. He ensured privacy by securing the door and closing the windows, then he engaged in sex with her to fulfill his sexual desires.

About fifteen minutes later, Clarence and Yolanda exited the office. ①

He appeared cheerful and rang up the executive manager of the group to prepare for a round of inspection in the group.

This was his first practical action at the Riley Group since his Norris family acquired the company.

The executive manager conveyed, "Mr. Norris, thanks to your family's investment, our group operations are back on track. We can anticipate that the Riley Group's application will become the most popular shopping application again!"

Clarence's expression soured. He retorted, "Funbuy is still the top shopping application, correct? Why haven't you found a way to surpass it during the shopping festival! My Norris family did not invest in your group for you to collect salaries while doing nothing!"

After dismissing the manager, Clarence continued his inspection.

Soon, he discovered something amiss.

The group's staff were using Funbuy to shop. They were eagerly hunting for the best deals.

"Mr. Norris, what brings you here?"

Stunned employees controlled their excitement upon seeing Clarence and appeared uncomfortable.

Seeing this, Clarence seethed. His first instinct was to dismiss



everyone, but the sheer number of these employees meant that their absence would cause a significant deficit in the workforce.

He pointed at the gathered staff and scolded, "Why did the group decide to hire individuals who seem to lack competence? Instead of working during office hours, you are shopping here! Worse still, you aren't even using your own company's shopping application!"



## Chapter 443 The Ten-Billion-Dollar Subsidy Plan Worked

One of the female employees who felt embarrassed whispered, "Mr. Norris, the things sold on Funbuy are really cheap. But they are rationed. We can't buy them if we don't scramble for them."

Everyone echoed and showed their attitude at the same time. "We're just trying to secure the best deals. The company behind Funbuy must be at its wit's end, so they are spending lots of money to keep the users. If we don't take advantage of it, it will be a waste. But our hearts will always be with the Riley Group. We will prepare well for this shopping festival. I'm sure we can defeat Funbuy."

When Clarence saw that everyone was trying to defend themselves, he felt it was inappropriate for him to argue more.

He snorted coldly, gave them instructions about the shopping festival casually, and returned to his office, holding Yolanda in his arms.

When he was in his office, the crazy shopping of the employees on Funbuy kept repeating in his mind. Somehow, he felt uneasy. It was just that he couldn't tell why.

Clarence frowned, looked at Yolanda, and asked, "Honey, you have been with Liam for three years, right? You must know him very well. Do you think he is spending money now because he has given up or because he has come up with a plan?"

Yolanda suddenly burst into laughter.

She stepped forward and held Clarence's arm.

Then she said jokingly, "Mr. Norris, in my opinion, it's just a gimmick



to let people spend money on Funbuy. It's like a supermarket sales promotion. When he uses up all his money, no one would go there again. It will collapse by itself."

When Clarence heard this, he was finally relieved.

The evil smile returned to his face. He held Yolanda in his arms and said obscenely, "Honey, you are so smart. I will give you a good reward..." ①

At this moment, many people outside were still scrambling for goods on the Funbuy app.

There were more and more trending topics about Funbuy on different social media platforms.

Some people even promoted the app, saying it had a ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan, so it was a good deal to shop there.

Even those people who had prejudices against Funbuy before also tried to join the shopping tide. And the result was that they really got the benefits, and they got into the habit of shopping online using the app.

The users who enjoyed the benefits of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan naturally publicized it. Soon, the number of users of Funbuy began to increase sharply again.

All the employees of Kingland Group cheered for this result.

"Funbuy is really awesome! And Mr. Hoffman is awesome too."

In their eyes, Liam had a more gorgeous halo around his head now. Everyone in Kingland Group was his believer.

Liam, the instigator of this, was in his office. He was also in a good mood.



Just as he planned, the development of the subsidy plan was getting better and better.

Although they had given up a lot of profits to the buyers, they were still making profits in the overall process. They were beginning to earn back the cost of transportation and storage.

The next step was to give the Riley Group a heavy blow.

At this moment, Liam took out his phone and called a very powerful person.

He actually asked for this person's phone number from Theo.

As soon as the call was connected, Liam said, "Hello, Mr. Olson. I'm the person in charge of Funbuy. I have a business to talk about with you."



## Chapter 444 Cooperating With PeachByte

The individual on the receiving end of Liam's call was none other than Otis Olson, the CEO of PeachByte Inc., a top-level manufacturer of personal computers, smartphones, tablet computers, and the like.

The unfamiliar voice on the line had Otis creasing his brows.

This was his private number, only shared with those of comparable standing.

Once Liam's intention became clear, Otis refused coldly. "I'm afraid, Mr. Hoffman, our PeachByte focuses on top-tier models, which seems out of sync with your platform's market niche. You might want to explore other avenues."

Liam was not taken aback by Otis' chilly demeanor.

Possibly, this was partly shaped by the storm of negative rumors swirling online.

With a smile, Liam responded, "Mr. Olson, I assume you've heard about the recent ten-billion-dollar incentive for Funbuy. This is a major move for Kingland Group to enter the mid-to-high-end market! We've managed to double Funbuy user base with this move."

Otis, putting his irritation aside, gave a nod of acknowledgement.

This man, who had been consistently on the wrong side of public opinion, seemed to have a vision beyond Otis' initial assumptions.

Otis paused, then questioned, "What's PeachByte's role in all this?"

Otis' shift from skepticism to a more relaxed demeanor signaled his willingness to drop his bias.



Liam, confident as ever, replied, "I want to help PeachByte seize market share!"

A spark of interest flashed in Otis' eyes as he felt the resolve in Liam's voice.

In a measured tone, he asked, "What's your proposal?"

Then Liam laid out his grand scheme!

He declared earnestly, "For your new phone's launch, I want an exclusive one-month selling right on Funbuy! We won't ask for any commission during this period!"

Otis wore a slight frown. Funbuy might have topped the shopping app charts and had a massive user base, but this didn't impress him.

Otis scoffed, "Is that your entire plan? Are you underestimating me, Mr. Hoffman?"

Liam, maintaining his composure, elaborated on three other benefits. "Your phone will have prime ad space on Funbuy's homepage throughout the product launch timeline. We'll also send out SMS alerts to the target audience. Furthermore, all logistics and warehousing expenses throughout the selling and after-sales processes will be covered by our Kingland Group!"

Otis was rendered speechless by this deluge of strategies. It was as though they were going out of their way to help him gain more profit!

Liam's proposition was straightforward. He wanted to leverage PeachByte's products to grow and maintain his user base.

In return, PeachByte would get increased visibility and market capture. It was a win-win situation!

It was at this moment that Otis grasped the reasoning behind Kingland



Group's massive investments in warehousing and logistics.

It wasn't a futile spending spree but a calculated move to propel Kingland Group to new horizons!

These sectors would not only recuperate their investments in due course but also fuel the growth of Funbuy.

Those enticing terms would be hard for any partner to resist. ⓘ

Otis was eventually won over.

For the first time during the call, he chuckled and applauded. "Brilliant! Let's discuss the details over lunch tomorrow at Summer Restaurant!"



## Chapter 445 Summer Restaurant

Once the phone call ended, a sense of relief washed over Liam, a rare grin unfolding across his face.

