

My Dreamy Old Husband Chapter 1496

Even Casper himself wasn't exempt from being the recipient of Cooper's death stare after he'd noticed him visiting a few times. Thereafter, he was intimidated and gradually dared not go to Carmen's house anymore since he had to avoid Cooper every single time. Bailey, however, was different. He ignored Cooper's death stare and went to Carmen's house as he liked whenever he had time, always going over to look for her blatantly. Besides, he even dared ask Carmen out right in front of Cooper, which was something Casper didn't even dare contemplate. After all, he was afraid of being mauled by Chow and Eggplant!

Not just anyone could withstand Cooper's death stare; the few boys who used to visit Carmen's house often were also terror-stricken by Cooper's stare, and even Hope who lived next door didn't dare go over if there wasn't anything pressing.

Hence, Casper couldn't do anything despite seeing Bailey coming over frequently to ask Carmen out.

Bailey was also a very conscientious person. Every time he took Carmen out, he always drove her home on time without spending the night with her or even holding hands. He kept track of the time very well each time, giving Cooper no excuse to blow up that he could only shoot him the death stare. No, in his eyes, it was merely a helpless look.

In the summer, Sophia planned to take the entire family for a vacation; Cooper, Anna, and the others would also be joining. When Sophia asked Bailey over for dinner, she casually noted, "Bailey, we're all going for a vacation. Are you interested in joining us?"

Carmen who was eating perked up her ears as well. She initially thought that Bailey wouldn't be interested, but to her surprise, he instantly agreed. "Sure! It just so happens that I'm thinking of going for a vacation as well."

Thus, Bailey packed a simple suitcase under Cooper's death glare and overtly went for a vacation with the entire family as the invisible old son-in-law.

In the blink of an eye, spring was gone to be replaced by summer. As per Casper's anticipation, Carmen officially entered Bayside University for her second doctorate. I can now bond with her as we go to school and back home together every day! Bailey can't possibly be anywhere there, can he?

"Don't overtax yourself studying every day. You're still young, after all, so don't give yourself so much pressure. Classes are over now, so let's go and grab a bite. I know of a restaurant that has exceptionally delicious food," Casper remarked as he followed beside her after having rushed over to her class when his class let out and successfully met up with her.

Carmen had on Bayside University's uniform and safety glasses with huge frames. Hugging her books to her chest, she walked toward the university gates. It feels great without bodyguards following me 24/7 and everyone turning their gazes on me everywhere I go! I'm just an ordinary student who doesn't even garner a second glance now even as I stroll around campus. Even the air feels sweeter with a hint of freedom. I like this feeling! "I don't feel like eating anything since I got braces," she replied.

"You got braces? Let me have a look!" Reaching out, Casper pried her mouth open. Sure enough, he saw a set of metal braces over her once white teeth, the ugliest and most primitive metal brace at that, rendering her entire mouth significantly bigger.

"Wow! You actually got braces, and it's such an ugly one to boot! What were you thinking?" Casper couldn't understand her at all. This is simply too ugly! Even if she wanted to get braces, there are plenty of choices nowadays, so she totally didn't have to choose such an ugly one.

"You don't understand. This is quick and effective. Besides, the adjustment I need is minute, so I won't need to wear it for long. Most importantly, I can lose weight by getting braces!" Losing weight is the most important thing. Otherwise, I won't fit into the evening gown for my coming-of-age party!

"You didn't need to get braces just to lose weight!" As Casper chased after her, the two of them headed to the university gates while messing around, the scene as harmonious and beautiful as when they were young.

On the way, they soon bumped into the others. Albert, Hope, Ashton, and Poppy had also gained admittance into Bayside University, so they all gathered together to head to Carmen's house for dinner. Hope joined the School of Athletics, Poppy joined the School of Computer

Science, Albert joined the School of Business Management, and Ashton naturally joined the School of Cinematography. Ashton, who rose to fame at a young age, wore a mask since he had a burden to maintain his image as a pop idol.

As they walked toward the university gates exuberantly, they again encountered Hope Fletcher—a lecturer at Bayside University—brushing past them on his bicycle. Every time he passed by the alumni corridor, he'd go in for a look at the person known as 'Quinton Clark' in there. When he saw him, it was as though he saw himself in his past life.

