

## **Midnight 681**

### **Chapter 681: He Couldn't Deny It**

It was early in the morning.

The rain stopped, the thunder ceased, and the wind went eerily silent.

Volunteers were cleaning up the mess left by the debris flow and caring for the injured who had been saved out last night.

Inside a single tent for the injured, Cecelia's eyelashes fluttered, and slowly she opened her eyes.

She had a terrible headache and a sore throat. The rain last night brought on a bad cold.

Then she stretched her arms and legs, relieved to find that she was nothing serious.

The scenes of last night came into her mind.

She sat up with elbows and looked down at herself. Her clothes had been changed, and she was now clean inside and out. The scrapes on her arms and legs had been medicated and bandaged.

Looking around, she fixed her eyes on a figure in the corner of the tent. Kevin curled up in a chair with his eyes closed.

He was still in his yesterday's clothes, dusty and torn. His hair was a little untidy, and his face haggard.

The fingers were lapped with white gauze.

Her heart beat thick. His fingers were badly hurt after he dug for hours last night to save her.

A wave of emotion swept through her heart.

She lifted the blanket on her, coming up to him.

"Kevin..."

Kevin woke up with a start, looking at her.

She was awake, hugging herself.

"Do you feel alright?" He asked, a little embarrassed.

"Well, yes." Cecelia looked at him with her eyes glittering.

"I asked a nurse in the rescue team to change your clothes and give you a bath last night," he explained, afraid she might misunderstand.

"Oh, really?" She looked disappointed, still gazing at him.

Kevin avoided her eyes.

"You're still running a fever. I'll get you some antiphlogistic medicine and antipyretic," he said as he staggered up.

"Don't move!" Cecelia gripped him by the arm and said anxiously, "You've hurt yourself! Show me your hands. Does it matter? Did you see a doctor? There's no good doctor here. Let's go back home now, and I'll take you to the best doctor to treat your hands."

She couldn't imagine how he managed to dig her out with his own hands.

If he couldn't get timely treatment for his hand, they might wither up and become useless!

He looked at her nervous face, and suddenly, a smile as bright as a firecracker exploded across his face.

"You're laughing?" Cecelia, noticing his smile, whispered with tears. "You're a genius at games. Why dug with your hands? You are not a transformer! What if your hands..."

"I'm fine." He raised his bandaged hand and wiped her tears away.

She stopped sobbing and gazed upon him and vaguely remembered he had given her mouth-to-mouth breathing after she was saved out.

Aware of the heat in the atmosphere, he withdrew his hand and turned.

"You shall have a rest first..."

As his last word fell, Cecelia threw her arms around his waist, pressing herself on his back.

"Kevin, I know you have feelings for me... Let's be together, okay?"

She never took him as her brother.

There was a long silence before Kevin said with a trembling voice, "I'm your half-brother... Do you know what it's called if we're together?"

Incest.

It was a shame to the Smith family, and they would be laughed at by everyone.

They would never be blessed by anyone.

When he saw her buried alive last night, there had been a moment when he had lost control, and the hidden beast had burst forth.

But now, his cool head was back.

He had to maintain his sanity.

The girl in front of him was his half-sister.

She could do as she wanted regardless of anyone's feelings, but he couldn't.

Cecelia was silent for a moment, her little face frowned as if she wanted to explain something, but she could only bite her lip and say, "Let's find a place where nobody knows us. I don't believe that we can't find a place to accept us!"

"So you're going to give up your family and have them disown you?" Kevin shook his head in disapproval.

She paused, gritting her teeth, "I want nothing but you! You may rest assured that my parents will not blame me, and they will understand me. I don't have to give them up, they will not disown me."

Kevin frowned. How was that possible?

He dismissed this as nonsense, turned around, and took her hand slowly away from his waist.

"That's enough. You should go."

"Kevin!" Cecelia's eyes were reddish about the rims. "I can go, but look me in the eye and tell me, you really don't like me? If I wasn't Robert's daughter if I wasn't your sister if I was just a girl not related to you, would you be with me?"

If he had no feeling for her, how could he have rushed to save her with both hands, risking his life?

He stared at her, wanting to reject her as cruelly as he had done before, but somehow, he could not say it again.

In his heart, there was a voice answering her.

He would be with her.

Had she not been related to him, he might have been with her early.

He couldn't deny it.

The wilful brave girl had already walked into his heart.

At first, he felt she had something in common with Savannah, who had been obstinate and stubborn.

But slowly, he didn't know why and how he was attracted to herself.

But why, why was this girl his half-sister?

He didn't reply, but Cecelia had heard his answer, and, with a bright smile on her face, she rose on her toes, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the lips.

Her lips were soft as he had tasted the night before, much warmer this time.

For a moment, he was lost in the kiss, and for the first time, he could not help reacting. His tongue tentatively stroked hers.

Unconsciously, he pulled her into his arms and kissed her hard, pushing his tongue into her mouth. He seemed to forget all trifles and worries and put aside their relationship and identity.

He fastened the tent flap so that no one would come in, and then they moved to the folding bed as they undressed each other.

"Kevin..." She closed her eyes, lying down stiffly on the temporary bed.

**Chapter 682: He Was Clearly Into Her**

Though nervous, she was ready to give herself to him.

And yet, despite the humble environment, she wanted him.

It didn't matter so long as the person was him.

Her low voice, however, brought Kevin's senses back. He loosened his hold of her and sat up, looking at the surprised girl, and felt sorry.

He took her in his arms and whispered, "Here's not a good place."

Cecelia sighed and looked around. Yes, it was so shabby here, and if anyone came in.

It was not in a hurry as long as he accepted her and stopped running away from her.

She nestled in his arms, describing their future.

"After we leave here, which country shall we go first? I know you've lived in Italy for a long time, but dad knows there so well that it's easy for him to find us. You have a lot of business and clients overseas, and you've been to many countries. You must know a lot of places well. I'll just follow you. I'll graduate this year, and I can work soon. I believe we will live a good life... As soon as we get settled, I'll call my parents and tell them," Cecelia paused and added, "You don't need to feel guilty for anyone..."

His eyes warmed as he listened to her.

Starting a family with his beloved woman was what he yearned for years.

But...

"You know, It's a crime..." He interrupted her thoughts in a low voice.

Not a crime against the law, but a crime against the soul.

Cecelia knew how sorry he was. She wanted to tell him it was not what he thought, but she swallowed it.