"Call Vivian here!" he said to his assistant.

Liam informed Vivian of his decision to work with PeachByte, instructing her to prepare a partnership contract.

Following their discussion, Vivian found herself utterly astounded by this cooperation!

This venture was more shocking than the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan.

It was almost akin to throwing away money!

Despite her urge to argue, she swallowed her words.

She chose to believe Liam!

"Mr. Hoffman, I'm going to draw up the contract now!"

The next day, both Liam and Vivian made their way to the scheduled meeting.

"Wow! Why does it feel like I've walked into the White House? This place is ridiculously sophisticated!"

Vivian's wide-eyed admiration in Summer Restaurant was almost childlike.

It held the title of the finest restaurant in Salem, and its intricate decor was unmatched.



Each embellishment was a masterpiece of high-quality red coral, reflecting the soft glow of the lights, painting a surreal ambiance.

In the center of the restaurant, there was a stage resembling a concert hall, adorned with a variety of musical instruments, the haunting melody of the Hungarian Rhapsody filling the air.

Otis, who had arrived early, was comfortably settled near the window, savoring the fine wine.

Spotting Liam, he greeted him with warmth, "Mr. Hoffman, you're quite accomplished for your age! You're a mirror of my younger self."

Although he was acquainted with Liam's reputation, the sight of the young man left him taken aback.

Liam, too, held a keen interest in the business tycoon. He responded modestly, "Your words are too kind. I have a long way to go before I can match you, Mr. Olson. I hope to learn much from you."

Their conversation was filled with pleasant exchanges.

Suddenly, two familiar faces at the entrance caught Liam's eye.

Balling his fists in fury, Liam growled, "Julie, Clarence..."

One of these two individuals was the woman he held dear, and the other was the man who had stolen her away.

At the entrance, Clarence was sporting a smile. "Julie, this is the top restaurant in Salem. Only the noblest people visit this place!"

His spirits were high. This was the first time Julie had agreed to go on a date with him.

This signified a deepening bond between them!



And he owed this to Yolanda!

Julie was impeccably dressed and adorned with delicate makeup, yet her eyes appeared lifeless and vacant, resembling those of a walking corpse.

Donned in a ravishing red dress, she walked into Summer Restaurant.

That image was forever etched in Liam's mind.

His expression turned somber.

Julie's arm was linked with Clarence's, a hint of repulsion glinting in her eyes.

At that moment, Clarence spotted Liam.

A mischievous gleam in his eyes, he strode over, taunting, "Oh, look who it is? Mr. Hoffman? With your company in shambles, how can you afford this place? Do you, a simpleton, even comprehend the music here? Your very existence here is a disgrace to the place! You're nothing more than an outcast from the Hoffman family!"

As Otis noticed the brewing tension, his expression soured.

"I apologize, Mr. Olson. I need to sort out a personal matter," Liam expressed regretfully.

After saying that, Liam turned to Clarence.

His icy voice cut through the air. "Dogs know how to bark! Leave! You're making my guest uncomfortable!"



## Chapter 446 A Contest

Upon hearing this, Clarence observed Otis's composed and dignified manner, which filled him with shame and prevented him from provoking him.

He glared coldly at Liam and declared, "I'm talking to you! It has nothing to do with your guest. Allowing someone of your caliber into this restaurant is truly demeaning!"

At that moment, Julie, observing from the side, decided to take this chance to earn Clarence's trust.

Teeth clenched, she interjected, "Mr. Norris, please calm down. Let's forget about him here for now and let him squander his wealth. After all, his Funbuy is nearing its demise! Once he's kicked out of Kingland Group, he might not even get the chance to step foot in here again."

The tension on Clarence's face dissolved and a malevolent smirk slid into place. "Precisely, darling. No need to stoop to his level," he murmured, wrapping an arm around Julie's waist and casting a triumphant glance at Liam.

The scene unfolding before Liam felt like an iron hook firmly lodged in his heart, relentlessly pulling at it with intensity.

"Julie, how did you come to this? Standing with Clarence and treating me with such contempt?" ①

His fists curled tightly, nails digging into flesh, while a dangerous red hue flickered in his eyes.

"Julie, being with someone like Clarence might provide you temporary happiness, but it won't last!" Liam's voice was hoarse.



Julie avoided making eye contact, unable to bring herself to hurt Liam with further falsehoods.

Just then, Dennis, who had been away to park the car, returned and found himself amidst the brewing storm.

He promptly intervened, asking politely, "What do you mean by 'someone like Mr. Norris'? Have you looked in the mirror? Do you consider yourself on par with Mr. Norris? You're nothing more than an outcast from the Hoffman family, whereas Mr. Norris is the heir of a clan worth hundreds of billions of dollars. Everyone knows which one of you is the better choice!"

Basking in the flattering words, Clarence shot Dennis an appreciative glance.

Turning back to Liam, he taunted, "Mr. Hoffman, aren't you overestimating yourself? You've seized control of Kingland Group, not the Hoffman family. Let me enlighten you, the greatest difference between an orphaned castaway like you and me lies in our upbringing. Take the soothing symphonies playing in this place for instance, I am familiar with nearly all of them and their underlying narratives. And you, you're limited to merely recognizing the sounds. This chasm cannot be bridged by your modest accomplishments. That's the reason Julie prefers me!"

A shiver ran through Liam's frame. He had no desire to engage with Clarence.

However, when it came to Julie, an irresistible urge surged within Liam.

He retorted coldly, "Ridiculous! The thing you're so proud of is not a big deal to me! My understanding of classical music surpasses yours!"

Clap, clap, clap!



A burst of applause resonated.

Dennis ridiculed him with a sneer, "You almost had me convinced! It is unfortunate that something cultivated from childhood cannot be surpassed by the casual learning of someone as ordinary as you. Stop boasting! If you're so sure of yourself, let's have a contest. The loser will make a swift exit from here!" ①

Wearing a smirk of arrogance, Clarence agreed to Dennis's idea.

He taunted Liam, "You're not trembling in fear, are you, Liam?"



## Chapter 447 A Perfect Performance

Liam glanced at Julie and responded icily, "What kind of contest?"

"It's simple. You'll play the piano on the stage. Each of you will perform a piece, and the level of skill will determine the winner. However, I fear you're unfamiliar with the piano keys. Prepare for your embarrassment." Dennis threw back a derisive snort.

As their verbal jousting and mockery danced around them, the contest rules found their place, attracting a small crowd around the stage.

Onstage, the musician was lost in his own world of rhythm and melody.

Intense, uplifting chords spilled from his nimble fingers, finding their way into the audience's ears.

As the composition concluded, a storm of applause echoed across the room.

Everyone was left craving for more, eagerly anticipating the next performer.

After all, the diners here were connoisseurs of music.

Undaunted and with an air of grace, Clarence ascended the stage and played a popular nocturne.

His execution, however, paled in comparison to the prior artist.

Yet he played commendably, earning him supportive applause from a few guests.

As he saw this, a smirking Dennis approached Liam, tauntingly saying,



"See that? Mr. Norris, a product of a family worth hundreds of billions of dollars. How can you contest with him? I suggest you exit quietly now while the crowd's attention isn't centered on you. If not, your dismal performance will be the laughingstock of the restaurant, staining your name."