When they reached the university gates, Theo would usually be guarding the gate conscientiously in the guard shack, dressed in his security uniform. Today, however, Carmen spotted him with a cold expression on his face as he bickered with a student the moment she arrived at the university gates.

"Where's your daughter? Don't tell me you truly married her off to a rich man for the betrothal gift? Well? Say something! Where's Carmen Fletcher? Why are you here? Where did Carmen go?" Sure enough, it was Flynn. He put in some hard work during the last few months and gained admittance into Bayside University, but never had he expected to see Theo guarding the gate again just after a few days here.

Beside him, Kimberly was exceedingly chagrined. All jobs require academic qualifications here in Bayside City, and girls without academic qualifications can only get a job with physical labor such as hotel staff, so a girl like Carmen Fletcher can only get married and have babies after getting expelled! I thought she'd disappear from Flynn's life forever, but never had I thought that Flynn still remembers her and is even asking about her here at Bayside University! Carmen Fletcher, Carmen Fletcher, Carmen Fletcher! That's all he knows!

Theo stared at him with a frigid expression on his face. He abhorred this low-quality version of his son, so he didn't bother answering him. Unexpectedly, Carmen suddenly rushed over and dragged the thundering Flynn away. "Have you lost your mind, Flynn Clark? Why are you harassing my father?"

Her sudden appearance surprised Flynn and Kimberly greatly, especially when they noticed that she was wearing Bayside University's uniform. "You... Carmen Fletcher, you actually got into Bayside University as well?" Flynn exclaimed excitedly while clutching her shoulders, seemingly both surprised and delighted.

At the side, Casper got irritated and slapped his hands away. "What are you doing? Remove your filthy hands from my girlfriend's shoulders. Let me tell you, if you harass my girlfriend again, I'll crush you!" he warned as he dragged Carmen away.

As his granddaughter was there, Theo took out his bicycle and gave Carmen a ride home for dinner.

The group of people then left. As Flynn watched them leave, his eyes shone with surprise and delight. It's simply marvelous that she got into Bayside University! He didn't know why he was so ecstatic, but it was simply a matter of fact.

Kimberly, on the other hand, was aggrieved. Why did someone who doesn't belong here show up? Wasn't she expelled, whereupon she went home and married an old man? Why did she appear here? Besides, she was even wearing metal braces, looking awfully ugly!

Kimberly had connections in this university. After all, her name contained royal connotations and meant ruler or chief, as evidenced by the great Lord Kimberly. Thus, she quickly found out that there was no one named Carmen Fletcher among the undergraduate students nor in the prep course. She couldn't get the records for the graduate school, but she was certain that Carmen couldn't possibly be with the graduate school. This means that she didn't get into Bayside University at all! Hah! She's probably here to bag a rich and handsome guy!

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Theo went home with his granddaughter on the bicycle. The moment he stepped in the door, he spotted Bailey, whom he hadn't seen in two months, having a staring match with Cooper. Upon seeing him, he snorted and went into the house. After all, he was also at his wits' end when it came to this thick-skinned old grandson-in-law of his.

When Sophia saw that they'd come home, she rushed out jubilantly and said to Carmen, "You're home, sweetie? Quick, come here and have a look! Bailey brought you back gifts from abroad!"

At the sight of the green-eyed goblin sitting on the sofa in the living room, Casper instantly saw red. Didn't he go back to Europe? Why is he here again?

"You're back, Bailey!" Upon seeing Bailey, Carmen instantly hustled over in delight. On the other hand, Bailey merely nodded. Having not seen him for two months, he seemed to have grown even more handsome, exuding a novel and enticing aura! Carmen mused.

"Come here. I brought a gift back for you." At Bailey's beckoning, Carmen eagerly hurried over.

Meanwhile, Casper was enraged. How weak-willed!

Unexpectedly, Bailey then added, "I brought back gifts for all of you." At the side of the sofa was a huge pile of gifts that were all exquisitely wrapped and adorned with ribbon flowers.

When Carmen opened her gift, she was immediately stunned speechless. "Wow! Is this what I think it is? Oh my God, this is an out-of-print CD! How did you get this?"

"I asked a friend to find it," Bailey answered.

Carmen was over the moon. Recently, she got obsessed with a rock band that was popular 20 years ago and had been collecting the CDs they released back then, but regretfully, there was one she searched for a long time but to no avail. Never had I thought that he would actually find it! "Thank you, Bailey!" She was so gleeful that she almost jumped up and gave him a smacking kiss.

