

Mommy, Daddy Has Already Regretted It

Chapter 51: Just Waiting to Fall into Nathaniel's Arms

Noelle tacitly accepted the title of 'Mrs. Sloan' and put on a considerate front. "Nathaniel, don't blame the manager of Rosalind Garden. He only let me in because of these documents."

Rosalind Garden was closed to all visitors; without Nathaniel Sloan's permission, no one was allowed inside. Yet, here Noelle Lockwood was, respectfully addressed as Mrs. Sloan and carefully catered to. The manager was deeply moved by her words. Mrs. Sloan was such a kind person!

After speaking, Noelle Lockwood bit her lower lip and looked at Nathaniel Sloan with expectant eyes. She thought, "He wouldn't embarrass me in front of so many people, right? As long as he doesn't contradict me..."

To her surprise, Nathaniel Sloan suddenly lifted his gaze, his eyes icy. "What kind of Mrs. Sloan are you? Did you appoint yourself?"

Noelle Lockwood's face instantly drained of color.

A heavy silence fell over the surroundings. Mr. Foster, the manager who had just been sucking up to Noelle Lockwood, exchanged glances with the other staff members. A cold sweat broke out on their backs. They wondered, "What does President Sloan mean? Is Noelle Lockwood not Mrs. Sloan?"

Noelle Lockwood's hands suddenly clenched into fists, but she maintained her gentle facade and hurriedly explained, "I'm sorry, Nathaniel. When your mother introduced me to them, she called me Mrs. Sloan. I just didn't want to embarrass her, so I didn't correct them." Turning to the manager, she added, "Mr. Foster, I'm not Mrs. Sloan just yet. You can simply call me by my name."

Nathaniel Sloan's eyes darkened further. He was about to interrupt when he suddenly thought of something and looked over at Estelle Lockwood. Seeing her completely indifferent expression, his lips gradually pressed into a tight line.

Estelle Lockwood was already feeling unwell. Between her carsickness and her churning stomach, hearing Noelle Lockwood's manipulative, two-faced drivel only made her want to throw up even more. She thought, "Not Mrs. Sloan just yet? Noelle Lockwood truly has mastered the art of manipulation."

"Miss Yara Lockwood, what's wrong?" Noelle Lockwood acted as if she had only just noticed Estelle Lockwood. She stepped forward anxiously and said, "Are you carsick? Hurry inside and rest. I'll have someone bring you some medicine."

Estelle Lockwood's eyes remained completely cold.

Noelle Lockwood turned her head to playfully reproach Nathaniel, putting on an air of extreme intimacy with Nathaniel Sloan. "Nathaniel, if I had known, I would have come

with you. At least with me around, I could have taken care of Miss Yara Lockwood." Looking at Estelle Lockwood with feigned helplessness, she continued, "Miss Yara Lockwood, Nathaniel has no idea how to take care of people. You must have suffered on this trip. He doesn't even care about his own health, let alone anyone else's."

Every word Noelle Lockwood spoke dripped with an ostentatious display of her familiarity with Nathaniel Sloan. Estelle Lockwood had heard similar remarks plenty of times. In the past, Noelle Lockwood had always relied on the fact that she had grown up with Nathaniel Sloan to flaunt her status in front of the actual Mrs. Sloan. She used to say, "Sister, you don't understand Nathaniel. When he starts working, he never stops and completely neglects his health. I'm the only one who can talk any sense into him."

Estelle Lockwood let out a sneer. Without bothering to acknowledge her, she cast a mild glance at Nathaniel Sloan. "President Sloan, you should handle your 'family matters' first. I'll head inside."

Nathaniel Sloan shifted his gaze to her, his tone calm. "The meeting is delayed by half an hour. Take some time to recover your energy." Estelle Lockwood didn't refuse.

As the two conversed, there seemed to be a natural barrier around them, isolating everyone else. Nathaniel Sloan didn't even seem to realize that the way he looked at Estelle Lockwood was entirely different from how he looked at anyone else.

A sudden wave of crisis washed over Noelle Lockwood. She wished she could tear this woman to shreds and ruin her reputation! She thought, "No... I have to do something. Otherwise, this Yara Lockwood will end up walking all over me!"

"Miss Lockwood, I know this place well. Let me take you to rest!" Noelle Lockwood quickly stepped forward, maintaining her gentle facade. However, just as she reached Estelle Lockwood's side, she suddenly let out a yelp. Her entire body tilted backward, on the verge of falling right into Nathaniel Sloan's arms—

THUD.

In the nick of time, someone caught Noelle Lockwood. She rejoiced inwardly. She thought, "I fell toward Nathaniel Sloan on purpose, so the person catching me must be Nathaniel!" Emboldened by this thought, Noelle Lockwood bit her lower lip and cast several deliberate glances at Estelle Lockwood. "Miss Yara Lockwood, did you lose your balance because you were feeling unwell? It's my fault, I should have been supporting you. I'm fine, though. Please, everyone, don't blame Miss Yara Lockwood."

