

Chapter 3 Lilly's Eight Uncles To The Rescue!

Everything happened so fast that the Hatchers had no time to react.

By the time Stephen rushed out, he saw Anthony preparing to get into his car and drive off. However, he had not been in time to see Gilbert brushing the snow off Lilly and picking her up from where she had been kneeling by the gate.

"My goodness! It's Mr. Anthony Crawford!" Stephen plastered a bright smile onto his face and greeted the other cheerfully. "What brings you here? It's an honor to have you visiting our humble abode!"

By then, Richard, Paula, and some of the Hatcher servants had hurried out to join Stephen as well, their faces wreathed in smiles of welcome.

When they saw Anthony's stern, aloof countenance, they became even more fawning and obsequious.

Anthony Crawford was the current head of the Crawford family's business empire and the CEO of Crawford Holdings!

The Crawford family was one of Clodston's four influential families; everyone wanted to butter them up and curry favor.

A true aristocratic family like this with old money and such deep ties to Clodston was rare. The Crawfords were an elusive, mysterious entity; they kept themselves out of the limelight. The only thing anyone in Clodston knew for sure was that the Crawfords had eight sons, but even then, few had even set eyes on them.

Anthony was occasionally featured in the headlines of the financial news, which was why the Hatchers had recognized him.

"Mr. Crawford, please come in! It's freezing out here. We'd love to have you stay a little while if you don't mind such humble surroundings," Richard said enthusiastically.

"Yes, yes, please do come in and have something hot!" Stephen chimed in, smiling.

Now that they were in the presence of a truly distinguished person, all the Hatchers could not help trying to ingratiate themselves with him.

The Ador Hatcher Corporation was in dire straits; for the Hatcher family, this was a catastrophe.

However, just a word from Anthony would revive their flagging fortunes!

If luck favored them, they might even become one of Clodston's top ten influential families...

Anthony's face betrayed no hint of expression; instead, he studied Stephen with keen eyes.

Was this Lilly's father?

Still without expression, Anthony declined Richard's offer coolly and enigmatically. "Very well, Mr. Hatcher and family."

Without another word, he got into his car and drove off.

The Hatchers stood there, confused and dazed, watching him leave.

Paula was the first to speak. "Mr. Crawford said very well... Does that mean he's intending to help us?"

Richard frowned. "Given his expression, I don't think he meant anything complimentary."

Stephen ordered the servants to enlighten him about what had happened earlier.

They related how the Crawfords had shown up en masse at the Hatcher Mansion and taken Lilly away, and that a man in black had stripped off his coat and wrapped it around her, cradling her in his arms. He had also identified himself as her uncle...

When Stephen heard this, he was thunderstruck. Suddenly, everything became terrifyingly clear.

It was common knowledge that the Crawfords had eight sons and a daughter. However, the daughter's health was frail, and she had never appeared in public before.

Did this mean that the woman he had rescued four years ago was the Crawford family's one and only precious daughter?!

The rest of the Hatcher family felt their hearts sinking. How they bitterly regretted their actions!

Paula's lips trembled. "So Jean was the Crawfords' daughter... hurry, we need to go and get Lilly back..."

They would never have forced Lilly to kneel in the snow if they had known!

In fact, they would have treated her like a goddess and worshiped at her feet!

Stephen regretted his actions as well; when he recalled how he had disciplined Lilly so harshly, he felt uneasy.

Angrily he snapped, "How are you going to get her back? Do you think we can walk in and take her away just like that?"

Richard frowned so hard his brow looked like a wrinkled prune. After a long moment of consideration, he said, "Well, regardless, we're still Lilly's blood relations. We're her grandparents, after all! The Crawfords can't deny that, no matter how angry they are. Then again,

Lilly did cause Debbie's miscarriage, that's a fact..."

All they had wanted to do was to teach Lilly not to be an irresponsible little liar!

Unfortunately, Stephen had let his temper get the better of him and had disciplined her more severely than he should have...

The Hatchers felt confident that they would be able to clear up any misunderstandings with the Crawfords. All they had to do was to have a satisfactory explanation for everything. Once that was settled, they would be able to look forward to a future of wealth and prestige...

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Instead of returning to Clodston after rescuing Lilly, the Crawfords went straight to the nearest hospital.

The hitherto vacant VIP suite in South Town's best hospital was now a hive of frantic activity.

No one dared to raise their voices. The atmosphere was extremely tense, punctuated by the sounds of hospital equipment beeping and doctors and nurses hurrying to and fro.

Hugh Crawford paced back and forth with the help of his walking stick. "Why are they still in there?" He muttered fretfully.

Anthony glanced at the time, then gently told his father, "Dad, you should sit down."