At the side, Poppy interjected sourly, "Ah, how nice it is to receive gifts!"

To her surprise, Bailey looked at her and said, "This is for you, Poppy." Then, he took out a gift box and handed it to her.

Poppy was stunned. "For me?" Still unable to believe it, she looked around in puzzlement before Sophia explained smilingly, "Everyone gets a gift!"

The old son-in-law was indeed zealous, for he brought back gifts for everyone, including Anna, Cooper, and Carmen's uncles. Despite Cooper's staring match with Bailey earlier, he hugged his gift to his chest, reluctant to put it down for even a second. Bailey's gift to him was a handwritten score from his favorite pianist back when he was young, so he truly loved it. Meanwhile, Poppy got a set of Western-European non-mainstream fashionable clothes,

and she seemed besotted as well. Bailey even had gifts for Carmen's friends, including Casper, Nathan, and the others.

He distributed the gifts one by one. At the end of it, he took out a tiny gift and waved a beckoning hand toward the back of the house. "Judge!"

Woof! A husky scampered out in a mad flurry. Then, Bailey unwrapped the gift to reveal an adorable ball. Gratified, Judge left with it in its mouth.

"Tangerine! Orange! Lemon! Gordon! Goldstein!" Upon hearing their names, the few orange cats padded over, meowing all the way. Bailey seemed to know each of them and was even familiar with their respective preferences, having a gift for every single one of them; some of them had gotten collars, while others got clothes.

Everyone in the house, including the dogs and cats, received their gifts. Theo had also received a military coat from Bailey which he really loved despite not being able to wear it for the time being. It was glaringly apparent that Bailey had put a lot of thought into it since everyone was beyond elated at his gifts. Simply put, the old son-in-law's method of winning people over was incomparable with the average person.

After all the gifts had been distributed, everyone had dinner together. Bailey consciously parked his butt on the seat reserved for the 'old son-in-law' that was previously occupied by Michael and was right beside Cooper, which invited his death stare in turn. Everyone who came over for dinner dared not even breathe, save for Bailey who appeared unruffled and even took dishes for Carmen.

The boys who came over for dinner made their escape one by one, and even Casper hightailed it in the end. He wanted to persevere until the very end, but he couldn't even breathe under Cooper's powerful aura. I really can't understand how he can stay calm and unruffled under Cooper's powerful aura. How thick-skinned is he? No, his fortitude extends far beyond anyone's imagination!

Initially, Cooper thought that Bailey would be leaving after dinner, but unexpectedly, Carmen happily went out with him while leading the dog on a leash. "Grandpa, Mom, I'm going out for a stroll with Bailey and walking the dog as well."

Cooper was so infuriated that his eyes almost rolled back in his head, putting him in a dead faint. This won't do! This old grandson-in-law is so capable that I'm not his match at all. I'm

old, after all. Now, he fervently hoped that Michael would regain consciousness as soon as possible. Probably only a thick-skinned person like Michael is his match!

The weather was very cool on the summer evening. As Bailey walked the dog with Carmen, the two of them were almost shoulder to shoulder, discussing studies as they walked. This time, Carmen was doing her graduate studies in jurisprudence. Bailey was very proficient in this area, so he could answer many of her questions.

The two of them then went over to a lawn by the roadside and sat down to rest. Meanwhile, the dog played with a ball nearby. The air in Bayside City had been managed well in recent years, so it was very much refreshing with less haze. As Carmen breathed in the cool evening air, a feeling of comfort engulfed her. Closing her eyes, she enjoyed this rare moment of warmth and tranquility before her.

“When did you get braces?” Bailey asked out of the blue beside her.

“Huh?” Carmen asked, her eyes springing open as she was startled.

Looking at her mouth, Bailey repeated, “When did you get braces?”

Carmen licked her braces. “It has been a few months,” she replied. Bailey seemed to be staring at her lips and the braces housed behind them seriously, making her feel somewhat baffled. I just can’t figure him out. Nope... No one can figure him out.

This man who’d been forced into society for survival’s sake when he was only ten years old had shrewdness so extraordinary that he managed to survive to this day in the brutal world of the adults and establish his hegemony. However, Carmen could only see his kindness, pain, and struggles. All of a sudden, she blurted, “Bailey, do you have a dream?”