A cunning grin found its way onto Liam's face. Clarence's piano abilities were barely superior to a novice's.

He retorted, "I suspect it will be you crawling away in defeat, not me!"

Shortly, Clarence's performance came to a close, sweat soaking his back.

Facing such distinguished guests, he feared humiliation. Luckily, the ongoing situation seemed to be tilting in his favor.

Sporting a smug grin, he sneered, "I doubt you even need to make an attempt. The outcome remains unchanged. Why not spare us all the time and bow down now?"

His brazen words were met with a single retort, "Ridiculous!"

With that, Liam stepped onto the stage.

His fingers danced gracefully across each piano key, as if he could sense their vibrant energy.

Noticing the lack of any sound, Dennis started to stomp his feet impatiently. "Step off the stage, Liam. Leave without further embarrassing yourself. You've already soured the evening for the guests!"

A few disgruntled guests aired their annoyance as well.

Still, the stage remained eerily silent.



Just when someone was on the verge of physically removing Liam, the first notes of music filled the air!

It was a deeply sorrowful classical piece.

It was *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* (The girl with the flaxen hair).

It depicted the intricate emotional entanglement of a man and a woman who were bound by love but torn apart by barriers.

It seemed to mirror Liam and Julie's tragic romance.

The melodic cries were amplified by Liam's raw emotions, creating a profound resonance.

The once tranquil ambiance shifted to a somber mood.

"Fannie, I lost you..."

"Penny, life without you is impossible..."

Several audience members shed silent tears, Liam included.

As he was lost in his own music, his eyes reddened, continually seeking Julie's gaze.

His heartfelt sentiments were lodged in his throat, unspoken, piling up in his heart.

Julie, I love you!

Sitting amongst the crowd, Julie also had tears welling in her eyes. The music drove a sharp pang of sorrow into her heart, yet she bravely held back, avoiding Clarence's notice.

The music slowly faded, leaving behind an audience swallowed in a deafening silence, drowned in their sadness.



Some bowed their heads in quiet agony.

This was a concert hall-worthy performance! A captivating performance that bound the audience in the emotional storytelling of the melody.

However, in Dennis' perception, the silent scene indicated an uncomfortable pause.

He swaggered over, obstructing Liam's path off the stage, and continued his belittlement. "Not a single applause for your act. It's pretty clear who the better performer is, isn't it? I warned you to save yourself the embarrassment. Now, kneel and take your leave, promptly!"



## Chapter 448 Refusing To Admit Defeat

Liam's gaze was as piercing as blades, glimmering with a lethal glint.

A conversation with Dennis was the last thing on his mind.

A gruff voice filled the air.

"Fuck off!"

After saying that, Liam continued to walk forward.

Witnessing this, Dennis took a gulp of nervous anticipation.

The power that Liam held was well known to him. If he really fought with him, Dennis' end would undoubtedly be unfavorable.

Yet to exact revenge on Liam, he summoned his courage, gritted his molars, and steeled himself to block Liam's path once more.

At that moment, Dennis' self-assurance diminished greatly. He stuttered, "Liam, are ... are you planning to fight in Summer Restaurant? Since you have placed a wager with us, you must bear the outcome of defeat. With a piano performance as poor as yours, how dare you be arrogant? You should accept the punishment you've earned!"

At Dennis' words, the spectators jolted back to reality, looking at him as if he were a fool.

The artist stepped forward and chastised with fury, "What are you doing? Get out of the way!"

This gentleman's prowess in piano, and even in classical music, surpasses mine by miles! Are you fit to pass judgment on it?"



Then, the murmurs of the guests began to ripple through the hall.

"Who on earth are you? You lack the competence to appreciate it, don't you?"

"This piece, *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*, genuinely moved me, brought back memories of my youthful sweetheart..."

"Indeed, regrets are a part of life, but what remains unerased might be our youthful romance..."

These murmurs served to reprove Dennis, while concurrently praising Liam.

Only then did Dennis realize that Liam's performance was significantly superior to Clarence's!

Feeling humiliated, he retreated to a corner, his spirit deflated.

Once Liam regained his composure, he paid no heed to Dennis.

Dennis, a conceited buffoon, was too insignificant to catch his interest.

Sporting a teasing grin once again, Liam advanced towards Clarence, uttering in a low tone, "Time to concede defeat, wouldn't you say? Even your lackey comprehends this. I assume you, as his superior, should be well aware of what you should do! Now, there's no need for my intervention. Just kneel and make your exit!"

Clarence's cheeks flushed in embarrassment. He feigned ignorance. "Why? Who declared you the victor? I hardly think you, a country bumpkin, can outdo me! I'm being generous by not demanding you to kneel and get out of here!"

Immediately, the guests booed at Clarence's behavior.

The artist himself stepped up to confront the situation!



Classical music could not be disrespected in his presence!

He stood tall before Clarence, declaring, "Let me present myself. I once won the first place at the sixteenth International Chopin Piano Competition. Am I not qualified to evaluate your skills? I can attest that Mr. Hoffman's mastery in classical music surpasses yours by a long shot! As for you, you don't even qualify as Mr. Hoffman's apprentice!"

Publicly shamed, Clarence hung his head low and tugged at Julie, eager to make a swift exit.

However, Liam was not about to let Clarence off the hook so easily. He stepped up and ensnared him, teasing, "Mr. Norris, where do you plan to go? We have a crowd of spectators. If you back away from your commitment after losing a bet, it's rather unseemly for an heir of a clan with a staggering net worth of hundreds of billions of dollars!"

Cornered and fuming, Clarence muttered under his breath, threatening, "Don't push me beyond my limits. It's not good for anyone to leave me no choice in it!"



## Chapter 449 Finalizing The Cooperation

Liam's icy expression reflected his firm resolve as he declared, "Today, I'll just leave you no choice in it! Either fulfill the bet and exit on your knees or don't bother leaving at all!"

Fueled by a potent mix of rage and humiliation, Clarence yearned to storm out. However, witnessing Liam's intimidating aura and his lack of a bodyguards rendered him powerless.

Furthering his dilemma, the crowd present sided with Liam.

If he wanted to go out, perhaps he really could only ask Liam to allow it!

Consumed by despair, he directed his anger towards Dennis, who came up with the idea!

Slap!

Suddenly, a resounding slap connected with Dennis's face.

Stunned, Dennis cupped his slapped cheek and queried, "Mr. Norris, why did you strike me?"

Fury seeping from his every pore, Clarence shouted, "This mess is on you. Why did you make the fucking bet with him?! Did you get my permission? I must beat you to death!"

Having vented, he turned to Liam, his demeanor changing as he implored, "Mr. Hoffman, surely you understand that this wager was Dennis's doing. How about we let him kneel and fulfill the bet!"

Liam was momentarily dumbfounded by Clarence's audacious ploy.



But it wasn't a good enough reason to let him off the hook!

Liam rebuffed, jesting, "Well, if the underling made a mistake, shouldn't the master do the disciplining?"

At this, Clarence's expression darkened.

Backed into a corner, he had no alternative but to direct the responsibility towards Dennis.