"No, you're not guilty! There's nothing wrong with you... Sooner or later, you will understand." She could only say that.

Kevin thought it was only a comforting word. He smiled and adjusted her clothes gently.

"If we were together, we couldn't have children. Don't you like kids very much?"

They were related by blood, and they couldn't have children.

Cecelia shook her head, and her voice caught in her throat.

"I...I don't like children at all. They're too noisy and troublesome. And I don't want children to share you with me. I want to be a DINK! I have you, and that's enough!" She seized him by the arm and said firmly.

His eyes burned, and warmth coursed through his heart.

She gave up having children because she wanted to be with him.

He could not help asking himself—Was he gonna let her down again?

Why not follow her wishes and his own heart, and think of nothing else?

Life was so short, just smiling, crying, loving whenever you wanted, no need to press on yourself.

He was clearly into her.

He couldn't leave her.

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They rested together in each other's arms, talking about this and that.

This was the warmest morning of Kevin's life.

Although the environment was harsh, he would never forget the morning with the girl in the tent.

It was not until he heard Cecelia's stomach rumbling that he realized it was noon.

"I'm going out for lunch," he said and got up with a smile.

Cecelia felt her empty stomach and nodded.

Kevin walked out of the tent and went to get two boxes of lunch.

The traffic was inconvenient in disaster areas, and lunch boxes were airdropped down. There were vegetables and bread, half an egg, and a little bit of meat in the box.

Kevin pulled the meat and half an egg from his box into Cecelia's.

A volunteer, seeing his careful behavior, approached him and asked curiously, "What's the relationship between you and that girl?"

A simple question, but it knocked Kevin down.

All at once, Kevin stood still, holding the lunch boxes in his hands.

What was his relationship with her?

Brother and sister? Lovers?

If she was with him, she would always have to face such embarrassing questions.

A simple question brought him back to the real world.

Just now, he even fantasized about being able to live a plain and happy life with her...

How was that possible?

Even if they could run away from the eyes of other people, they could not escape their own mental accusation.

Just then, another young woman walked by with a smile and patted the volunteer on the shoulder.

"They're a couple, of course, or how could he have risked his life to save the girl last night! Now he's afraid that the girl can't eat well. If only I had such a boyfriend!"

The joke meant no harm, but Kevin's face clouded, and he hurried off with his lunch boxes.

In the tent, Cecelia was rubbing her stomach and crying, "I'm starving! Why did you come back so late?"

Kevin's mood brightened a little at her smile. He handed her the boxed lunch.

"Feed me!" Cecelia flirted and gave him the spoon.

He chuckled but did not refuse her. He opened the box, took a spoonful of food, and put it into her small mouth.

Cecelia felt that it was the best meal she had ever had, but after a few mouthfuls, she worried about his injured hand and stopped him.

She took the spoon from his hand and said, "Open your mouth, now it's my turn to feed you."

"I'll eat it myself." Kevin smiled helplessly.

"No, your hands have not healed yet!" Cecelia forced the spoon into his mouth.

They frolicked and finally finished the meal.

Then Kevin gave her the medicine. She wasn't hurt, but she got caught in the rain and had a fever.

After taking medicine, Cecelia felt sleepy.

Kevin put her to the foldout bed, covered her with a blanket, and watched her young and beautiful face for a while before he straightened up.

"Kevin, stay with me..." Cecelia clutched his sleeve, looking at him nervously as if she feared she would never see him again after falling asleep.

Kevin, his heart pounding, bent over and kissed her on the forehead.

"I'm going to help the rescue team. Have a good rest. We won't go until you get well."

"Really?" A smile spread across Cecelia's lips.

"Yes." He looked away, hiding the lonely and cruel determination in the bottom of the eyes.

Then she let go of his sleeve, nodded, and obediently closed her eyes.

### Chapter 683: Where Has He Been?

It was evening when Cecelia woke up.

She had a sound sleep and a long dream.

In her dream, she wore a wedding dress and married Kevin.

This was her secret wish from the first time she had seen him when she was a little girl.

At the wedding, her parents came to wish them a happy life.

No one looked at them strangely.

After the wedding, they went abroad for a honeymoon. They enjoyed their life and every day soaked in happiness.

In the end, she murmured Kevin's name as she opened her eyes.

A yellow beam of sunlight shone straight into the tent and warmed her.

Though her head was still a little heavy from the fever, she felt happy and relaxed as she recalled her sweet dream.

She got up and couldn't wait to see him.

It was quiet outside the tent, and the sky was free from storm or wind.

The volunteers of the rescue team were busy around.

She didn't see Kevin. Maybe he went to other places to help.

She went out and looked for him around the tent, but she couldn't find him.

Her heart was beating fast.

She went on looking for him everywhere, but she caught no sign of him in the crowd. Finally, a bad foreboding came up.

She grabbed a volunteer who passed by.

"Excuse me, did you see Kevin?"

Many of the volunteers didn't give their real names, and neither did Kevin. The volunteer paused and replied, "Kevin? Oh, the tallest and most handsome man in the rescue team? I think he's gone."

"Gone? Where has he been?" Cecelia fell into a daze.

"Three hours ago, I saw him leave the disaster area with his luggage on his back. He said he had something urgent to do and had to leave." The volunteer said and went on with his work.

Cecelia stood where she was for a long time, unable to breathe.

It was impossible. He clearly said he would stay with her. How could he leave suddenly?

Hadn't he accepted her?

But the fact told her that he had gone without leaving a message.

His gentleness and patience were all to make her fall asleep quickly.

Tears came to the eyes. She clenched her fists and turned, trying to get him back.

She wanted to ask him why?

Was it because he still cared what people thought of them?

She was too native. Even if she was willing to give up everything for him, not everyone could accept his feeling for his blood-related sister.

She had given him too much pressure...

Suddenly, her weak body was overwhelmed by too many thoughts, and she blacked out, fainting to the ground.

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When she was fully awake again, she lay on the bed in Balfour Sanatorium.

It was the hospital of the highest level in the country for senior officials and their families.

She was sent away from the disaster area after she was found lying unconscious on the ground.

The guards, who had wandered through the country in search of her, had just tracked her down and secretly got her from the local hospital to LA and then to Balfour Sanatorium.

Robert and his wife were relieved when their daughter was found back safely from the earthquake-stricken area.

On the first day Cecelia woke up, the couple came to visit their daughter.