A dream? Have I ever had a dream? Retracting his gaze from her braces, Bailey cast his gaze far into the distance. “Everyone has a dream,” he murmured.

“What’s yours? Tell me, please?” Carmen promptly asked.

At this, Bailey chuckled without answering her, merely saying, “It’s a secret.” My dream in the past was only to survive. Today, my first dream has come true, and I now want to live happily with the person I love...

Carmen stared at him with wide eyes. This man is truly the most difficult man to fathom in this world. I can't make out his thoughts, and that's precisely why he's so captivating.

They both watched the sunset together. As the last ray of sunshine bathed them, their hands were already stacked together silently at some time...

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Having studied Bailey, Cooper finally found his flaw and pointed it out before everyone. "Bailey, your education level is too low, so you're not worthy of becoming my grandson-in-law," he declared unceremoniously in front of Carmen and the rest of the family when Bailey was at their house for dinner one day.

Indeed, Bailey's education level was low. He stepped out into society and took over his family business when he was ten years old, so he had no opportunity to return to school anymore thereafter. All he could do was to hire tutors to teach him at home, for it was already arduous for him to survive when he was hard-pressed from all sides. Thus, studying with his peers was practically impossible. While he'd studied systematically and was very capable to the extent that many universities invited him over as a visiting professor, he just didn't have the academic qualifications. In fact, he didn't even have a high school diploma!

The moment Cooper's words were heard, Carmen's reaction was the most intense. "Grandpa, what do you mean by that? Why are you talking about him being worthy or otherwise? We're just friends!" Although we... we kissed the other time, neither of us ever brought that day up again. Therefore, they were still at the beautiful stage where things were fuzzy. Hence, Cooper's proclamation burst the bubble, making the situation exceedingly awkward.

Bailey, who was eating, stilled for a moment, but he said nothing.

Upon seeing this, Cooper was in seventh heaven. Finally, I've found his Achilles heel! Putting on his authoritative air as an elder, he loftily asserted, "My granddaughter will never marry a man who doesn't even have a high school diploma."

All at once, the atmosphere turned awkward, and Carmen's face flushed bright red from mortification. At this time, Sophia hurriedly smoothed things over, exclaiming, "What are you saying, Dad? What's this about marrying and all?" He should at last leave them some dignity! They're now at the beautiful stage where things are hazy, so isn't he just ruining everything by uttering such a remark?

Unexpectedly, Bailey put down his cutlery and said to Cooper solemnly, "I almost forgot to tell you that I've already enrolled for Self-Taught Higher Education Examinations at Bayside University, so I am studying while working. I've already passed two subjects so far, and will soon be receiving my bachelor's degree from Bayside University." Then, he continued, "When I've gotten my bachelor's degree, I'll continue studying for a master's degree."

Cooper opened his mouth, but upon realizing that he had nothing to say, he muttered, "Being self-taught isn't something that's so easy..."

From then on, Bailey had a new reason to interact with Carmen—having her teach him.

Subsequently, Casper noticed that Bailey was often showing up in the university, so he made discreet inquiries. Only then did he know that Bailey had actually enrolled for Self-Taught Higher Education Examinations (STHEE) in Bayside University! For that reason, he often came to the university to attend lectures. He even applied for a bachelor's degree in law, which was precisely Carmen's course, so he seized the opportunity to sit in on her classes.

Cooper had truly shot himself in the foot this time. After all, this was a trick Michael had used previously!

Furthermore, Bailey got a bicycle from somewhere, so he even often used it to commute to and fro while giving Carmen rides. Thus, they went all around Bayside University like a couple.

Casper was so infuriated that he saw red. Bailey is simply a prodigy, an expert in seizing any and all opportunities to advance his intentions!

Someone else who was likewise disgruntled was Flynn. He searched for Carmen all over the campus the entire day as though having nothing better to do. On the other hand, Kimberly said that Carmen didn't get into Bayside University at all, but he didn't believe that. And sure enough, he often spotted her on campus. She even seemed to have gotten herself a new boyfriend—a green-eyed international student who was taking STHEE. Since there were few green-eyed international students in the university, Bailey naturally became the most conspicuous as he was also the most handsome among them all.