Lilly had immediately been whisked off to the emergency room as soon as they reached the hospital. Gilbert had gone with her; up until now, neither of them had emerged.

In the emergency room, Gilbert examined Lilly's bruised body with shaking hands.

Broken bones were the worst thing that could happen in cases of severe frostbite. A more detailed examination revealed that Lilly had been badly beaten; in fact, her arms, ribs, and shins had been fractured.

There were numerous patches of frostbite all over her body. Some of the areas were so severely frostbitten they would require surgical intervention.

Lilly was only three or four years old, and she had been made to undergo such torment...

Hot tears stung Gilbert's eyes. Leaning down, he murmured, "Lilly, this is your Uncle Gilbert. Can you hear me? If you can, please hang in there. You'll make it through, I promise..."

Lilly's eyes were tightly closed, but she had the oddest sensation of her body feeling very light and warm all over. It was the first time she had ever felt so comfortable.

Everything was very quiet, except for a voice by her ear that constantly murmured, "Lilly...Lilly dear...little Tulip...Can you see me? Can you hear me?"

Who was this mysterious person?

Lilly tried very hard to open her eyes, but she was unable to do so.

She wanted to reply that she could hear this person talking to her as well, but she could not make a sound, no matter how frantically she tried.

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It took three hours of surgical procedures before Lilly was out of danger, and the doctors all felt this was a miracle!

The little girl was wheeled into a hospital room, IV tubes plastered all over her body.

Gilbert's face was stony as he handed Anthony the report from Lilly's examination. When the Crawfords read it, they were incensed.

Hugh growled in fury, "A fine, upstanding bunch, these Hatchers! They even had the nerve to lay hands on a three-and-a-half-year-old child!"

Anthony had already done a background check on the Hatcher family. In a frosty voice, he replied, "The Hatcher family's business goods are under suspicion of being contraband. The company is in pretty desperate straits. Recently they've been trying to find some point of connection so that we'll help them."

Hugh merely laughed derisively. "Help them? They can count themselves lucky if I don't ruin them entirely!"

The old gentleman was so enraged that he wanted to tear the entire Hatcher family to pieces there and then.

"Don't worry, Dad," Anthony answered. "They won't last long."

Hugh bit his lower lip and fell silent. After a while, he murmured, "Then how about Jean...what's happened to her...?"

Anthony did not say anything, merely stayed silent.

Clodston and South Town were around 1200 miles apart.

Four years ago, Jean had somehow found her way to South Town, seriously ill and having lost her memory. Stephen had found her, and taken her home.

She had almost died giving birth to Lilly but miraculously recovered and held on for another two years before succumbing to her illness, leaving Lilly alone in the world.

The Crawford brothers' beloved sister had died quietly in some remote town without a nod to her status or even a mention of her name...

Anthony's fists clenched tightly as his anger grew; the expression on his face became even stonier.

Hugh did not dare probe any further; he was afraid he would not be able to handle the truth.

Gilbert asked, "Why would they beat Lilly like that?"

Anthony replied in a voice as cold as ice, "Stephen Hatcher's wife, Debbie, fell downstairs and had a miscarriage. Stephen believed that Lilly pushed her."

The other Crawfords could not help frowning at this.

While this discussion was taking place, the Hatchers had finally tracked Lilly to the hospital.

Anthony's assistant hurriedly entered the room and said in low voice, "Mr. Anthony, the Hatchers are here. They want to see their granddaughter..."

Anthony gave a scornful bark of laughter, then ordered, "Turn off the heating outside on this floor and open the windows. Let them wait."

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Stephen, Richard, and Paula waited outside on the top floor corridor for a very long time.

The VIP suites on this level were located inside an access-controlled door; the Hatchers were in the outer area, so they were unable to go in.

Anthony's assistant had arrived earlier, asking them to wait for a while, then had left. The Hatchers had not seen him since.

Paula grumbled, "Why won't they let us in? Lilly's our granddaughter, after all! Why would they make us wait outside here?"

Stephen snapped, "Oh, just wait!"

He had beaten Lilly more severely than intended; it was understandable that the Crawfords would be angry.

However, the Hatchers soon realized that something was amiss. The corridor was rapidly getting colder. Not only that, their waiting area was beside the windows, and the frosty winter wind blew in, causing them to shrink away and shiver from the cold!

"This weather is dreadful! Nobody can wait around like this!" Paula, who had been pampered and sheltered her entire life, could not take it anymore.

"Stephen, you'd better find someone and ask what's going on!" Richard agreed, frowning heavily.

If the Crawfords were angry, deliberately making the Hatchers wait for a while was understandable. However, they had already been here for half an hour; that was a bit too long.

No one would be able to stand waiting in such bitterly cold weather.