Not a single word outright accused Estelle Lockwood of pushing her, yet every syllable was designed to tell the onlookers that it was entirely Estelle Lockwood's fault.

Estelle Lockwood coolly lifted her eyes, but when she saw who had actually caught Noelle Lockwood, she froze in astonishment.

Her face flushed with feigned shyness, Noelle Lockwood thanked the person holding her from behind. "Nathaniel, thank you for saving me. But you should hurry inside. Don't worry about me."

The expressions of everyone around them stiffened. Even the manager who had just been kissing up to Noelle Lockwood looked incredibly awkward. Completely oblivious, Noelle Lockwood deliberately continued to show off her supposed intimacy with Nathaniel Sloan.

"Nathaniel, let me go, I'm really fine. Miss Yara Lockwood is the one who looks unwell. You should go take care of her..."

"Noelle Lockwood, it seems you're thanking the wrong person." A teasing male voice interrupted Noelle Lockwood's coy act, carrying a meaningful undertone. "Miss Lockwood, why don't you turn around and take a look? Are you really so certain that Nathaniel Sloan is the one who saved you?"

She thought, "This voice..."

Noelle Lockwood's face underwent a drastic change. Stiffly, inch by inch, she turned her head. Henry Kendrick was standing directly in front of Nathaniel Sloan, completely blocking him from view. He smiled innocently. "Miss Lockwood, I'm sorry to disappoint you."

He had just parked his car when he heard Noelle Lockwood's remarks. Henry Kendrick's fiery temper instantly flared up. He thought, "What is she babbling about with her passive-aggressive insinuations? Five years ago, I didn't know Estelle Lockwood, so I couldn't help her teach this two-faced snake a lesson. But you think I can't do it five years later?"

So, the moment he saw Noelle Lockwood repeating her old trick and pretending to fall, Henry Kendrick tapped into an astonishing burst of speed. He sprinted over as fast as he could, shoved Nathaniel Sloan out of the way, and caught Noelle Lockwood himself. Henry Kendrick gave a half-smile. "Come on, Miss Lockwood. I'm waiting for my thank you."

Noelle Lockwood's face turned ashen! She gritted her teeth furiously, having absolutely no idea where Henry Kendrick had just popped out from! In her perfect scenario, Nathaniel

was supposed to catch her, and the bystanders would praise them as a match made in heaven. But now, Henry Kendrick had completely derailed her plan!

Noelle Lockwood's complexion shifted from pale to green. She could barely suppress the hideous scowl threatening to overtake her features and couldn't utter a single word for a long time.

Henry Kendrick clicked his tongue in dissatisfaction. "What? Is President Sloan the only one worthy of Miss Lockwood's gratitude? Someone else helps you and saves you from a fall, and you won't even show a shred of appreciation? Just a moment ago, when you thought President Sloan saved you, you couldn't stop thanking him. But now that you realize I'm the one who caught you, you're looking at me like an enemy..."

Henry Kendrick continued in a hauntingly casual tone, "Miss Lockwood, you didn't trip on purpose just to fall into Nathaniel Sloan's arms, did you? Were you hoping everyone would spin a romantic tale of the hero saving the beauty for you and President Sloan?"

In the crowd, a few people subtly nodded in agreement. They thought, "Young Mr. Kendrick actually has a point. Otherwise, why would Noelle Lockwood look so incredibly disappointed?"

Henry Kendrick's tone turned chilling. "With one strategic fall, not only do you get to stir up gossip between you and President Sloan, but you also manage to sling mud at our Yara. You're quite the schemer, Noelle Lockwood. You reek of hypocrisy—are you worried people won't be able to smell it on you?"

He rambled on, not giving anyone a chance to chime in, before suddenly speaking up again as if he had just had an epiphany. "Oh, wait, there really is someone who can't smell

it. Someone who treats a two-faced, manipulative little lotus flower like an absolute treasure. Wouldn't you agree, President Sloan?"

The crowd remained utterly silent. They thought, "Who would dare to respond to that? Young Mr. Kendrick's sarcasm couldn't be any more obvious!"

Chapter 52: She's Helping Someone Else Change Clothes?

Nathaniel Sloan slightly lifted his eyelids. His aura was overwhelmingly powerful, but he did not utter a word.

Noelle Lockwood felt like she was going to faint. Henry Kendrick had hit the nail on the head regarding her inner thoughts. She trembled with anger but had no choice but to explain herself.

"Young Mr. Kendrick, you've misunderstood me. That wasn't my intention at all..."