Finally, Flynn managed to ambush Bailey and Carmen who came out on a bicycle after having kept watch at the university gates multiple times. Seething, he stopped them on the spot. "Get down from there, Carmen Fletcher!"

Braking, Bailey stared at him coldly. Flynn, on the other hand, rushed over in a few strides to grab Carmen. "This is your boyfriend? A self-taught examinee with no future to speak of?" he lambasted.

Carmen nudged her glasses. "What a lunatic! Let's go, Bailey."

Right now, Bailey wasn't in the mood to contend with Flynn either, since he had to rush back to Carmen's house for dinner. Thus, he pedaled the bicycle to leave, but unexpectedly, Flynn held his bicycle still. "You're not allowed to leave!" he barked. I'm just about to lose my mind! How could she find such a worthless boyfriend? As her ex-boyfriend, I really can't take it! "You must dump him today! There's no future in getting together with this man!" he threatened.

At this, Carmen got off the bicycle to reason with him amicably. To their surprise, a pale and slender yet harsh hand suddenly shot out from behind the arrogant Flynn and grabbed him by the collar effortlessly. In the next instance, a wintry female voice cut through the air like a sharp blade, piercing right into Flynn's ear. "Kid, if you continue harassing my sister, I'll make your life a living hell."

"Who's this?" Flynn glanced over his shoulder indignantly, only to see a lady who was about his height standing behind him, looking all formidable in military uniform.

It was the military training day for freshmen on the next day, so people from the military were already here. Military green buses were also parked in the campus since all freshmen would be going to military camp the next morning for military training. Therefore, it was no surprise to see people in military uniform within campus.

The moment Flynn saw the lady, all the arrogance in his expression drained away because he glimpsed a pair of green eyes. The Fletcher Family had always been the director of Bayside University's military training. In the past, Joel had been the one in charge, but he retired the year before. Thus, he was replaced by someone else who also had the last name Fletcher, and it was a woman at that.

Rumor had it that the woman was extremely capable, having achieved extraordinary prestige in the military at a young age. She was the eldest daughter of Joel, who was the patriarch of the Fletcher Family, and she was no less competent than her father. It was her first time handling the military training last year, and the sophomores were still wearing terrified expressions when they spoke of her, for she was even more brutal than her father! That woman had a pair of unique green eyes, a rare mixed-blood military officer in the Cethosian military. Military officers dubbed her 'Steely Green-Eyed Military Beauty', and her name was Lorelei Fletcher.

At this moment, Flynn noticed the pair of green eyes. As his eyes moved toward her military uniform, his heart jolted, and he froze from abject fright. It's Lorelei Fletcher!

Lorelei, on the other hand, had committed his countenance to memory. Then, she ordered the deputy officer beside her, "Deputy Washington, remember this face and take 'good care' of him in the following month."

Deputy Washington glanced at Flynn. He's very easy to remember. His face seems to be carved from the same mold as Taylor Murray. Nodding, he solemnly replied, "Understood, General." This kid is done for.

Flynn was so terrified that he almost went to his knees, and even his tongue was in knots. "General, I..."

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Jumping with joy, Carmen latched herself to Lorelei. "Lola! When did you arrive?"

Lorelei warmed up to Carmen upon seeing the latter. "We'll be welcoming the freshers today. They seem to be a little disobedient! How dare a bunch of newbies be so arrogant?"

The girls walked away while they chatted, but Lorelei didn't speak with Bailey when they saw each other, as they both considered it sufficient as a greeting when they exchanged looks earlier. Therefore, Bailey pushed his bike while walking beside the girls as they spoke, all the while mentally exclaiming on how Lorelei had bloomed into her true self by staying with the Fletchers; that was where she truly belonged.

Lorelei was feared among the freshers. Furthermore, Flynn Clark had his name called out directly by her earlier, so he almost burst into tears out of his intense fear for her. At that moment, Poppy appeared out of nowhere to scare him. "Aha! You're done for! The general called for you! Flynn, you should be prepared! The following month will be hell for you!"

Flynn was on the verge of tears. As if having realized something, he asked Poppy, "Is Carmen the commanding general's sister?"