Cecelia looked pale and sullen, not saying much.

Thus, Robert couldn't scold her for running away from home and going to the disaster area. After sitting for a while, Robert got up to leave.

"Go ahead, I want to stay with Cecelia a little longer," Madison said to her husband.

Robert nodded and left the room first, accompanied by the guard.

Madison closed the door. Then she turned to her abstracted daughter.

"You went to the southwest to look for Kevin this time, and you met him, didn't you?"

She did not believe her daughter would go to the disaster area without any reason.

After her daughter was taken back, she sent someone to the town to inquire. Sure enough, she heard that Kevin and Cecelia met again in the disaster area.

She was almost buried alive, and Kevin fought to get her out.

Madison was relieved to know Cecelia was more scared than hurt this time, but what made her alarmed was that her daughter was more closely related to Kevin after she was saved by him.

According to the volunteers there, Kevin took care of her all night and left the next day.

After that, Cecelia fainted quietly and was sent back to LA.

That was why she was still in a daze now.

Needless to say, it must be about Kevin.

Cecelia was not surprised that her mother knew. She lowered her eyes without saying a word.

"Cecelia, you know he's your brother, and there's no way you can..."

"No, he's not my brother." Cecelia raised her head and looked straight up at Madison.



If someone else heard her, it would only be taken as an angry remark.

But Madison's face turned pale immediately as if she knew what she was talking about. After a short pause, she put her pounding heart back in place and stammered, "W-what are you talking about?"

Cecelia stared deeply at Madison, and a sense of pity slowly emerged in her eyes.

"Mom, you know exactly what I'm talking about." She sighed.

The color faded from Madison's face. Shock, surprise, disbelief filled her chest.

"Cecelia..."

Cecelia seemed to know what her mother was trying to say.

"Don't worry, mom. I won't tell anyone about it, ever," she whispered.

This made Madison even more nervous.

"Sorry I'm tired. I want to rest. Just leave me alone, please," Cecelia turned over in bed and closed her eyes.

Madison looked at her daughter with mixed feelings.

After a long time, she heard her daughter's steady breathing. She stood up and stumbled out of the ward.

In the bed, Cecelia clutched the quilt and trembled slightly.

The scenes of her childhood memories passed in review before her eyes.

When she was seven years old, she was sent to Balfour Sanatorium with a bad fever.

At the time, the director of Balfour Sanatorium was her uncle, Madison's eldest brother.

As the director's niece and the governor's daughter, of course, she was taken good care of by the medical staff.

#### Chapter 684: **They Are Not Sibling**

That afternoon, her fever was brought down, and she was better in spirit. After a nap, she slipped out of the ward, holding her beloved bear doll.

Her feet brought her to her uncle's office.

There were usually many nurses and assistants in and out of the director's office.

But that day, for some reason, there was no one. It seemed that they had all been sent away in advance.

The door opened just a crack. She was about to knock on it when she heard the low cry of a woman.

It was her mom.

Her mother had always been noble and proud. She had never heard her cry. Her voice sounded not sad but full of fear.

Why did her mom cry in front of her uncle?

She paused, holding her breath.

"... If it hadn't been for Cecelia's sickness this time, I wouldn't even know it," her uncle said in a low voice, "According to her blood test, her blood type doesn't match yours or Robert's. Then I secretly had a paternity test for you... Madison, tell me, who is Cecelia's real father? What have you done?"

Cecelia was shocked.

Her real father?

Wasn't her father Robert?

She knew that a terrible secret was about to be disclosed and that it might hurt her.

She knew she'd better leave, but somehow her feet couldn't move.

She peeped through the crack of the door to see her mother's pale face. Madison stopped crying, grinning through her clenched teeth.

"Why didn't you ask what Robert had done? After we got married, we quarreled every day, and he even made a housekeeper's daughter pregnant. Although the woman and her illegitimate son were driven out of the house by me, this has always been a scar on my heart! Every time I thought of it, I got so annoyed that I couldn't forgive him! He betrayed me, why can't I cuckold him?"

"So... you just..." Cecelia heard her uncle gasp.

"Yeah, eight years ago, I went to a bar and had a one-night stand with some guy, and then I had Cecelia. I don't know who her father is and can't remember that man's appearance, but whatever. If Robert can have a mistress, why can't I have a lover?" Madison's cold voice exalted hate.

Her brother's facial expression changed.

"Stop that!" He whispered, "Madison, are you crazy? You're the governor's wife, and... If Robert knows you've betrayed him and he's raising another man's daughter, he would be more than angry!"

"That would be best. I wish he could feel how I had been betrayed!" Madison said coolly.

"Enough! For our family as well as for yourself! If your marriage with Robert should break up, I'm afraid that the relationship between our two families will be broken too. Do you want our father to pop off with rage?" Her brother growled.

Madison silenced and said nothing.

Behind the door, Cecelia stood stock still, too terrified to breathe. Her little face was pale, though she didn't fully understand the conversation between her uncle and her mother.

"All right," her uncle calmed down and said, "I'll change Cecelia's blood type and never let Robert know. With my position and status at the sanitarium, it isn't hard to keep the secret. Anyway, Cecelia is still Robert's daughter. Don't fool around with me from now on, and never mention it again!"

Madison wiped away her tears and nodded.

When Cecelia saw her mother rise, she stumbled back to her room, clutching the bear doll.

She climbed into the bed and wrapped herself in a blanket.

In less than ten minutes, her life was turned upside down.

She knew she wasn't Robert's daughter. She was only the product of a one-night stand her mother had in retaliation for her father's infidelity.

She was born guilty.

If there had been repentance in the world, she would not have gone to her uncle's office.

Just then, the door opened.

She heard her mother's light step come in.

"Cecelia, are you awake? Are you better today?" She called softly.

Cecelia's body fluttered, and her heart was filled with coolness.

She had thought it was her luck to be born in a noble family and had the governor as her father, but now she found herself a joke.

No matter how noble and dignified she might be in public, she was nothing but an illegitimate child.

Even if they could hide it from dad and the rest of the world, she couldn't hide it from herself.

Silently wiping away tears from her eyes, she turned and sat up. She repressed the ebb and flow of her emotions with the greatest effort.

"Well, mom. I'm feeling better now."

She knew she had to keep what she had just heard a secret.

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Pulling herself back from memory, Cecelia pulled the blanket upward to cover her face.