"Why are you explaining this to me, Miss Lockwood?" Henry asked with a baffled expression. "It doesn't matter if I misunderstand or not. As long as your precious Nathaniel believes you, that's all that counts."

With that, he called out directly to Yara Lockwood. "Yara, let's go."

Estelle curled her lips and smoothed her hair. "Although I don't want to interrupt Miss Lockwood's performance, I still need to remind you that Rosalind Garden has surveillance cameras. A quick check of the footage will prove whether I pushed you or not.

"I'm not some random pushover who only knows how to cry when someone throws dirt at me. I have the Star Group backing me. Do you understand?"

After speaking, she turned her gaze to Nathaniel. "Either she apologizes, or our cooperation ends here and you can expect a lawyer's letter. Slandering the head of Star is not a good habit."

After the two left, the surrounding crowd looked at Noelle with eyes full of disdain and judgment.

Did Noelle spend all day long thinking about how to vie for favor? Whenever she saw another woman near Nathaniel, did she try every trick in the book to drive them away? But did Noelle even know who Yara was, or how important this cooperation was? Now that she had offended Yara, could this collaboration still proceed smoothly?

Noelle's eyes turned red. Looking as if she had suffered a massive injustice, she shook her head pitifully.

"Nathaniel, I didn't... I really just misunderstood. Because Yara was the only one standing next to me at the time, and my legs gave out for a second, I thought... I just thought..."

Nathaniel's gaze was as sharp as a knife, devoid of any gentleness. He questioned her directly, "You thought? After Estelle returned to the Lockwood family, how many times have 'you thought'?"

Noelle stiffened all over. Why was he thinking about Estelle again?!

Terrified that Nathaniel would dig into the events of the past, she hurriedly cried out, "Nathaniel, it's my fault. I'll go apologize to Miss Yara right away... Nathaniel, Nathaniel..."

Nathaniel had already turned away coldly.

Noelle was exasperated. She had calculated every single step today perfectly. Where exactly did it go wrong?!

Nathaniel walked into Rosalind Garden but didn't see Estelle anywhere. He frowned slightly.

An assistant immediately stepped forward. "President Sloan, President Lockwood has already gone to the guest room with Vice President Kendrick. Vice President Kendrick said we didn't need to bother, as he would take care of her. Oh, right, President Lockwood also said she needed to help him change his clothes..."

Nathaniel stopped dead in his tracks. Change his clothes?

Yara was changing Henry's clothes?!

If they were changing clothes, wouldn't Henry have to take off his own clothes first? Then Yara would see Henry's...

For some unknown reason, a flame of anger flared up in his heart, though he couldn't quite pinpoint why. With his lips pressed into a tight line, Nathaniel immediately turned and strode quickly toward the guest room.

Meanwhile, Henry held the clean clothes and sighed faintly. "I'm dirty. To think I caught Noelle with my bare hands. I'm dirty."

Estelle rolled her eyes at him. "I got the clothes for you. Hurry up and change."

The moment they entered the room, Henry had started sighing incessantly, repeating "I'm dirty" dozens of times. He threw a fit demanding to change his clothes, claiming that his previous outfit had touched Noelle and was now tainted with bad luck.

Having no other choice, Estelle had gone to an assistant to request a shirt and a jacket. But for some reason, the design of this shirt was quite different from regular ones. Henry studied it for a long time but still couldn't figure out how the buttons were supposed to fasten.

Estelle felt a bit disdainful of Henry's intelligence. "Bring the clothes here. Let me see."

She lowered her head and fiddled with it a couple of times. "This buttons here, and this one goes here... Forget it, I'll help you put it on..."

BANG!

The guest room door was violently pushed open. Nathaniel's usually stoic face, which would remain unfazed even if a mountain collapsed before him, now carried a hint of panic.

When he heard Estelle say "I'll help you put it on," his body reacted faster than his brain, and he had already shoved the door open.

Estelle and Henry turned around at the same time.

Realizing his impulsiveness, Nathaniel felt his throat go dry. "Miss Lockwood, the meeting is about to start. What are you still doing?"

Estelle didn't notice anything amiss. "Then I'll go prepare."

With that, she moved to shove the clothes back into Henry's hands.

Nathaniel let out an imperceptible sigh of relief. He didn't even know what he was so nervous about.

Henry's eyes darted around, and he suddenly understood the ex-husband's thoughts.

He thought, "Oh, so you're nervous. You care. But so what? Estelle cared about you a lot back then too, and did you ever respond? Weren't you spending all your time in the gentle embrace of a two-faced manipulator instead?"

Henry didn't take the clothes. He coughed, then suddenly leaned close to Estelle like a pitiful puppy, using a whining tone.

"Yara, just help me out. I really don't know how to do it."