"Did you hear him? Accept defeat, kneel, and leave the premises!"

Distressed, Dennis managed a weak smile.

His position left him no room for defiance.

Suddenly, Dennis found himself on his knees, teeth clenched as he commenced the crawl of shame, inch by inch!

It was a spectacle, not just the humiliation of the underling, but of the master too!

Fury blazing in his eyes, Clarence gritted his teeth and queried, "May I take my leave now?"

"However, since you humiliated me before, you owe me an apology, don't you?" Liam stood firmly in front of him, blocking his way and refusing to let him pass.

Mockery emanated from the spectators.

"How dare this amateur belittle a master?"

"You had the audacity to call Mr. Hoffman a country bumpkin, yet only showcased a mediocre level of piano skill. How ridiculous!"

"His failure isn't just in music, but also in manners."



The cumulative scorn pushed Clarence past breaking point!

Slap!

Clarence struck his own face. His bloodshot eyes bored into Liam.

He demanded tersely, "Can I leave now?"

Liam was taken aback. He hadn't expected Clarence to slap himself.

Disdain coloring his words, Liam commanded, "Get out of here! Next time, refrain from barking like your dog!"

Clarence, his face a mask of gloom, exited alongside Julie.

When he reached the door, he turned around, his gaze boring into Liam as he threatened, "Even if you've won today, await your banishment from the Kingland Group, given Funbuy's current state! Then, I might graciously offer you a janitor's position at Riley Group! We'll see how this plays out!"

Julie looked at the embarrassed Clarence, laughed nervously and forced herself to chime in, "Indeed, your piano skills are impressive, but they don't make you compare to an heir of a clan worth hundreds of billions of dollars! Perhaps consider how to manage Kingland Group well instead of strumming piano keys!"

With that, they departed.

Julie's parting words hung in the air, a reminder for Liam!

However, Liam was too engrossed in his whirlwind of emotions to absorb the implication.

His mind was a flurry of questions. How did Julie and Clarence end up together?



He kept his gaze fixed on them until they were out of sight.

"Julie, I swear I won't let Clarence harm you!"

Collecting himself, Liam returned to his seat.

He apologized to Otis, "Mr. Olson, I'm sorry for keeping you waiting."

Otis dismissed the apology with a wave of his hand.

In a courteous tone, he said, "No inconvenience caused. I was, in fact, treated to your splendid performance! Your assistant took the chance to brief me about your exploits, bolstering my confidence in our partnership."

Liam responded modestly, "Those are insignificant details."

The two proceeded to discuss the alliance further, with Liam showcasing his dedication.

Otis, already leaning towards the partnership, was there merely for confirmation.

The contract was signed then and there, followed by champagne uncorked in celebration.

In good mood, Otis exclaimed, "Mr. Hoffman, upon my return, I'll publicize our collaboration. I'm positive it will yield the desired results!"

Ding!

The glasses met and were drained, but a sudden thought prompted Liam to caution, "Mr. Olson, perhaps we should withhold announcing our partnership for the moment. We can make the preliminary plan, and discuss the specifics and next steps later."



Otis was perplexed, yet he didn't protest.

Trusting his new ally was a prerequisite for a successful collaboration!

"Here's to a fruitful partnership!"

With the partnership sealed, Liam headed back to Kingland Group.

The worries for the partnership had been lifted, leaving only residual anger from the encounter in the restaurant.

Summoning Aikin, his voice hard, Liam commanded, "Investigate Julie's recent activities. Why has she changed so drastically?"



## Chapter 450 Questioning Yolanda

Upon hearing this, Aikin started to become nervous as he started to tremble inside.

Anything that involved Julie would affect Liam's emotions. The aura that Liam radiated at the moment was sending chills down his spine.

"Yes sir! I will get down to it right now!"

With that, he quickly launched an investigation into this matter.

Soon, he received a message from his men.

Without hesitation, Aikin returned to the office and reported respectfully, "Mr. Hoffman, we have found out that a few days ago, Yolanda went to the Cortez family's residence to see Miss Fiber. After that, Miss Fiber seemed to start getting close to Clarence deliberately!"

"Yolanda?"

A hint of surprise flashed across Liam's narrowed eyes. Following that, he ordered icily, "It's her again! Bring her to me at once! I'd like to see what tricks she is playing this time!"

"Yes, sir!"

Thanks to Kingland Security's power, Yolanda was soon brought before him.

She screamed and struggled all the way as she felt a certain sense of uneasiness settling over her.

However, she calmed down the moment she saw Liam.



Taking the initiative to sit in front of him, she puffed out her chest in her attempt to charm him.

She teased, "Liam, since you went through so much trouble to invite me here, should I take it as a sign that you're missing me?"

With that, Yolanda fluttered her eyelashes and fixed her gaze upon him as she looked for traces of admiration in his eyes.

However... Her words only made Liam sick!

With a stoic expression, he questioned her in a cold manner, "Why did Julie choose to be with a bastard like Clarence? What did you do to her?! If you want to hook up with a rich man, you should make the effort instead, you bitch! If you dare to take advantage of Julie, I swear to god I will hunt you till the ends of the earth!"

Yolanda didn't take his accusation seriously at all.

However, seeing Liam's concern for Julie somehow made her jealous.

With a dark expression upon her face, Yolanda said, "Liam, we had been married for three years, but you had never cared about me this much before this! Is that bitch, Julie, so good that she is deserving of all these?"

Slap!

A resounding slap was heard as Yolanda endured a hard slap to her face.

Following that, Liam's cold voice was heard saying, "You aren't worthy of mentioning her!"

Hearing this, Yolanda laughed in a craze manner and said, "Fine! I am not worthy, huh? I bet you just can't bear to see Julie being with another man, can you? I did pay her a visit the other day. However. I



merely told her the truth without a single lie! It was Julie's own choice to be with Mr. Norris! What's more, they've slept with each other already!"

What?!

This shocking news sent Liam stumbling, nearly tripping over himself.

"No, that's impossible! It's absolutely impossible!"

Liam's eyes were bloodshot for he didn't believe that Julie would do such a thing!

But at the same time, he started to have his own doubts. Did Julie really choose Clarence?

No, it was impossible!

Liam pushed Yolanda out of the office and shouted angrily, "Get out! You must be lying to me! Julie isn't that kind of person to hook up with another man!"

Having been forcibly removed from the office, Yolanda fumed with shame and indignation.

She stared at Liam with hatred in her eyes and said, "Liam! How dare you consider yourself a man?! How dare you attack me?! Just wait and see. I will force you to kneel in front of me with despair in your eyes the day Kingland Group announces their bankruptcy! It's okay if you don't believe me for now. Sooner or later, you will see with your own eyes that she chose Mr. Norris instead of a loser like you!" ①



## Chapter 451 Regained Confidence

"Send her away!"

Liam instructed Aikin, his breath coming in short, sharp gasps.

He remained alone in the office, using the solitude as an outlet to express his inner emotions.

The documents that cluttered his desk were scattered on the floor in a fit of anger!

One by one, the vases decorating the balcony shattered, adding to the chaos!

"Julie, why?"

Liam, having exhausted his anger, sank to the floor in a desolate corner, a twisted smile of bitterness on his lips.