She had known that she was not Robert's biological daughter since she was a child. Therefore, she was clear that she and Kevin were not siblings when she met him for the first time.

It was funny.

She was only an illegitimate child, not the real daughter of the governor.

Kevin, who had grown up outside, was Robert's real son.

Perhaps because of this, she felt guilty for him, as if she had taken his place.

Slowly, her guilt evolved into pity, and uncontrollably turned into inexplicable feelings.

Her feelings for him grew deeper and deeper and became out of control.

But her story was a big secret. It was not only about the harmony of her parents' life, but it would also affect the relationship between two families.

So, she couldn't tell Kevin anything. She had to see Kevin hesitate because of their blood relation.

Whenever Kevin mentioned their relationship, she wanted to cry to him that they were not sisters and brothers.

But she couldn't say it.

For her mother and father's marriage, and for the relationship between two families, she could only break off her own feelings.

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A sudden rain sent the temperature down.

It was evening when Madison got home.

She got out of the car in a daze, walking towards the villa in the rain.

Approaching the steps, she looked up and saw Robert holding an umbrella at the door, waiting for her.

#### Chapter **685: How Could She Be Fine?**

Robert went to his wife when he saw her coming back and held the umbrella above her head.

Madison didn't expect him to wait for her in the rain with an umbrella as if they were an affectionate couple.

For a moment, she didn't know how to react.

"What's wrong? Is Cecelia okay?" He asked anxiously.

"She's fine," Madison sneered at herself, "I just didn't expect you'd come to pick me up."

"After all, we've been married for decades." Robert dropped his eyelids, looking a little embarrassed—that did not match his status and age.

Madison forced a smile.

"Madison, I know," he sighed, "There's a lot I've done wrong. We've been fighting and bickering since we were young, but after all these years, I'm tired... Whatever you may think, you're my wife, and we're going to spend the rest of our life together."

Madison's eyes turned red. If only her husband had said that to her earlier.

Unfortunately, they had been rebellious and never understood each other when they were too young. They thought this political marriage was not what they wanted, so they never tried to accept each other.

Half a lifetime passed.

They didn't realize they had become an inseparable part of each other.

There was nothing better than to hear her husband reveal his mind and ask for peace.

But what if her husband knew that she had betrayed him and that Cecelia was not his daughter?

Her back shivered at the thought.

No. Robert must not know the secret, otherwise, the harmony of their relationship would be broken again.

Robert didn't know what Madison was thinking, but he felt her trembling slightly. He moved the umbrella a little closer to her. "Let's go in."

Recovering herself, she looked up to see her husband's gentle face. She kept her mind calm and was led into the house by Robert, arm in arm, as if they had always been so affectionate.

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Robert was too busy with his business to visit his daughter in the sanatorium.

So, Madison went to accompany Cecelia every day.

Cecelia had been very quiet, as if she had forgotten what she had said that day.

Madison tried to start the unfinished topic again a few times, but Cecelia didn't respond.

Then she knew her daughter would just keep it secret.

Cecelia knew the severity of the matter, and she knew the consequences were unimaginable once the outsiders knew.

Madison was not relieved but more worried because the secret hidden in her daughter's heart made her daughter pine away day by day.

She knew that for the sake of the integrity of the family, even if she had to lose Kevin, she would hold on to this secret tightly and never utter a word. However, because of this, she looked weaker and soulless day by day.

At first, it was just a common fever, and then it turned to pneumonia.

A few days later, Cecelia didn't recover but began to cough blood.

Madison watched the nurse inject her daughter anxiously, her face no better than Cecelia's. When the nurse went out, tears started to Madison's eyes, and she rushed to the bedside.

"Cecelia, how are you feeling?"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine." Cecelia forced a weak smile, raising her hand to wipe tears from her mother's face.

How could she be fine?

Since she came back from the earthen-stricken town, she had been losing weight day by day.

"Don't think about that guy, okay? I beg you, Cecelia," Madison looked at her gaunt daughter with red eyes.

Cecelia sighed.

"Mom, if someone told you not to think about dad, could you do it?"

Her remark pulled Madison up short.

"You and dad had fought and bickered for so many years, but I know you're still the most important one for each other in your hearts. You quarrel because you care too much. Right?" Cecelia said weakly.

Madison looked at her daughter and felt for the first time that her daughter had really grown up. Maybe she became mature overnight because of that man.

But such a sensible daughter made her more pain.

She grasped Cecelia by her hand, whispering in a trembling voice, "Cecelia, if you really like him, tell him... Tell him the truth, tell him that you are not Robert's daughter, that you are not related to him by blood. Let him know that you are not his sister and that he will be with you."

Cecelia looked a little startled, a great longing flashing in her eyes.

No. She calmed down.

It was a shocking secret. She couldn't be so selfish.

Dad might not forgive mom, and their marriage would be over.

She could not destroy her family, her mother's happiness, for the sake of her own.

At last, she held her mother's hand gently but firmly.

"It's all right, Mom, I'll be fine. You can rest assured. That secret will never be known."

"But you --" Madison couldn't see her daughter so depressed.

"I'll try to forget him. He should also be trying to forget me now." Cecelia gave her a weak smile.

Madison's heart ached, tears streaming down her face.

When Cecelia fell asleep, she tucked her daughter in, dried her eyes, and left the room.

Back home, Madison was tossing and turning for a sleepless night.

Robert noticed his wife's anxiety, but he didn't know how to ask about it.

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The phone was ringing gratingly after midnight.

The housekeeper, with a frightened face, rushed upstairs and knocked on the door of the couple's bedroom.

"Sir, Madam, wake up! The sanatorium called and said Miss Smith's condition is critical! She's in the emergency room now!"

"What?" Robert and Madison's face blanched.

They put on their clothes and hurried downstairs. Accompanied by guards, they headed for the sanatorium.

When the couple rushed to the emergency room, just in time to see the nurse come out from the room.

Madison, regardless of her usual dignified bearing, ran to the nurse and asked quickly, "How's my daughter? Why? Isn't it pneumonia? Why is she in a critical condition now?"

"Miss Smith suddenly had difficulty breathing tonight and went into shock. It seems that her pleural fluid suddenly increased, and her pneumonia worsened..."

#### Chapter 686: God Was Punishing Him

"How could this be? You must have made a mistake! If there's a tendency to deteriorate, it'll surely be detected..." Madison shook her head in disbelief.