Before Estelle could speak, Nathaniel frowned fiercely.

Henry doubled down. "President Sloan, isn't there still a quarter of an hour before the meeting? That's plenty of time. I know what's important, and I won't cause any delays. Could you step out first? Yara is going to help me change clothes. You're not planning to stay and watch, are you?"

Estelle was speechless.

Nathaniel's lips pressed into a tight line.

Henry clicked his tongue. He suddenly raised his hands and started unbuttoning his own shirt. "Yara, if President Sloan won't leave, then forget it. I'll just take off my clothes first, and then we..."

"Young Mr. Kendrick!" Nathaniel abruptly interrupted, turning his head.

Henry flashed a smile. "What's wrong, President Sloan?"

Nathaniel knew perfectly well that Henry was putting on an act, but he still fell for the bait. He enunciated every word clearly. "Changing clothes, right? I'll help you."

Those last few words carried a hint of gritted teeth.

Henry was overjoyed inwardly. He turned to Estelle and said, "Yara, if President Sloan wants to serve me, then let him do it. This is a rare opportunity, after all. I want to experience what it feels like to be served by President Sloan."

With that, Henry shoved the clothes into Nathaniel's hands.

"I knew you'd fall for this manipulative act, Ex-Husband," he thought smugly.

At the main entrance of Rosalind Manor.

After everyone else had gone inside, Noelle was shut out of the gate, looking extremely pitiful. She dialed Laura Jennings's number, tears streaming down her face delicately.
"Aunt Laura..."

Imperial Crest.

Mia, who had been taking a nap, suddenly opened her eyes. "Zachery, you little dummy, a bad guy is trying to bully Mommy."

Zachery immediately jumped up. "What!"

Mia would do a divination reading every day. The results varied, but whenever it concerned Estelle, the two kids cared deeply.

Zachery's brain worked rapidly. "Mommy is at Rosalind Garden. Could someone there be bullying her? But we can't go to Rosalind Garden either."

Christian suddenly spoke up. "I can go to Rosalind Garden. The people there all know me. They won't stop me."

Mia rejected the idea outright. "No way. You need to stay home and rest well."

Around noon, for some unknown reason, Christian had suddenly developed a fever. Right now, his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were glazed over. It was obvious his fever hadn't broken yet. If he went to Rosalind Garden looking like this, would he be helping Mommy, or just offering himself on a silver platter?

"Actually, I have another idea."

A flash of inspiration struck Zachery as he suddenly thought of a brilliant plan. He gulped. "I learned the art of disguise from Great-Grandpa. Maybe I can..."

An hour later, two identical Christians appeared in front of Mia. One was running a fever with a flushed little face; the other was jumping up and down, brimming with excitement.

Zachery was very satisfied. Now, who could possibly tell the difference between him and Christian Sloan? He patted his chest confidently. "Young Master, I'll go to Rosalind Garden in your place!"

Chapter 53: Christian and Zachery Swap Identities

Twenty minutes later, Zane Grant was stopped in the living room.

He looked at "Christian" in front of him and asked in surprise, "Christian, has your fever broken?"

The young master, who had been lethargic just earlier at noon, was now bursting with energy. His cheeks were rosy, and he looked incredibly healthy.

Zane touched his forehead and muttered in a daze, "It's a miracle..."

Christian had always been frail. Normally, even a minor cold would put all of Imperial Crest on high alert for fear that he wouldn't pull through. When he suddenly spiked a fever at noon, Zane had truly been startled. However, after a thorough checkup revealed no underlying issues, he agreed to Christian's request not to tell Nathaniel Sloan about the fever.

And now, after just one nap, Christian was perfectly fine?

Zachery, who was disguised as Christian, was speechless. His eyes darted around, unable to hide his guilty conscience. "Yes, m-my fever is gone. Uncle Grant, I need a favor from you."

Zane sensed that something was off about "Christian," but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. "What kind of favor?"

Zachery cleared his throat and said, "Daddy is going to be at Rosalind Manor for a few days, and I kind of miss him. Uncle Grant, can you take me to Rosalind Garden?"

Zane looked utterly shell-shocked, his pupils dilating in disbelief. "You're saying you miss Nathaniel?"

Christian had always been quite aloof, cut from the exact same cloth as Nathaniel. A person like that would never admit to missing someone, no matter how much they actually did. Especially Christian—due to his chronic poor health, he had no friends his own age and always kept his feelings bottled up.

When had he ever expressed his inner thoughts so straightforwardly?

Zachery was startled by Zane's flabbergasted expression. For a moment, he panicked. He thought, "Oh no, am I going to fail my disguise as the young master on the very first day?"

He was just about to say something to salvage the situation when Zane suddenly crouched down in front of him. With a look of deep emotion and a hint of heartache, Zane said firmly, "Alright, Uncle Grant will take you!"