However, his question went unanswered as Poppy left to flatter Lorelei, or else it could easily be her turn to get singled out for the coming month. Flynn stared at Carmen—who seemed to be close to Lorelei—in confusion while she hugged Lorelei. She seemed to be totally different from who I thought she was! Lorelei hailed from the prestigious Fletcher Family, so does Carmen being her sister mean that she is also a Fletcher? No, that's impossible! How could a Fletcher possibly work as a mere security guard?

Unfortunately, he would never get to know the truth, nor did he have time to brood on the subject any longer, as the military training would soon begin. Lasting for a period of a month, the training was an obstacle that one would be required to pass if one wished to enter Bayside University. Every year, there were a lot of students who would voluntarily drop out of the university as they couldn't handle the training.

On the other hand, Lorelei already knew of Bailey and Carmen's relationship. The Fletchers were also keeping a close eye on them. Cooper's nuclear bomb and the Fletchers' army were all targeting Bailey like thousands of knives that were pointing at him, so he had a lot of pressure on him. After all, being an old son-in-law was never easy. However, Bailey chose to go down that road nonetheless.

The sisters parted ways after briefly catching up with each other, since Lorelei had a job to do; she still had to train a bunch of youngsters. Poppy, Hope, Ashton and Albert, who were

all among the same batch of freshers, were attending to Lorelei in hopes of getting on her good side, since they knew the military training would be taking a toll on them.

Upon leaving the school, Bailey rode on his bike with Carmen sitting behind him. While on their way back, Carmen suggested out of the blue, "Bailey, why don't we join the military training too?"

She never knew what the military training was about, as she never was involved in it. Although the Fletchers would organize similar trainings for their children every summer, she missed out on all of them as she was studying away from home. Initially, she intended it as a joke, but unexpectedly, Bailey agreed to it without hesitation. "Sure."

By the next day, the two of them got onto the bus that would take them to the military base. Seeing them on the bus devastated Poppy. "Why are you two here? You can literally go do anything else if you have too much free time to spare!"

However, Carmen didn't answer her. Instead, she took a nap while leaning against Bailey's shoulder. In turn, he held her shoulder too, which seemed to indicate that their relationship was making rapid progress. Nevertheless, Bailey still held on to his principle, for he would never cross that final line before she was eighteen. The previous incident was merely an accident considering that he was drunk.

On the other hand, Casper also applied to join the training after catching wind of their attendance, but he quickly realized that he had no business joining it in the first place. Carmen had a comfortable nap while leaning against Bailey's shoulder before waking up at the military base.

Bailey looked extraordinary in the military uniform. Not only was he tall and handsome, but his emerald eyes gave him an air of mystery. His blond hair was also noticeable within the crowd who all had black hair. The military uniform he wore gave him an added advantage to attract the attention of young girls. As soon as they arrived at the base, Carmen noticed that a lot of girls were trying to strike a conversation with him as well as getting his contact.

The sight of it irked Carmen, so she hurried over to hold his hand, declaring her relationship with him before dragging him away just like a kitten trying to protect its food from being taken away. Bailey shook his head with a smile on his face, all the while turning his palm around to hold her hand and allowing her to drag him away. From then on, they had a tacit

agreement to hold hands whenever they met up. Their relationship had seen major progress throughout the training program.

Since they were the ones who took the initiative to join the training, Lorelei wasn't about to go easy on them, so she assigned them into the Superb Company. Almost all of the descendants from the Four Great Families and the Yard Family were assigned to that company due to their parents' request. Contrary to the other parents who were worried that their children might suffer during the training program, the Four Great Families all put in requests to increase the intensity of their children's training.

Lorelei oversaw the company's training personally, as she was adamant to go about things the right way. Therefore, they started off their first day of the training program with a so-called 'death match'.

Casper rubbed his palms together expectantly. With ten years of experience in mixed martial arts, he volunteered to join Bailey's group to get a chance to fight him. He even signaled to Hope and Ashton to join him in the opportunity to defeat Bailey.

However, Hope shook his hands to indicate that he dared not join in the fray, nor did Ashton agree to it. The latter needed to maintain an immaculate outward appearance, as his career depended on it. Out of them all, Albert feared Bailey the most, as he didn't want Carmen to clobber him like when they were still kids if he ever laid a finger on Bailey.

In the end, Casper stood in front of Bailey alone while saying savagely, "Bailey, we've known each other for a long time. I heard that you learned martial arts, so I'd like to have a match with you! Come on! You don't have to hold back! Give me your best!"