"Generally, her condition shouldn't have worsened so rapidly," the nurse said, a little confused. "There's a process of deterioration. If the patients feel sick, they'll let us know, and we can control it immediately. It won't be like this..."

Madison and Robert tightened their faces and immediately understood what the nurse meant.

Cecelia didn't say.

She was unwell, but she dragged it on purpose and did not tell the nurse.

That caused pneumonia to get worse.

Madison pressed her hands to her mouth, her pupils contracted.

How could she not know why Cecelia wanted to die?

She knew that she would never be with Kevin. She decided to keep her birth a secret from her mother.

Madison never knew that her daughter's love for Kevin was so deep.

She would rather die if she couldn't be with him...

"Mrs. Smith, don't worry. Your daughter will be fine. The doctor is giving her emergent treatment now." With that, the nurse left in a hurry.

Madison, her body, pulling downward, was held by Robert in time.

"What's wrong with Cecelia?" Robert asked and frowned. "Why... Why did she do that?"

Looking at the closed door of the emergency room, Madison clenched her fist, tears in her eyes, muttering, "Cecelia. I'm sorry..."

"Don't blame yourself. Come on, stop crying. Cecelia will be fine." Robert helped his wife to a bench and sat her down. He thought his wife just blamed herself for not noticing Cecelia's condition.

Madison finally stopped crying. She said nothing more, snuggling in her husband's arms and silently praying for her daughter.

Finally, the door of the emergency room opened.

The doctor came out and took off his mask.

"How's Cecelia?" Madison and Robert rushed up to the doctor.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Smith, Miss Smith is all right now, but she's still weak and not awake. She needs a good rest. You can visit her tomorrow," the doctor said simply.

Just then, two nurses came out pushing a nursing bed, where Cecelia was lying quietly attached to the oxygen machine.

Madison came to her senses and followed the nursing bed, quietly soothing her daughter.

Robert pulled her back gently.

"Madison, the doctor said Cecelia's fine. Don't worry. Let's go back and come tomorrow." Robert watched his daughter's back as she was pushed into a private ward. He heaved a sigh and looked back at his dazed wife.

Madison, still preoccupied, nodded without saying more.

At the gate, the guard opened the car door for them. Robert was about to get in when Madison suddenly pulled his sleeve. He turned and found her looking at him as if she had just made up her mind to tell him something.

"What's the matter?" Robert raised his eyebrows.

Madison ordered the guards to stand back.

"I want to tell you something," she said in a firm voice when there were only two of them.

After almost losing her daughter, she was no longer afraid.

She must be plain with her husband for the sake of her daughter's happiness.

In this way, her daughter could have the courage to be the person she loved and live the life she wanted.

She didn't want her daughter to be like her.

"Go ahead." Robert looked at his wife, calmly.

"About Cecelia."

Robert's pupils contracted as Madison continued.

"Cecelia is not your daughter. Years ago, you had an affair with Kevin's biological mother after we had a fight, and then Kevin was born. I've been very angry with you for many years. Once, I went to a bar, and then I thought about your betrayal and got myself mad again. Just then, I was accosted by a man. Cecelia," she said after a short pause, "was born after I had a one-night stand with that strange man, and she had nothing to do with you."

Robert did not speak. He seemed to be absorbed in his wife's confession.



"I know you're mad at me. If you want to divorce me, I understand that. I don't want anything but Cecelia. Our marriage was a failed relationship even though I tried to be a good wife to you,"

Madison bit her lip and held back her tears of remorse.

After their divorce, Cecelia was no longer the daughter of the Smith family and would be able to be with Kevin.

She could choose her life freely and didn't have to suffer so much with this shameful secret.

Then she turned without another look at her husband, walking resolutely out of the gate.

"Why? You've kept the secret from me for so long, why didn't you choose to keep it?" Robert asked, and his voice was toneless.

Madison stopped short and turned with a sad smile.

"Because Cecelia is in love with Kevin. I hope she can choose her life as she wants. I only wanted my daughter's happiness, Robert,"

Robert raised his eyebrows in shock.

Maybe it was his failure as a father for not realizing Cecelia's feelings for Kevin.

God was punishing him.

The tragedy of Kevin's mother was caused by him. His wife's betrayal was also because of his indifference to her.

As a mother, Madison unburdened herself of the secret all for her daughter's happiness.

"Don't you want to know what I think?" She heard his low voice before she turned to leave.

Robert came to her and stopped in front of her.

She would not be surprised if he slapped her in the face. After all, no man could accept being cuckolded.

She closed her eyes, waiting for his fury.

But he didn't. He looked at her deeply and finally said, "I've always known this."

Madison opened her eyes wide in disbelief.

"Do you remember when Cecelia broke her leg at four? I took her to the hospital, and the nurse tested her blood. I noticed that her blood type differs from ours. After that, I took a paternity test and knew she's not my daughter," Robert said quietly.

#### **Chapter 687: Now We're Even, Okay?**

Robert knew this secret when Cecelia was four years old?

Madison froze, staring at him.

He had known about it early, but he kept silent. He even treated Cecelia as his own daughter.

Why?

"I betrayed you once, so you wanted to get even with me. If it made you feel better, I can pretend to know nothing for the rest of my life," whispered Robert.

Madison was dumbstruck.

She never knew that the man in front of her had been compensated for his guilt in this way.

Robert took her hand and said softly, "Madison, now we're even, okay?"

Madison threw herself into her husband's arms, tears brimming her eyes.

"Cecelia is our daughter, and you're my only wife. It will never change. We are family since then," Robert whispered as he patted her on the back.

\* \* \*

In that clear instant of consciousness, Cecelia opened her eyes to see her parents looking at her nervously.

"She woke up!" Robert cried out.

Madison leaned over and lifted her gently.

"Cecelia, how do you feel?"

Cecelia's eyes moistened as she enjoyed the concern and care from her parents. The experience of death made her appreciate life more.

Her parents loved her so much, but she deliberately hid her condition and almost died.

How sad they would be if she really left the world.

What an unfilial daughter she was!

However, looking at her parents' worried face, she still felt a little lost.

Besides mom and dad, it would be even better to wake up to see that man, but once again, he left her without a word. She felt pain deep down inside her heart, and she's dying to see him again.

Madison captured her daughter's trance and guessed what she was thinking.

"Honey, I'll go to the doctor. Take care of Cecelia," she said as she exchanged a look with her husband.