Zane thought, "If even someone as inarticulate as Christian is saying he misses his daddy, just how much must he be missing him? He might just be saying 'I miss Daddy' out loud, but who knows, maybe our precious Christian is secretly wiping away tears under his blanket in the dead of night!"

Letting his imagination run wild, Zane's heart ached even more for the boy. He secretly cursed Nathaniel's ridiculous luck for having such a well-behaved son.

"But it's too late today. How about this, precious Christian? I'll take you to Rosalind Garden first thing tomorrow morning. Sound good?"

Zachery agreed guiltily. "Okay, but you can't tell Daddy, Uncle Grant. I want to give him a surprise."

Zane's face beamed with paternal affection. "Alright, alright. Not a problem."

The next day.

Zachery applied his disguise and skillfully altered Christian's appearance as well. Looking at Christian wearing his face, Zachery didn't feel weirded out at all. Instead, an inexplicable sense of closeness welled up from the bottom of his heart.

It was so strange.

His disguise skills usually weren't this flawless, but for some reason, after swapping his and the young master's appearances, not a single person in Imperial Crest had noticed a thing.

Perhaps it was because the two of them naturally looked a bit alike. After all, they were both that scumbag daddy's sons.

Zachery patted Christian's shoulder. "Young Master, I'm off then. Rest well at home and recover from your sickness, and while you're at it, take good care of that little dummy Mia!"

Christian nodded solemnly. "Don't worry."

Standing off to the side, Mia looked entirely unconvinced. She wondered if this would actually work.

Christian, wearing Zachery's face, was being impossibly obedient, while Zachery, wearing the young master's face, was bouncing off the walls. Were all the adults here blind? How could they not see through this?

Still, the two of them really did look so much alike. For a brief moment, even Mia herself had been dazed by the resemblance.

"Mia." As soon as Zachery left, Christian turned to her. "Don't you guys have a video call with Mommy every day? Isn't it about time?"

Before she could answer, he added, "Since I am Zachery now, let me handle today's call."

Mia shot him a bewildered look.

Had he already completely immersed himself in the role? Why did the word "Mommy" roll off his tongue so naturally?

7:00 AM, Rosalind Manor.

Estelle Lockwood was jolted awake by her alarm. She rubbed her temples. Yesterday's meetings had dragged on until nine at night. Neither side was willing to budge on the raw material prices, leading to endless arguments. Once they had finally settled on a mutually satisfactory price, she had to rush off to inspect the raw material base.

By the time she returned to her room, it was already midnight. Estelle had been so exhausted she didn't want to move a muscle, but since she still had an inspection at Rosalind Farm today, she immediately forced herself out of bed to wash up as soon as the alarm went off.

It wasn't long before her phone rang with a video call from Mia. As soon as the call connected, two little munchkins appeared on the screen. "Good morning, my precious Zachery, my precious Mia."

"Good morning, Mommy!" Mia chirped happily.

Only hearing Mia's voice, Estelle was a bit surprised. "Why is my precious Zachery so quiet today?"

No sooner had she asked than she noticed something was wrong. Her expression instantly turned serious. "Zachery, why is your face so red? Do you have a fever?"

Pretending to be someone else should logically make Christian feel guilty. Yet, he handled the situation effortlessly, not acting like a novice at all. "Mommy, I just have a little cold. It's nothing serious, so please don't worry."

Estelle was quite surprised. Zachery was usually very headstrong and never cared if he got sick. Even with a fever, he would still be running around outside all day. Why was he being so... well-behaved today?

Her heart softened. "Since you're sick, make sure you rest properly. Mommy will be home by the day after tomorrow at the latest."

Given Christian's current physical condition, there was no way he could leave the house. Looking slightly apologetic, he said, "Mommy, I can't go to kindergarten today either. I'm sorry."

Estelle was even more shocked, half-suspecting her son's fever had fried his brain. "You want to go to kindergarten when you're sick? My precious little Zachery, since when did you become so diligent and studious? Alright now, your health is the most important thing. Be a good boy. Put school out of your mind for today and just focus on recovering at home, understood?"

Christian bit his lip, suddenly feeling an inexplicable sense of envy toward Zachery.

He wondered, "So when you get sick, you can actually receive care from others? You can also skip studying and not have to force a smile?"

He asked in a small voice, "But Mommy... won't you think I'm not being mature enough this way?"

Estelle had a sudden urge to pinch his cheeks. Who knew Zachery could be this adorable when he was being clingy?

"You're only five years old. What do you need to be mature for? Play when you want to play, and sleep when you want to sleep. Besides, even if my baby boy doesn't go to class, he's still the most amazing kid in the entire kindergarten."