"Sure. Let's fight."

With that, Casper got a good beating from Bailey in front of all the girls on the first day of the training, being repeatedly pummeled to the ground again and again, and again. Finally, Casper arrived before Carmen with bruises all over his face while he wept. "Bailey hit me! He hit me! Look at what he had done to me!"

However, Carmen didn't take pity on him. "You got what you deserved! Bailey and Lola are from the same family, so you should've known how strong he is just by seeing how strong Lola is!" Bailey wouldn't have survived if he were weak.

With that, Casper left tearfully with Hope's support. In spite of his spectacular defeat, Casper still refused to admit it, so he continued to compete with Bailey in every other way he could find, only to realize that he seemed to fall short in all regards when it came to Bailey.

A month later, the military training ended with Casper having bruises all over his face. On the other hand, both Carmen and Bailey had a tan when they returned. They had also gotten to the stage of holding hands all the time with each other.

As usual, Cooper maintained his deathly glare when he met Bailey. He had arranged a group of people to join the military training, hoping that they could teach Bailey a lesson, but all of them wound up being intimidated by him. Geez! That bunch of cowards!

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Even Cooper himself was beginning to acknowledge that he no longer stood a chance against Bailey by now, say less of anybody else. He was getting older, so it was time to hand things over to the next generation. Now, Bailey was the young, determined, and ambitious one, whereas Cooper had aged, so he was no longer the former's opponent. Therefore, he could only watch as Bailey dated his granddaughter.

After the military training, Carmen's eighteenth birthday was approaching fast, which would mark the beginning of her adulthood. Sophia was extremely busy with preparing the Bayside City ladies' ball, which was intentionally held during Carmen's birthday.

The ball held this year was of an unprecedented scale, and the venue was far more lavish than the previous ones. All costs were borne by the Michels, Yards and Mitchells, so it was within reason that Carmen should be the center of attention. It was a silent agreement among all the attendees that the other ladies would be required to take the backseat. Since the hosts were the ones to bear all the costs, nobody complained about the arrangement. Moreover, they were even hoping to get an invitation to the ball, as being invited as a guest was in itself a great honor.

The event would mark the coming-of-age of the nameless girl who was one of the most prestigious ladies in upper class society, who was also Michael and Sophia's daughter, as

well as Cooper and Anna's granddaughter. She would be officially showing herself in the upper class society of Bayside City, so all eyes were on the event.

Carmen already made her debut under another pseudonym when she was a kid. After shooting some films and reality shows, she retired to study abroad. There was no news of her since then, so the public seemed to have forgotten her altogether.

On the other hand, the Fletchers and Mitchells were also extremely protective of her. Nobody was able to capture even a single photo of her ever since her retirement from stardom, so people could only make conjectures of her current appearance according to movie stills that she was in when she was younger.

Carmen treasured the days when she could hang out in Bayside University without restrictions, as well as without needing to conceal her appearance. Nobody would spare her a glance, as she was but a nerdy-looking girl with braces that could easily blend into a crowd. Not only could she enjoy food at hawker stalls, but she could also sit with her legs crossed, or even dig her nose and go out without washing her face.

However, she couldn't hide forever. After she turned eighteen, she would be an adult. She had to start managing her family's company, so she could no longer hide from the public. Forever lost was her freedom, as growing up meant having various limitations being placed on her. Therefore, she asked Bailey on a date on the eve of her eighteenth birthday to have one last feast at the hawker stall outside her university.

Targeting the university students, the street vendors on the street near the entrance of Bayside University sold a lot of cheap and tasty food. In a few gulps, Carmen chugged down some coke directly from a bottle. She set the bottle down on the table with a loud thud when she had enough, and then wiped her mouth before letting out a gross burp. Knowing that it was probably her final chance to do so, she treasured the moment. She wouldn't be able to do so from now on, as she would be required to act like an elegant lady befitting of her status.

The hawker stall that they were at was indeed a stall in its simplest form, equipped with only a single table as well as two stools. Standing at a height of a hundred and ninety centimeters, Bailey could only sit on the ground, using some newspapers as a cushion. They ordered a lot of grilled meat while enjoying it using disposable cutlery.

The stall was only popular because of its cheap price and delicious food, while the rest of the dining experience was lousy at best. However, Bailey didn't seem to mind at all, as he finished all of the food that they ordered, including those that Carmen didn't manage to finish.