Cecelia looked at her mother, blankly. Honey? Her mom had never called dad that before...

When Madison left, Robert looked at his daughter and whispered, "Cecelia, are you feeling better?"

She nodded.

Robert thought it over before he said, "When you recover, go and see him. Don't worry, dad and mom won't stop you. We understand your feelings towards him, and we only wanted to see you happy,"

Cecelia didn't understand for a moment, but soon she came to her senses.

Dad was telling her to go to Kevin?!

Did dad know that she liked Kevin?

But why did he allow her to be with Kevin?

Was it because he had known that?

"Dad, why..." She sat bolt upright in bed and stared at him.

Did her mom, for the sake of her feelings, confess to dad the secret?

"Cecelia, I've known the secret of your birth," Robert said gravely, "since you were four years old."

She gasped, unable to utter a word.

He knew she was not his daughter, but he never penetrated the secret and always pampered her as a little princess.

"Your mother and I were both too young at that time. We hated political marriage and never tried to love each other. I betrayed your mom and hurt an innocent woman. I regretted having made such a mistake, but I didn't know how to make it up. You have nothing wrong... Although you're not my own flesh and blood, in my heart, you are always my daughter, Cecelia. What about you? Will you still think of me as your father?" Robert said slowly. Afraid of being rejected, he uttered those words in a low voice.

Cecelia had not expected Robert to be so generous.

No, not generous. He forgave his wife and accepted her because of love.

It seemed that her parents had talked it over and became reconciled. They realized how important the one by their side was and decided to manage a happy marriage together.

No wonder they looked more affectionate.

"Dad, I only have one father, and that's you!" She hugged Robert.

"Uh-huh, good girl." Robert nodded happily with wet eyes.

As for Kevin's mother, he could only make up for her in the next life.

"I've checked out where Kevin is. You don't have to hesitate anymore. Be brave and go to him." Robert added what Cecelia wanted to hear most.

Cecelia nodded, and tears came to her eyes.

\* \* \*

It was late afternoon when Cecelia arrived at the mining site in South Africa.

She had anointed herself with suntan lotion, but the sun burned her through the sunhat, and her sun-protective clothing was scorching.

According to Robert, Kevin came here after leaving the southwest town.

How could he get used to such a harsh environment?

She couldn't understand why he had chosen to come to such a hard place, but wherever he was, she would not hesitate to find him.

Though nearly well, Cecelia was somewhat feeble under the harsh sun.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith had asked her to take some time off before coming to Africa, but she couldn't wait a day.

After she learned from her father that Kevin was in Africa, she began to make all preparations—visa application, luggage preparation, vaccination in advance...

After getting off the plane, she took a local taxi and arrived at the site.

Without stopping for a moment, she walked straight up to a foreman. She greeted him in English and then asked directly,

"I want Kevin Wills. Can you take me to him?"

The foreman had been told that there would be an honorable girl coming for someone. He paused and immediately replied, "You are Miss Smith, aren't you?"

"Yes." Cecelia couldn't wait.

"Sorry, Miss Smith," the foreman looked embarrassed. "You're late. Mr. Wills left here this morning."

Cecelia gasped. "Where did he go?"

"I don't know. Mr. Wills plugged away at his work and seldom talked with us. He left this morning quietly. I didn't know until just now."

The power that had sustained Cecelia for so long disappeared suddenly. Kevin had gone away before she arrived. She couldn't find any words to speak after a few minutes of silence.

#### Chapter 688: Everything He Had Was Hers

With a pale face, Cecelia picked up her luggage, going away from the site.

In the blazing sun, she staggered along the road. A few taxis passed by and slowed down, asking her if she wanted help, but she didn't respond.

She couldn't feel the heat, dryness, and exhaustion of the body.

He was gone.

Why? Did he run away because he learned that she had flown here looking for him?

Did he hate her so much?

Didn't dad say he had contacted him and told him her birth on the phone? Now, he knew that he wasn't related to her, didn't he?

Before, he avoided her because she was his sister.

But now, when he knew they were not blood-related, why did he run away?

The only possibility was... he didn't like her at all.

Whether she was his sister or not, he never considered having a romantic relationship with her.

"Hey, babe, want a ride?"

A car slowly followed her, and out of the window came the voice of a yellow-haired man.

"No." Cecelia, in a bad mood, replied coldly.

"It's a long and lonely road, and the sun might burn your pretty skin. Get in, and I won't charge you a thing." The yellow-haired man continued.

It was not easy to meet a beautiful woman in such a place.

"Go!" Cecelia said impatiently.

The man took a deep breath and, enraged, sped up and pulled the car in front of Cecelia. He got out and walked up to her.

"I was kind enough to give you a lift, but you told me to go? Are you Americans so rude?" He said boisterously as he stretched out his hand as if to take advantage of her.

"Take your hand away from her." A cold voice came from behind before the hand touched Cecelia.

The yellow-haired man turned on the alarm.

Cecelia froze at the voice and slowly looked back in disbelief.

Kevin!

Under the scorching sun, he was dressed in black trousers and a white shirt, quiet and expressionless, approaching her in a cool manner. His sleeves were rolled up, showing his firm arms.

He had got a suntan after being burnt by the sun for a long while, and the ceaseless work had made him leaner and stronger. He looked like a panther on African plains.

He was even more charming in this image than as a social elite.

Kevin strode over, grabbing the man on his hairy wrists and easily pulling him aside.

The man reacted by raising his fist in anger and punching Kevin.

But his fist was caught in midair!

Kevin held the man's fist with a tenacious grip in one hand and punched him hard in the face with the other!

The man realized to his horror that he couldn't pull out his hand. He got a blow from the thin and graceful man and was thrown to the ground.

The pain made him see stars.

Scrambling to his feet, the man was about to run away when Kevin seized him by his collar, yanking him back and kicking him in the knee.

The man knelt on Cecelia uncontrollably.

"Apologize to her," Kevin snapped.

Reluctantly, the man bowed his head to Cecelia and said in a panic, "I'm sorry, Miss. I shouldn't have been rude to you."

"Go away!" Cecelia said without looking at him. She stared at Kevin. Her mind was rescinded from others.

The yellow-haired man got up at once and rushed to his car.

The car sped away, raising a cloud of dust.

Cecelia looked at Kevin with emotion. She couldn't believe he was there.

After having experienced too many disappointments, she dared not have hope.

"I have to spend time worrying about you," Kevin said as he walked to the transfixed girl.