It felt as if something had struck Christian's heart. His eyes grew hot, and he felt a sudden urge to cry, alongside a welling up of unexplainable grievance. He envied Zachery so, so much.

Why had no one ever said these things to him?

Daddy was always busy. And for Noelle Lockwood's sake, completely disregarding his own wishes, Daddy had handed him over to Noelle and Rose Lowell. Growing up, the thing he received the most was harsh criticism.

He thought, "If only I could be Mommy's son forever... Is there any way to make her my legitimate mommy?"

In stark contrast to Christian's effortless performance, Zachery had been squirming in his seat with sheer guilt ever since he got into the car.

Zane glanced at the hyperactive "Christian." "What's wrong? Are you feeling unwell somewhere?"

BEEP BEEP BEEP.

Just then, Zane's phone rang. He glanced down and saw that it was Nathaniel calling.

"Hello?"

Nathaniel's voice was a bit hoarse. "Are you still at Imperial Crest? How is Christian?"

Zane immediately looked at Zachery in the backseat. Overcome with guilt, Zachery slumped down into the seat, speechless.

He hadn't prepared for this yet! Why was the scumbag daddy calling already? Was his cover about to be blown?

Chapter 54: What Kind of Fate is This?

Half an hour later, Zachery sat at the dining table in Rosalind Garden.

Nathaniel Sloan asked Zane Grant in a deep voice, "What happened? Why did you come looking for me before even eating breakfast?" Originally, he was just worried about Christian and had routinely checked in with Zane, their family doctor. He hadn't expected Zane to show up in front of him with Christian just fifteen minutes later.

Hearing this, Zane couldn't help but twitch his lips. What kind of biological father was he? His son missed him and wanted to see him—was that a crime?

"You'll have to ask Christian about that," Zane said. "I have to say, you're way too irresponsible as a father. You've only been out for a day, and he's already saying how much he misses you, begging me to bring him here to find you." Zane grew increasingly indignant the more he spoke. "Do you often stay away from home and neglect Christian?"

Nathaniel was stunned for two seconds before a surge of pleasant surprise washed over him. "Christian, you missed Daddy?"

Zachery shifted guiltily in his seat. Considering himself a cool, upright kid, he really wasn't good at lying. So he replied dryly, "Yeah, I guess."

Nathaniel didn't sense anything amiss, only feeling slightly curious. "Christian is a bit more lively today."

Zachery muttered under his breath, "Heh." He thought, "He can't even recognize his own son. What a scumbag father!"

Zane didn't think much of it. "It's probably because he finally gets to see his daddy and is happy. Isn't that right, Christian?"

Zachery curled his lips. "Yeah. Daddy, I'm hungry. Let's eat." After saying that, he reached for one of the plates of dumplings.

"Christian, did you not sleep well last night? There are shiitake mushrooms in these dumplings. You're allergic," Zane said, hurriedly pulling the plate away.

Zachery choked back his words and turned to pick up a pastry instead.

Zane quickly interjected again, "Your stomach isn't doing well. You can't have glutinous rice products in the morning. They're hard to digest.

"Christian, darling, this milk is too cold. You can't drink it.

"Wait, I remember you didn't like this dish. Why has your taste changed...

"Careful not to choke. The last time I came to treat you, it was because you choked on a peanut..."

After Zane finished his nagging, he noticed 'Christian' had gone quiet. "What's wrong?"

For the first time in his life, Zachery experienced the feeling of having a table full of food but not knowing where to start. He looked at Nathaniel with a resentful gaze. How on earth had the young master survived to the age of five without starving to death? Setting aside the allergens—anything too cold, too hard, too soft, too hard to digest, spicy, sweet, or salty was completely off-limits. No wonder he was so frail and sickly. He wondered if Young Mr. Sloan had grown up drinking morning dew.

"I can't eat any of this?"

"That's right." Zane didn't think there was anything wrong with this. Whether Christian could eat these things was one thing, but more importantly, he didn't like them anyway.

Nathaniel stroked his hair. "I didn't know you were coming, so Luke White prepared things you can't eat. I've already asked him to prepare something new."

Zachery said gloomily, "Daddy, I don't know if you've heard of an idiom?"

Nathaniel paused, wondering why Christian's mind was racing so fast. "What idiom?"

"It's called giving up eating for fear of choking. It means being so afraid of choking to death that you just stop eating altogether." Zachery's tone grew even more resentful, yet tinged with a hint of righteousness. "I'm still growing. If I can't eat anything, how will I grow taller? How will I develop? I bet my health is so poor precisely because I'm not allowed to eat anything."

Nathaniel was taken aback. Because of Christian's special physical condition, every piece of food he consumed had to be carefully screened before being served. He had never voiced any complaints about it before. Was this how he had felt all along?