A laugh that echoed the emptiness within him filled the room as he said, "I chose to give up on her myself. Why can't I let her go now? Julie, even if you did choose to be with Clarence, under what title can I possibly intervene?"

Time seemed to stretch indefinitely until at last, Liam pulled himself up.

The urge to protect Julie from harm stirred in him once more, a determined look returning to his eyes.

With clenched fists, Liam voiced his resolve. "Julie, even if we part ways, I will ensure you never end up with a scum like Clarence! Clarence, do you believe your Riley Group will be the winner? Watch as I trample your pride and joy into the dust at its pinnacle!"



Suddenly, there was a sound of high heels.

It was Vivian!

Alerted by the commotion in the CEO's office, she had hurried over.

In the office, she surveyed the scattered documents and fragments of broken vases, feeling a tightening in her heart.

"Mr. Hoffman, are you alright?"

Julie... I implore you not to take this to heart." Vivian spoke with genuine concern.

Aikin had briefed her about Julie's situation on the way here.

At some point, Vivian realized she had grown indifferent towards Julie.

She was not worried about Julie falling for Clarence's ruse anymore.

By this time, Vivian's heart belonged entirely to Liam! ①

She even found herself gleefully pondering over Julie's predicament! For in that scenario, Liam would be solely hers!

"Leave! It's not your place to bring up Julie!"

Liam's cold tone stunned her, and he sternly told her, "Do not enter the CEO's office without my permission from now on! Aikin, show her out!" ①

Upon hearing this, Aikin timidly entered the room.

After all, it was his careless chatter that had triggered this event.

"Miss Greyson, we should step outside." Aikin gently guided Vivian out of the office with a hushed reminder.



Feeling slighted, Vivian held back her tears as she reluctantly exited. Her heart was filled with a whirlwind of humiliation and resentment. She held Julie responsible for everything!

Why! Even though Julie was with someone else, Liam's heart was still tethered to her!

Back in the office, Liam found himself in solitude for what felt like an eternity.

Images from his past with Julie flashed through his mind.

His emotions fluctuated between laughter and tears.

He gradually regained composure, and the glimmer of confidence returned to his eyes!

Liam reached for his phone and dialed Otis' number. After exchanging customary greetings, he said, "Mr. Olson, the official unveiling of the new phone will take place next Tuesday!"

He had chosen this day deliberately. It was not only the Riley Group's shopping festival, but also Julie's birthday!

"Julie, just wait. I will reclaim you," Liam whispered to himself.



## Chapter 452 The Scheme Of Clarence

Meanwhile, in the Riley Group.

Clarence was berating his team with anger flaring in his eyes.

"Good for nothing! If you can't handle it, fuck off!"

Despite the shopping festival on the horizon, Riley Group's app promotions had tanked.

If this trend continued, it wasn't just about beating Funbuy; even their survival was at stake!

"Mr. Norris, our app is still pretty renowned, right? We'll fix this," Dennis said without thinking, attempting to appease Clarence.

With a fierce turn, Clarence directed his wrath towards Dennis.

A powerful slap sent Dennis sprawling on the floor. ①

Clarence looked down and reprimanded, "What's the fucking point of spewing nonsense like that? As an underling, learn when to keep your mouth shut. Got it? And the incompetent suppliers you brought to the company, have they roped in any users yet? If they're just idling about, they'll be booted out of this group sooner or later!"

Dennis, having been unexpectedly struck, picked himself up without uttering a word.

Just then, Yolanda entered, seething with rage towards Liam.

Her eyes glinted with malice and a wicked smirk played on her lips. Revenge was on her mind.



"Mr. Norris, could I have a word?"

Yolanda hinted for a private conversation with a flick of her eyes.

Clarence, visibly annoyed, asked the others to leave.

"What is it? Spit it out. I have to go on with the meeting!"

His indifferent attitude was totally different from when he was flirting with her.

Yolanda was slightly taken aback but quickly composed herself. Love was fickle, she realized. Money and power, however, brought respect from others.

With a grin, she spilled the beans about Julie.

"Did you know, Mr. Norris? Julie's being nice to you isn't due to affection! She's a corporate spy! Leveraging your trust, she's been relaying information to Liam. And, Julie's heart still beats for Liam!" ①

This revelation left Clarence dumbstruck.

"Say that again?"

Clarence's inflated self-perception crumbled.

The realization morphed into rage, and he was about to ask someone to bring Julie here.

If he couldn't win her with his charm, he'd rape her with brute force!

This was the decision of Clarence.

But Yolanda intervened, "Mr. Norris, relax. Julie isn't worth your wrath. You can have some fun with her and then discard her. But she's still of use to us currently. She wants to spy on the Riley Group,



right? Let's do her a favor! Let her deliver false information to the Kingland Group. Soon, it'll be unclear whose spy she really is!"

Clarence considered this, seeing the merit in Yolanda's plan.

Plus, it aligned perfectly with his covert plans!

"Honey, you're brighter than I thought. You are much better than that loser Dennis! When we succeed in overthrowing the Kingland Group, you'll be its CEO and assist me in managing the company!"

Yolanda didn't buy his words.

Nevertheless, she played along, resting her head on Clarence's shoulder. "I owe it all to you, Mr. Norris. Your guidance has been invaluable!"

Clarence's eyes sparkled with lust and desire at her words.

"I guess I need to mentor you more often."

Everyone retreated after hearing that.

After having sex, Clarence rested on Yolanda's body, out of breath.

"Mark my words, Kingland Group's end is near!" he asserted firmly.



## Chapter 453 I Will Still Do It

The next day, Yolanda went to the Cortez family's house early in the morning.

And as soon as she saw Julie, she said in a panic, "Julie, bad news! Clarence will secretly attack Kingland Group. I heard it with my own ears. In fact, he almost caught me. They bribed several big suppliers of Funbuy, intending to exchange the goods for fake products and sell them to the users. Then Clarence will discover it and report it to the media. They want to ruin the reputation of Funbuy. In this way, Kingland Group will be completely doomed. And Liam will also be driven out of it."

When Julie heard all this, the expression on her face drastically changed.

As the former vice president of Kingland Group, she knew very well in her heart that if this plot succeeded, the Funbuy would completely lose the trust of the users, and no one would use it again in shopping online.

She said anxiously, "Then let's go to Kingland Group now. We need to let them know about this. They should find out who those bribed suppliers are. Let's ask them to deal with it secretly. No word about it should get out to the public."

When Yolanda heard this, the look on her face changed slightly.

She couldn't help sighing in her heart. No wonder Julie was the vice president of Kingland Group before. She could come up with a preliminary solution so soon.

But she hurriedly stopped Julie. "I'm afraid it's inappropriate. Come to think of it, the large-scale self-investigation of such a giant shopping



platform will not only affect the existing business but also make people panic. It will also have a negative impact on the development of the Funbuy. I think we should figure out which suppliers were bribed by Riley Group first. After all, it will be easy for Kingland Group to deal with this matter if we have an accurate list. However, I'm afraid it's not that easy to find out exactly which suppliers were bribed."

After saying this, Yolanda sighed, expressing her powerlessness incisively and vividly.

Julie's expression became solemn. She thought what Yolanda had just said made sense. A large-scale investigation couldn't be done in this situation.