Last time, she went to the earthquake-stricken town in the southwest. Well, at least it was a domestic town.

This time she came all the way to Africa.

After only a few hours, her face was crimson with sunburn.

The simple sentence from him made Cecelia feel a sense of grievance.

"Didn't you leave this morning? Why come back again?" She murmured, clenching her fists.

"What do you think?" Kevin lifted his eyes and looked at her meaningfully.

"Did you... forget something?" She ventured.

Kevin narrowed his eyes and nodded. "Well, you may say so."

Cecelia bit her lip, on the verge of tears.

How could he have come back for her? He just forgot something and accidentally met her.

Frustrated and angry, she was about to pick up her luggage and go when he suddenly took her luggage from her and held her hand.

"What are you doing?" Cecelia started and stumbled after him.

"Didn't I come back for something? I've got it. We can go now."

Cecelia's eyes widened.

What did he mean? Did he come back to take her?

"Kevin!" She stopped and shook off his hand. "Tell me what happened! You left the site this morning to avoid me, didn't you? Why now..."

"I did leave the site this morning, ready to go home," he said, glancing back, "but not to avoid you."

After a pause, he said with a big smile, "I'm going home to look for you."

He had no idea that she would come today.

A few days ago, he had learned her story through a call from Robert.

It turned out that Cecelia was not related to him.

It was shocking that Madison accidentally had Cecelia after a one-night stand, but he had to say, the biggest stone in his heart was put down.

Then he knew that the girl had known about the secret, but she never told him.

She must be suffering.

After the phone call with Robert, he booked the plane ticket, ready to return home to look for her.

It just so happened that the day he left South Africa was the day she came to find him.

If he had not just received a phone call from Robert when he arrived at the airport, he would have missed her again.

Cecelia stared at him as though pondering his words, wondering whether it was a dream or not.

"Wake up," Kevin squeezed her face.

Cecelia rubbed her face.

It was not a dream.

He left this morning not to avoid her, but to look for her!

When he knew she was here, he returned to find her!

For an instant, all the happiness came back, filling her chest. But the next moment, her small face fell.

"Don't you despise me?" She whispered in low spirits.

Kevin looked at her quizzically.

"You are the rightful master of the Smith family, but I... I'm only an illegitimate child." A touch of bitterness touched her lips,

He lifted a strand of her hair, wrapping it around his finger, and then gently pulled her closer to him.

"Do you know why I came here after I left the southwest town?" He didn't answer her directly.

Cecelia tilted her head. She was really surprised to hear from her father that he was in a mine site in South Africa.

He looked around with a soft chuckle.

"I came here because I hope the hard environment and hard work can help me forget you."

From then on, she was not his sister but his girl.

Everything he had was hers.

She looked shocked, and her lips slightly trembled.

This was the most touching confession in the world for her.

She threw herself into his arms.

The sky was baked red by the afternoon sun.

#### **Chapter 689: Greta Sterling, The Fierce Heiress**

Milan, Italy.

Stars watched the slim figure on a path.

Greta was walking toward the suburbs with an absent stare.

She had just gone through the most confusing night in her life.

Her slender shadow stretched out in front of her.

Just half an hour ago, she had been released from detention in Milan.

It was the man she always hated, Dylan Sterling, who sent someone to free her.

Just now, he told her on the phone that it wasn't him who killed her father.

The Sterlings never harmed her parents.

It was completely different from what she had known.

Everything was mixed up in her mind, and she had no idea what was true.

Did her revenge make a complete mistake?

She didn't know how long she had walked, and it was almost dawn when the familiar outline of the manor house appeared in front of her.

It was her secret residence in Milan.

"Who is it? Stop!" The doorman shone the flashlight on her.

"Young master? What happened to you?" He cried in surprise and then turned to a servant at the door, "Call Brent, now!"

After a while, Brent stormed out.

"How did you come back?" He asked with emotion as he examined her up and down, relieved that she was fine.



A year ago, knowing Greta was wanted by the Milan police, Barzini, her foster father, locked her in the house and kept her grounded.

But not long ago, Greta sneaked out and was caught by the police.

Greta looked at Brent, who had a broken cheek. Barzini must have given him a black eye after she was caught.

As her bodyguard who grew up with her, Brent could never escape from punishment if she made a mistake.

According to Barzini's ruthless determination, he should suffer no less than she had.

"Very badly hurt..." Greta raised her hand involuntarily and touched the cut on his cheek.

As her last word fell, she collapsed and fainted into Brent's arms.

\*\*\*

Greta woke up to bright sunlight filling her room. It was already afternoon.

She slept through the day.

Luckily, she was young and quick to recover, and when she awoke, she was fully refreshed.

After she changed her clothes, a maid came in with a bowl of hot soup. No sooner had she drank it, the door of her room was knocked again.

"Young master, Lord Barzini is in the study," a servant said.

A complex glister came to Greta's eyes. It was no surprise to her that Barzini had come to Milan.

All right, she also had something to ask him, too.

She knocked twice at the door of the study, and as soon as she entered, she trembled at the cool air of the room.

A middle-aged, silver-haired man in his 40s was standing at the window with his hands behind his back.

The man was a pure White European.

Though he did not speak, the dignity in him could not be ignored.

The middle-aged man was Barzini, the most powerful mob boss in Italy.

"Dad," Greta greeted her foster father drily, holding her breath.

Barzini slowly turned around, his sapphire piercing eyes shining.

"You know you were wrong?"

Greta knew that Barzini was saying she shouldn't have gone out alone when the police were looking for her. She hung her head without a word.

Barzini bent his brows, and his voice was displeased. "What? Do you still think you were right? Last time, you came to Milan with Brent to kidnap a woman without telling me in advance. And this time, you ran out regardless of the consequences, knowing that all the police in Italy were searching for you. Now, you didn't even realize you'd made mistakes? Do you think you're able to do things independently and no longer obey my words?"

Greta clenched her fists silently.

"Why did you sneak out?" Barzini kept his temper. He felt that something had changed after his adopted daughter came back this time.

"If you think I was wrong, just punish me." Greta, however, remained stubborn.

The veins bulge out of Barzini's forehead. He picked up a long stick slant and ordered coolly, "Kneel down."

Greta followed his words silently, kneeling on the cold hard marble floor.

She had been used to it.

The long stick had fallen on her whenever Barzini was not satisfied with her, and that was how she came by the scars on her back.