As Zachery spoke, he furrowed his brows. He wondered if a normal person really had so many dietary restrictions. This scumbag father didn't look like someone who would abuse a child. Could Noelle Lockwood intentionally be starving the young master? His heart ached at his own imagination. "Defending the young master's right to eat starts with me!" he decided.

So, Zachery immediately picked up a dumpling and stuffed it into his mouth. "Who knows what I can or cannot eat better than myself? I—"

As the shiitake mushroom slid down his throat, Zachery instantly felt a fine, prickling itch and began coughing violently!

Nathaniel's expression changed. He quickly picked him up. "Spit it out, hurry!"

Zane was also shocked, his face turning pale. "You clearly know you're allergic to shiitake mushrooms! You've tried it so many times, and you're allergic every time, yet you just won't give up. Every time you see them, you have to eat them. Christian, darling, I really don't know what to say... I'll go get your medicine!"

Zachery was speechless. He was completely dumbfounded, doubting his entire existence. He thought, "Damn it, I'm allergic to shiitake mushrooms? Why didn't I know?"

But it seemed to be true. Mommy had never let him eat shiitake mushrooms. He wondered what kind of bizarre connection he had with the young master. He also thought Zane's words were very strange. What did he mean by "every time you see shiitake mushrooms, you have to try them, and every time you try them, you're allergic, but you still won't give up"? Did Young Mr. Sloan have a rebellious streak too? They were quite alike in that regard.

With these thoughts swirling in his head, Zachery drifted off to sleep.

"According to past situations, he should wake up after a short nap," Zane said helplessly. "Who did he get this stubbornness from, hitting a brick wall and still refusing to turn back?"

Nathaniel placed Zachery on the bed, his face completely expressionless. "He takes after his mother."

Zane instantly fell silent. He had to admit, Estelle Lockwood from five years ago really had that kind of personality. The Lockwood family disliked her, despised her, and belittled her, yet she tried to get close to them time and time again. With no foundation in perfumery, rejected by all her teachers, and shunned by the Lockwood Group, she never gave up. Estelle was the type of person who wouldn't turn back even after hitting a brick wall. Even if her head was bleeding, she would walk down that dark path until the very end.

The only thing she gave up on five years ago... was Nathaniel.

Nathaniel let out a light chuckle and changed the subject. "I haven't seen Christian this lively in a long time."

Christian used to be very lively too, but at some point, he had become increasingly withdrawn and silent.

Zane was about to speak when Luke White knocked on the door. "Mr. Sloan, it's time."

They had scheduled an inspection of raw material quality at Rosalind Farm this morning, and they couldn't be delayed. Zane nodded. "Leave Christian to me, you just go. If you're really worried, I'll report his condition to you every half hour."

At nine in the morning, Estelle Lockwood and Nathaniel Sloan arrived at Rosalind Plantation.

This land was dedicated to cultivating perfume-grade roses. The planting, harvesting, and extraction processes all utilized the world's most advanced methods to preserve the purest rose scent.

Everyone from Star Group was very satisfied. After the inspection, one of the managers said, "President Lockwood, Mr. Sloan, it's just about noon. Would you like to grab lunch together? Today's meal features wild mushrooms flown in fresh—they're only available this season."

Another manager, who was very familiar with Estelle, immediately shook his head. "That won't work. Yara is allergic to mushrooms and can't eat them, and her two little cubs are allergic as well."

"That's a shame... Then how about you, Mr. Sloan? I heard Young Mr. Christian came along too. Does Young Mr. Christian like them?"

Nathaniel paused upon hearing this, his gaze falling on Estelle. He wondered how she could be allergic when she used to love shiitake mushrooms.

Nathaniel asked in a hoarse voice, "I didn't realize Miss Lockwood couldn't eat mushrooms."

Estelle thought of something, and her smile deepened, though it didn't reach her eyes. "There are plenty of people allergic to mushrooms, what's so strange about that? Seeing how surprised you are, Mr. Sloan... could it be that you remembered a certain event from the past and feel a guilty conscience?"

Chapter 55: Zachery and the Young Master Are Really a Bit Alike

Without waiting for Nathaniel Sloan to answer, Estelle Lockwood looked at the managers. "You guys go ahead and eat. I won't be joining you."

After saying that, she immediately turned around and went back to her room, not letting the people behind her see the emotions almost overflowing from her eyes.

During their two years of marriage, her disappointment in Nathaniel had accumulated bit by bit.

All her colleagues knew that she couldn't eat mushrooms because she was allergic to them. But once, Noelle Lockwood lost the necklace Nathaniel had bought for Estelle. Pretending to apologize, Noelle cooked a bowl of mushroom soup and gave it to Nathaniel.