After a long silence, Julie said with determination, "I'll do it. I'll go to Clarence's office to look for the relevant documents or the list of suppliers. Then it will be easy to solve the crisis."

Yolanda couldn't help chuckling inwardly when she heard this. Sure enough, Julie had fallen into her trap.

But, of course, she had to continue pretending. She deliberately put on a worried expression and quickly denied it. "No, absolutely not! It's too dangerous for you to go there, especially with such a purpose. What if Clarence finds out? If he catches you, your parents, and even the Cortez family, will be implicated. It's not easy to appease the anger of the heir of a family with assets worth more than hundreds of billions."

Julie fell silent. She hesitated for a while.

In her mind, the person she was obsessed with constantly enlarged and filled her entire heart.

So she became more determined. She said firmly, "Even if the consequences may be dire for me, I will still do it. This is the only thing I can do for Liám."



When Yolanda heard this, her expression became complicated. Her faith seemed to be a little shaken at this moment.

She smiled at Julie, but she was a little jealous in her heart.

There had never been someone who would do something like that for her.

But in the end, she thought Julie did this because Julie was stupid.

So she told herself inwardly that only a fool like Julie would be loyal to Liam. Julie and Liam were destined to be a pair of lovebirds in the netherworld.





## Chapter 454 The Fake List

Julie soon crossed the doors of the Riley Group and walked in.

She had taken special care in choosing the perfect dress to wear.

Her makeup was perfect, and matched her sexy figure.

She turned heads wherever she went, and wasn't even conscious of it.

This was the first time Julie displaced herself to see Clarence. She was especially uncomfortable, seeing as her intentions weren't exactly pure.

She stopped in front of his office and took a deep breath. "You have to calm down: He can't see through you," she repeated softly to herself.

Before she could open the door, the door was pulled open from inside, and Clarence walked out.

He had just received a detailed message from Yolanda. One that got him very angry.

However, he had to keep his emotions in check for this to work. He feigned pleasant surprise and smiled at Julie. "Julie? What are you doing there? Missed me? Why don't you come in and have a seat?"

As he spoke, he draped his arm around her waist, drawing small circles on her waist with his fingers before helping her to the sofa.

Julie swallowed the bile that rose in her throat and forced a fake smile on her face. "I had nothing to do at home. I thought I'd come and see you."

Conversation didn't come easily. So, they chatted awkwardly.



Julie never forgot why she came. Her eyes darted around, searching for anything useful.

Then, her eyes fell on the safe under Clarence's desk. Bingo!

"Mr. Norris, I'm a little thirsty. Can I have some coffee?" Julie asked cautiously, hoping it would get him out of the office.

Clarence scoffed inwardly. Julie already couldn't wait to have him out of the way, huh? Bitch!

He kept his thought to himself and stood up to go out. There was nothing to worry about since he had everything under control.

"I'll make it for you myself. I recently bought a Synesso Cyncra coffee machine. The mocha coffee that comes out of it is simply delicious. It will take some time though. I hope you're willing to wait."

Julie couldn't be happier. She needed him to stay out for as long as possible.

She kept her face neutral despite her inner joy and said, "I am. Take your time."

Clarence nodded and left.

As soon as the door closed after him, the gentle look on his face faded and was replaced by a cold and hard look.

He wasn't sure how much longer he was going to keep his anger towards Julie tucked away.

"That bitch! I can't believe she loves Liam this much. I've been after her for so long, but she never once came to see me. She finally came today for the first time, and for what? For another man! You ungrateful bitch! You'll pay for this. You'll soon be my slave."



Back in the office.

Certain that the door was locked, Julie wasted no time.

She fumbled around the desk in search of the key to the safe. She found it in the drawer. That was so easy.

Julie then opened the safe and carefully looked through it.

An odd document caught her attention.

She opened it quickly and found a list with names on it.

"Could this be it? The list of the bribed suppliers?"

Julie didn't have time to figure that out. So, she took out her phone and quickly snapped shots of the list.

"How can there be so many people?"

Once she had taken pictures of everything, Julie kept the file back in place, closed the safe, kept the key back in the drawer and walked back to her seat. She took a deep breath and tried to even her breathing.

Meanwhile, Clarence sat in the monitoring room and watched everything that happened in his office.

As soon as Yolanda tipped him, he had a micro camera installed in his office.

He looked at the flustered Julie, anger simmering just below his restraints.

At least, one good thing would come out of this. He said to himself with a smirk, "Oh, Liam, your woman will get you kicked out of the Kingland Group, and I'd like to see how you will react to that. Don't



worry. I'll make sure you see Julie become my slave."





## Chapter 455 Was It Julie

Clarence stepped into his office, a mug of steaming coffee in his grasp.

Feigning ignorance, he donned a fake grin and carried on with his charade.

"Julie, here's your coffee."

Anxiety caused Julie's fingers to tremble slightly as she accepted the coffee and took a cautious sip.

Having attained her goal, she worried that any more delay might betray her intentions. Hastily, she fabricated an alibi, uttering, "I...I need to take care of something at home, so I'll be leaving now."

A cunning grin flashed across Clarence's face, but he made no move to hinder her.

As he watched Julie's retreating silhouette, he murmured under his breath, "I hope you play your part and make yourself useful!"

Meanwhile, at the Kingland Group's CEO's office.

Liam was immersed in reviewing the latest financial analyses of Funbuy.

Thanks to a hundred-billion-dollar infusion and a focus on inventory and logistics, they were gradually seeing returns.

The growth of the Kingland Group was unfolding just as he envisioned.

Thud. Thud.

The knocking sound reverberated through the room.



After receiving anger in his office the last time, Vivian now didn't dare to barge in anymore.

Upon receiving the go-ahead from Liam, she started her briefing. "Mr. Hoffman, the shopping festival of Rileymart app is nearing. It could possibly affect Funbuy's performance. Shouldn't we prepare for this?"

"No need to worry. The marketing team just presented me with Rileymart's stats. Their pre-sale records aren't anything spectacular. They're merely scraping by. Let's concentrate on our growth. You can leave now."

Liam was quite pleased at that moment.

Not only was the acquisition of the Riley Group at arm's length given the current trajectory, but he also had his heart set on bringing Julie back to his home!

That day was rapidly drawing closer!

Just then, a beep emanated from Liam's computer.

An email from an unknown sender had made its way into his private inbox.

The bold subject line immediately caught Liam's attention. "Kingland Group in Crisis (7.23)."

Confusion furrowed Liam's brow. "Who could this email be from? They know my private email address and my birthdate!"

After wrestling with the mystery to no avail, he opened the email to read its contents.

"Many of Funbuy's suppliers have been bribed! Counterfeit products are being used to sully Funbuy's reputation and topple the Kingland Group!"



The email also had an attached image, a list of suppliers!

"Can this be true?"

Liam's eyes nearly popped out of his head as he grappled with the shocking revelations of the email.

In haste, he cross-referenced Funbuy's list of suppliers, and they matched flawlessly!

This was about Kingland Group's commercial confidentiality!

Who could be the sender of this email?

Liam's mind started racing. Such an attack on Funbuy could only be traced back to the Riley Group.