Just as she gritted her teeth, waiting for the sharp pain to come in her back, the door banged open, and Brent's voice came in a hurry,

"Lord Barzini, please don't blame Greta. It was my fault! Blame me for not protecting her well. Punish me if you want to."

Barzini looked coldly at the young man who ran in. "Your punishment is inevitable, but Greta cannot get away with it."

Then he threw the stick into the girl's back with great force.

Without hesitation, Brent rushed forward, protecting the girl in his arms, irrespective of the stick.

The long stick beat hard on Brent's back!

He grunted in pain but still enfolded the girl in his arms.

Greta scented blood, and her eyes widened.

"Get out of here," Barzini barked out his order.

Brent still held Greta, repeating, "Punish me, not her."

"I say again, get out of here," Barzini lowered his voice in anger.

Brent didn't move.

"Let me go," Greta whispered, knowing Barzini was ready to blow up.

The young man who held her tightly had no intention to let her go.

As her bodyguard, he should accept all dangers and hardships for her.

Out of the corner of Greta's eye, she saw Barzini furious, raising his long stick, ready to give Brent another hard beat.

If Brent took the whip, his bones might be broken, and he would probably be internally injured.

"I was wrong!" At last, she gave in and screamed, "I shouldn't have gone out, okay? Stop, please stop, don't hit him again, please! "

The stick waved in the air and stopped short.

Barzini laid down his stick and looked coldly at his adopted daughter, waiting for her explanation.

#### Chapter 690: Yes, I Lied To You

Greta spared herself from Brent's arms. She rose and stared straight at her foster father, who gave her a second life but only trained her as a killing machine.

"That day was the anniversary of my mother's death. She liked honey strawberry cake when she was alive. I just wanted to buy a cake for her but didn't expect to be caught by the police... I'm sorry, it was my fault. Please don't punish Brent," Greta whispered with her head drooping.

Her mother, Jennifer, left a diary recording her love story with her father. When Barzini adopted her and brought her to Italy, she took the diary with her. Since she learned to read, she had tried to imagine what her mother liked from the diary left by her.

From the diary, Greta learned her father always bought a honey strawberry cake for her mother. She smiled and sometimes cried as she read the happy days of her parents, imagining they were always around her.

Over the years, she had read and reread the diary, and the outside corner of the diary was worn down.

That was why she knew her mother liked honey strawberry cake.

Every year, on the anniversary of her mother's death, she bought honey strawberry cake in memory of her mother.

This year, unluckily, she ran into a local police officer and was caught when she sneaked out.

Barzini's face relaxed a little when Greta, at last, gave way.

His adopted daughter was so young, but she cared not for pain and was as rigid as adamant.

That was exactly what he wanted.

He was injured in a fight when he was young and could never have children of his own.

This was his purpose in adopting this American girl.

She had been brought up to be ungrateful and cruel, and when he was old and frail, this kid would take his place, dominate his subordinates, and inherit his empire.

The only fly in the ointment was...

Barzini's eyes fell on Brent, who was wounded.

He'd rather see Greta refuse to admit her mistake. But in the end, she submitted to him for a bodyguard.

This meant that Greta still had a weakness.

A tender-hearted creature was not able to run the Mafia.

Greta didn't know what her foster father was thinking. She called a maid to help Brent up and take him out.

After Brent was helped away, she turned to Barzini.

"I've admitted my mistake, dad," she said calmly. "Now, can you answer my question?"

"Go ahead," Barzini looked at her.

Greta approached him slowly. "You told me my real father was killed by my uncle and that my mother was driven away from LA to a small village by my grandfather. You said I should blame the Sterlings for the miserable fate of my family. What you said is all false, isn't it?"

She had thought of what response Barzini might have when he was asked the question.

The strongest possibility was that he would explode on the spot and scold her for questioning him in this way.

But, to her surprise, Barzini made only a slight frown.

The do-nothing Italian police worked hard to find Greta under pressure from the Sterling family. After Greta was arrested, he sent people to help but could hardly find an opportunity to get her out of the detention house.

After she came back last night, he learned right away who had freed her.

Dylan Sterling.

That man must have said something to her, otherwise, she wouldn't have asked that question just now.

"Yes, I lied to you," he replied simply.

Greta had guessed the answer, but she was shocked at his frankness.

She had planned to revenge her dead father since she was a child, but she was proven to be ridiculously wrong.

The Sterlings were her family, not her enemies.

And what did she do? She tied up her aunt, hurt her, and almost killed her uncle personally. Her innocent little cousin nearly became a parentless kid because of her.

She took a few deep breaths to calm herself down.

"Why?" She stared at the man in front of her with an awful penance, "why did you do that? Why did you lie to me and say my relatives were my enemies?"

Barzini smiled relentlessly at her adopted daughter as if he didn't think he had done anything wrong.

"It sharpened your mind and made you more invincible."

If she could kill her relatives, her heart would be as strong as a rock, and no one could defeat her.

At that point, she would be the real successor.

Therefore, after she became sensible and asked how her parents died, he told her that it was her grandfather who separated her parents and drove her pregnant mother out of LA. After that, Jennifer gave birth to her alone in a village. Because there was no one to take care of her, she died of disease early.

Since her father was the eldest son and heir to the family fortune, her uncle murdered her father to possess the family property alone.

And she believed all he said.

She had been brainwashed into thinking that she must kill the Sterlings to revenge her parents.

But now, she was told that all she believed was false, and the one she had hurt was the one who loved her.

She gawked at Barzini, speechless.

She had always been grateful to Barzini for adopting and educating her.

At this moment, however, she deeply realized that Barzini's kindness to her might not be for her good but for himself.

He wanted to have a ruthless inheritor to manage his gang.

"Finished? Then go back to your room and get packed. We're leaving in the evening for Rome." Barzini waved her out.

Greta stood still, staring at him.

Barzini's face changed.

"What's the matter? Aren't you convinced? Want me to apologize to you? Don't forget who brought you up! If it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have had a chance to grow up and see the world. You would have died with your mother in that small village!"

Blue veins stood out in his neck, and there was a murderous look on his face with its raised eyebrows and downward curling lips.

Greta finally unclenched her fist and walked out of the room.

She headed for Brent's room.

To protect her closely, Brent lived in the room next to hers.

The door was ajar. She pushed it open and walked in. Brent, half-naked, was applying for medicine on his wounded back with twisted arms.