After their meal, Carmen let out a burp while looking at Bailey. "I'll be turning eighteen soon, so do you have a present that you would like to give me?"

Instead of giving her an answer, Bailey scooped up the huge bottle that she was drinking from just now to chug down a mouthful of coke before setting it down again, letting out a burp in the process. Amused by his actions, Carmen chuckled merrily; she thought Bailey was a fun man to be with.

While she was waiting for Bailey's reply, Flynn seemingly emerged out of nowhere once again. "Carmen, why are you here?"

Burping, Carmen turned to see Flynn and Kimberly. Both of them were wearing fine, branded clothing which were a mismatch to their environment. Upon hearing Carmen burp, Kimberly covered her nose while scrunching up her face in contempt. "Let's go, Flynn. This place is disgusting." This is sickening. How could people eat in a place full of germs like this? I suppose this is all poor people could afford.

Meanwhile, Carmen retorted in irritation, "Can't you see we're eating?"

Flynn examined the food in bewilderment. "How could you be so degenerate? These things are just—" The food Carmen was eating looked repulsive to him, so Flynn couldn't even imagine eating them.

On the other hand, Carmen didn't want to speak to Flynn, for she realized that Flynn and her were too different. In contrast, Bailey and her were birds of a flock. Not a lot of people were willing to enjoy street food with her. Even though Casper kept her company twice, he always got an upset stomach after going home, so Bailey made for better company. He was trying his best to adapt to her family and lifestyle, as well as her habits and preferences.

In the meantime, Flynn was still chiding Carmen. The longer he spent observing her, the more disgusted he was. He even felt anger and disappointment toward Carmen for willingly engaging in such depraved activities. It was, after all, a matter of upbringing and social status. Flynn never needed to work, nor was he accustomed to eating street food. Having gotten used to living a luxurious life, he didn't even know the prices of groceries.

All of his friends hailed from rich families. They collected watches and cars, living a sheltered life that led them to be ignorant of the sufferings of others. His girlfriend, Kimberly, was of a similar disposition. She had rich girls as friends whom she would talk about makeup and accessories with. Those were stuff that Carmen would never get her hands on. The amount they spent on a meal was enough to sustain Carmen for a whole year, and the price of any article of clothing they wore would be enough for her to buy clothes that would last for the rest of her life.

Kimberly also received an invitation to attend the ladies' ball, which was something that someone at the bottom of the social pyramid would never get to know and join in on; they practically lived in two different worlds.

It wasn't until then that he knew how different they were. While Flynn would never eat street food with Carmen, her current boyfriend was willing to do so. Gritting his teeth, Flynn left without a word, as if having made a decision. This time, he was finally able to leave her behind; even if they met each other again in the future, he would treat her like a stranger.

There was a time when he used to want to spend his life with Carmen, as he never met someone as intelligent and kind as her. Even if she was no better than other people, she was at least better than Kimberly in both regards. However, they could never get together. His family would never agree to the match due to the fact that Carmen couldn't help his family climb the social ladder like how Kimberly could. It wasn't until after losing her that he came to know that she already had a place in his heart, but unfortunately, they could never get together.

Meanwhile, Carmen paid them no heed. Instead, she focused on finishing her coke before letting out another burp. Hearing that nearly made Kimberly puke. She hoped that Flynn could see clearly now that Carmen wasn't on the same level as him, so he should stop pining after her.

After filling up their bellies, Carmen paid for the meal before leaving. While on their way home, she walked hand-in-hand with Bailey. The setting sun cast its rays on them, while Carmen was calculating how many more meals she would need to buy in order to repay Bailey for the meal that he paid for. Seemingly having recalled something, she repeated the question she asked earlier. "You have yet to tell me what you're planning to give me as a present."

Stopping in his tracks, Bailey held her hand. Then, he lowered his gaze to stare at her seriously. "Would you like to know?"

She nodded expectantly. "Of course!"

Falling into silence, Bailey held a gentle gaze in his emerald eyes before stepping forward all of a sudden to kiss her on the lips.

Later that day, Carmen yelled as soon as she got home, "Mom, do you have any hemostatic lozenges and anti-inflammatory mouthwash? Bailey cut his tongue on my braces, so he's bleeding heavily!"