But within the Riley Group, this level of information was top secret. How could it have slipped through?

After racking his brain, Liam could only draw one conclusion. Was it Julie?

She knew his birthday, and all signs seemed to point towards her! ①

Was she getting close to Clarence just to gather information for him?

With these thoughts in mind, a surge of emotion welled up in Liam's eyes.

"Julie, rest assured, your message has been received, and I will certainly conduct a thorough investigation!" Liam said in a whisper.



## Chapter 456 Being Controlled

Then Liam called in Augustine Richardson. He was the manager of the marketing department and was responsible for negotiating with the suppliers.

"Mr. Richardson, I received a report that these suppliers may have counterfeit products. Check their products secretly."

Liam printed out the list of suppliers and handed it to Augustine.

The expression on Augustine's face drastically changed when he heard this. He stammered, "Okay... Mr. Hoffman."

Liam saw Augustine's reaction, but he didn't take it seriously.

He only thought Augustine was tired. After all, the matter of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan made everyone busy.

Liam smiled faintly and asked, "Mr. Richardson, why don't you look well? Have you been under too much pressure because of Funbuy recently? This time, put aside your work first and conduct an inspection of their products. This is our priority. After this, I'll give you a month off, so you can relax."

Augustine nodded in agreement absent-mindedly.

"I understand, Mr. Hoffman."

When he walked out of Liam's office, a bitter smile immediately appeared on his face.

Indeed, he was under too much pressure.

Because his parents were being controlled by Clarence.



Clarence used his parents to threaten him to deliberately expose the news that Kingland Group was selling counterfeit products to discredit the company.

At this moment, he guessed that this task of randomly checking the suppliers was all a trap set by Clarence.

Augustine was an experienced employee, and he had been working in Kingland Group since it was established. He had been busy with the company's business all the time. He also put a lot of effort into the development of the Funbuy app.

In fact, Liam was even his idol.

But now, he was forced to betray Kingland Group.

Augustine's eyes darkened. No matter how unwilling he was, he had no choice but to do it.

At this moment, Liam was in the CEO's office, tapping the table with his fingers, and his eyes were obscure.

He was a little uneasy.

During the inspection, even if they found counterfeit products, it would only stop future losses.

Unfortunately, some of the counterfeits were already sold. Once they were discovered, it would seriously affect the reputation of the Funbuy app.

Regardless of whether it was an email from Julie or not, he had to take measures.

Liam picked up the phone and called Vivian.

He handed the list to her and ordered, "Take this list to the logistics



department. Tell them to stop dispatching the products of these suppliers. Also, temporarily remove their stores from the app. Then draft a statement about the problem with the logistics. Tell them that there is something wrong with the logistics of the Funbuy app, and the delivery of the products will be stopped in some areas. Those customers who have placed orders will be compensated for the delay."

Vivian was surprised. She was originally celebrating the success of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan.

Why did such a big thing happen in just less than two days?

But at this moment, Liam's eagerness made her dare not ask any questions. She hurriedly left the office to carry out the order.

Since Funbuy was a popular shopping app, the statement Vivian released immediately caused countless discussions.

Not long ago, many people enjoyed the benefits of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan, so the reputation of the Funbuy app improved a lot.

Someone even joked, "Is it possible that they don't have enough money to support the subsidy plan anymore, so they stopped the delivery?"

At this time, Clarence also saw the statement. He was so overjoyed that he said to himself, "Liam, after waiting for so long, I finally made you fall into my trap. It seems that bitch's words work for you."

Soon, the Riley Group also made a public statement.

"The real reason why the Funbuy app stopped its delivery this time is that they have been selling counterfeits. At present, some people have discovered it, but they were quieted down by Kingland Group. Now, they keep the products and don't allow the rest of the counterfeits to be delivered. They want to deal with this matter in secret, so they can



sell the counterfeits in the future. The so-called ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan is actually an advertisement for fake products. As a counterpart shopping app, we think the real sources of products are the most basic guarantee for users. If the Funbuy app refuses to admit this fact, we will release the evidence tomorrow."

As soon as this statement spread, the heated discussion intensified even more.

Some people who didn't like to use the Funbuy app immediately came out to ridicule it.

"I have been wondering why an app selling bargains also started to sell branded products. It turns out they are selling counterfeits."

"If you gain petty advantages, you'll suffer a great loss. Do you really think the Funbuy app is generous enough to do charity? One with little intelligence won't be fooled like this."

However, there were also some users who really enjoyed the benefits of the ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan. They came out and spoke for the app.

"As an opponent, the Riley Group used words of slander to excite you immediately."

"Yes, we have really enjoyed the benefits, and the things we have bought are also very good. You are just jealous of it."

Public opinion continued to shift, and the two sides were arguing fiercely.

The next day, Augustine came for a surprise inspection of the trucks of the suppliers on the list. These trucks were returning to the warehouse.

After the inspection, he found that the products were all genuine and



there was no problem with them.

Augustine's eyes flickered. He thought of his parents, who had worked hard to bring him up.

Finally, he took out the counterfeits he had prepared long ago and exchanged them for the real ones.

Then he took photos and videos of the trucks' logo and the counterfeits and sent them to Clarence.

"Mr. Norris, I have done everything you've asked me to do. Can you let my parents go now?"

After receiving the evidence, Clarence checked it. Then he smiled excitedly.

And as for Augustine's request, he replied casually, "Don't worry. Your parents are fine in my place. When Kingland Group is completely destroyed, they will definitely return to you."

Actually, as long as Augustine was still useful, Clarence wanted to keep controlling him.

He would not release his parents at present.

Augustine wanted to protest again, but the person on the other end of the line had already hung up.

He didn't have any bargaining chips in his hand. If he continued being like this, he would only become Clarence's puppet.

At the thought of what he had done, he burst into tears.

"Mr. Hoffman, I'm really sorry."



## Chapter 457 A Mole

In the CEO's office of the Riley Group.

Clarence, upon receiving the evidence, promptly shared it online and declared, "Funbuy brushed aside our warnings and sought to deceive the users.

I won't let those countless users stay in the dark and choose to expose it!"

A video was the most compelling piece of the evidence.

Luxury wallets from Mont Blanc were seen being unloaded from a truck adorned with the Kingland Group's logo, but none bore anti-counterfeit labels.

In that very truck, a sack full of anti-counterfeit stickers was discovered, intended for fraudulent use.

The alleged original products promised in the ten-billion-dollar subsidy program were nothing more than cheap imitations!

As soon as the statement was released, it caused a sensation on the Internet.

And, online gossip mongers, in Clarence's payroll, helped circulate the story of being fooled by forgeries.

Even the netizens who supported Funbuy began expressing regret.

They started questioning the authenticity of their purchases, realizing they might not have noticed they were all knock-offs.

"We've been played by Funbuy for far too long, even standing up for



them previously."

"This despicable app deserves to be banished from the Internet forever!"

"We'll report it to the authorities. We cannot tolerate such a cancerous growth!"

Netizens united in their digital attack on the platform.

This uproar led to numerous Funbuy users demanding refunds and lodging complaints across different outlets.

Such negative publicity impacted Kingland Group's stock market performance, with a consistent decline in their market value.

At Kingland Group, everyone was in disarray due to this scandal.

A wave of panic washed over the organization.

In the CEO's office, Liam was visibly troubled.

He found the turn of events suspiciously bizarre.

"How did Clarence come across such incriminating evidence? Our trucks, responsible for product deliveries, are all dispatched by Kingland Group's logistics department. How on earth did Clarence manage to pinpoint these trucks' locations?"

Liam was highly skeptical, almost convinced that there was a mole within Kingland Group!

Moreover, this mole had to be someone in a position of power.

Liam summoned Aikin and shared his suspicion of a traitor within their ranks.



He provided him with a list of potential suspects. "Keep a covert watch on the logistics and marketing departments. Any irregularities, report them to me immediately!"

Aikin was taken aback.

A ruthless gleam appeared in his eyes as he said, "Mr. Hoffman, I'm onto it right away. If I catch that mole, they're going to wish they hadn't been born!"

By now, Liam had pieced together the puzzle.

Clarence was behind all this!

With a spark in his eyes, he muttered to himself, "So, you're itching for a showdown with Funbuy. Enjoying your manipulative games, are you?"

Meanwhile, the ambiance at the Riley Group was starkly contrasted with the anxiety at Kingland Group.

A celebration party was in progress at the Riley Group.

At this gathering, Clarence couldn't hide his triumphant aura.

Since the exposure of Funbuy's counterfeits, the user base of the Riley Group's app had surged, with their sales figures soaring.

Their shopping festival promotion was finally paying off!

"Ladies and gentlemen, since I took over the Riley Group, we've finally made some achievements. I intend to ride this wave, increase our festival discounts, and completely obliterate Funbuy!"

The staff members echoed his sentiment, witnessing their boss' joyous mood for the first time.



Clarence had already envisioned the day Kingland Group would crumble.

Gazing lustfully at Julie, he felt excited. "Bitch, you will be my plaything soon! Liam, your beloved, will be a mere speck beneath my foot!"

Julie, seated beside Yolanda, whispered anxiously.

With a face as pale as a ghost, she chastised herself. "Yolanda, this is all my fault. It was too late for me to spread the news so that Funbuy failed in dealing with it! Do you think that Kingland Group can survive this time? Will Liam be okay?"

Yolanda, putting on a show of concern, reassured her, "Once public sentiment simmers down, everything will bounce back."

But within her, Yolanda was secretly laughing at Julie.

She thought she really did have foresight, and Julie would be in serious trouble if she continued to associate with a loser like Liam.



## Chapter 458 Make Them Pay

The next day, in the CEO's office of Kingland Group.

Aikin stood in front of Liam, making a report.

"Mr. Hoffman, I delved into the individuals you listed, yet nothing has surfaced..."

His expression was grave, as he blamed himself for failing to aid Liam.

"I had a feeling that you wouldn't be able to uncover anything."

Liam, undisturbed, offered him a reassuring smile. "The mole has just made their move. They are probably well hidden. We're not going to find anything just yet. Eventually, they might just expose themselves."

Public sentiment surrounding the Funbuy app was in a stalemate online.

In the end, counterfeit products wouldn't deal a crippling blow to a corporation.

Some people even vouched for Funbuy after buying valuable items and confirming their authenticity, although these voices were few.

Liam instructed the PR department to release another statement in Kingland Group's name.

"The claim that Kingland Group intentionally sells counterfeit goods is not true. There is, indeed, an issue within our group. The sales of counterfeit items are under investigation. We promise the public an explanation! We will fully compensate any users who have purchased these counterfeits, ensuring their satisfaction. Rest assured, Funbuy is in the public interest. Our ten-billion-dollar subsidy plan is definitely



effective!"

Despite the struggle, Funbuy was showing signs of revival.

Clarence, unable to sit idle, pondered for a bit.

He dialed Augustine's number once again, grinning threateningly. "Your mother keeps pestering me about you. Don't you think you ought to do something more for me to expedite their return?"

Augustine's face hardened at this.

The call was like a recurring nightmare for him.

Each time Clarence called, he would demand that he execute some cruel task, chipping away at his morality.

"And what exactly do you want me to do this time?" Augustine queried in a frosty tone.

Clarence responded outright, without concealing anything, "Of course you will continue to undermine Kingland Group. This time it's simple. You'll find those suppliers involved in the evidence and make them pay for their contract breach! They have to pay, no matter what methods you resort to. Crucially, they should be made to believe this is Liam's wish!"

Clarence laughed wickedly at his own words.

Augustine remained silent for a while. It was tough to slander someone he admired.

After a moment of hesitation, he replied, "Alright, but this time you must release my parents first, in case you break your promise once more!"

Ha ha ha...



His laughter ringing out, Clarence dropped the pretense. "Considering how tough you're acting, I fear you might seek revenge! I'll be frank with you. You could fulfill my command, and I still might not let your parents go. But if you don't do as I say, their demise is guaranteed!"

With that, he abruptly ended the call.

Augustine felt the sting of humiliation, his eyes reddening.

"Mr. Hoffman, I'm sorry!"

The situation was so dire that he contemplated ending his life, but the thought of his sick parents always made him reconsider.

In a hotel, Augustine assembled the suppliers, his voice icy as he chastised them.

"You all were aware of the terms when you signed up with Funbuy right? Now that you're peddling counterfeit items, it would be wise to pay the penalty and willingly terminate the contract. Otherwise, Mr. Hoffman will ensure you never do retail business again!"

This statement incited outrage among the suppliers.

"What? Is Mr. Hoffman accusing us of intentionally selling counterfeit goods?"

"We're all legitimate traders. We've never participated in such acts!"

"This is a set up! We won't pay compensation! At worst, we'll take them to court!"

Augustine was well aware these suppliers hadn't sold counterfeit items.

Yet, remembering Clarence's threat, he steeled himself and retorted "Well, the fake items were traced back to you! And they've caused



considerable damage to the Kingland Group. If this does end up in court, do you really think you stand a chance against Mr. Hoffman? Don't overestimate yourselves. I've got all the legal documents you signed.

If you decide to go to court, you could end up behind bars, let alone paying the penalty!"



## Chapter 459 Denouncement

Augustine's threats slowly worked.

The suppliers exchanged weary glances and exhaled heavily.

They acknowledged the harsh reality that instigating a legal battle would yield no gains, but instead they would be burdened with significant losses.

"Guys, we should just pay the penalty. I'm done dealing with Funbuy. Let whoever wishes take over as their supplier!"

These words of surrender echoed soon, someone starting to fold.

At this time, an elderly supplier, his hair white as snow, pushed his way through the crowd towards Augustine.

Suddenly, he abruptly dropped to his knees, his eyes filled with despair and pleas.

"Could you possibly implore Mr. Hoffman to be lenient with us! We're not selling counterfeits. I've been a sincere supplier all these years. I get up early and go to bed late to make money for the treatment of my dear daughter's illness! She is only ten years old. I can't watch her die!"

The sight before Augustine made him recoil. He took a few steps back.

He was genuinely struggling and felt the urge to show kindness several times.

However, he could only respond coldly, "I... I have no choice. It's Mr Hoffman's orders. I'm simply following them. Don't put me in a tight spot."