"Nathaniel, it's my fault. You bought that necklace for Estelle, and she must cherish it a lot, but I lost it... I made this mushroom soup to apologize to her, but she definitely wouldn't want to see me right now. Nathaniel, could you bring this soup to her for me, please?"

Nathaniel brought her a bowl of soup that would trigger her allergies and told her to drink it, saying that Noelle had specially cooked it to apologize.

When she refused to drink it, Nathaniel frowned and asked, "I've already bought you a new necklace, and Noelle didn't do it on purpose. You won't even accept her apology—how long are you going to keep throwing a tantrum?"

Estelle had almost humbly begged Nathaniel not to be angry, downing the mushroom soup in one gulp. The man walked away without looking back, while she developed a high fever that night due to the allergic reaction.

But no one knew or cared about that allergic reaction. From beginning to end, Nathaniel never realized that she couldn't eat mushrooms.

Pulling her thoughts back to the present, Estelle quickened her pace, suddenly feeling a wave of nausea in her throat.

She thought, "Disgusting. How absolutely disgusting!"

No matter how deeply affectionate Nathaniel pretended to be now, it was all an illusion!

Returning to her room, Estelle washed her face and forced herself to calm down. Her breathing gradually steadied.

She ate a quick lunch. At twelve-thirty, an assistant knocked on her door. "Miss Lockwood, please don't forget the investors' gathering this afternoon."

Estelle wasn't in high spirits. "Got it."

For this collaboration, aside from Star Group and Evernight International, there were also quite a few minor investors. With the collaboration officially underway, these investors would become the company's partners in the future, so naturally, Estelle had to attend the gathering.

The gathering was held at a racecourse under Henry Kendrick's name, which was not far from Rosalind Garden. When Estelle arrived, most of the guests were already there.

As soon as she walked through the doors, she spotted a few people who had absolutely nothing to do with this banquet. Her eyes instantly turned icy.

Meanwhile.

Zachery had begged Zane Grant to bring him along. Left with no other choice, Zane took "Christian" to the racecourse. Seizing a free moment, Zachery sneaked off to make a phone call.

"Hey, Mia! Let me tell you, he didn't suspect a thing! It's one thing for others not to recognize me, but he's the young master's biological father, and he still couldn't tell the difference between us. How trashy of a person do you think he is?"

Mia was rendered completely speechless. After a moment of hesitation, she said, "Mommy didn't recognize him this morning either. The 'Zachery' next to me is actually the young master."

She thought that if it came down to who was trashy, it seemed both the scumbag dad and Mommy were... Pfft, pfft, pfft, how could she even think something like that?!

Zachery's standards were highly adaptable. "How can Mommy and the scumbag dad be the same? Mommy thought I had a fever, so she definitely wouldn't overthink things. Plus, you guys were on a video call. But the scumbag dad is different. I was standing right in front of him in the flesh, and he still didn't suspect anything! I feel so bad for the young master!"

Thinking of the young master's well-behaved demeanor, Mia muttered softly, "Let me tell you, you and the young master really do look quite alike. Sometimes, just looking at your backs, even I can't tell you two apart."

Christian, currently wearing Zachery's face, was sitting at the head of the bed reading a book. For a brief moment, his expression was identical to Zachery's. Although Zachery was energetic, once he poured himself into a task, he became intensely serious. This same level of seriousness was perfectly mirrored in Christian.

Zachery also muttered a complaint, "True. The young master is allergic to mushrooms, and so am I. I even ate mushroom dumplings and nearly scared the scumbag dad half to death."

Though sometimes, he did wonder if there were simply too many coincidences between him and the young master. But it was normal, right? Even though they didn't share the same mother, they had the same father, meaning half of their genes were identical.

Just then, Zachery's ears twitched. Catching a sound, he immediately grew furious. "I've got to go, Mia! Those scumbags are trying to bully Mommy! I'm going to help her!"

As Mia hung up the phone, Christian asked in concern, "Zachery is just a little kid. What if he gets bullied?"

Mia curled her lips. "With Zachery's mouth that can infuriate the whole world, you think someone can bully him?"

Back at the gathering.

With a single glance, Estelle spotted Noelle Lockwood surrounded by the crowd. Standing next to Noelle were Rose Lowell and Laura Jennings. The three women were all smiles, accepting everyone's compliments without a shred of guilt.

"Only Miss Lockwood could make President Sloan change his mind."

"Mrs. Lockwood, Miss Noelle is simply far too outstanding. If my daughter could be half as excellent as Miss Noelle, I would be completely satisfied!"

Most of the people present were aware of the true and fake heiress incident from back then, which prompted some to naturally try and curry favor.

"If you ask me, the Lockwood Family making the decision to keep Miss Noelle back then was absolutely their smartest choice."

Rose beamed with pride and raised her chin. "Of course. Noelle was meticulously raised by us, so naturally, she stands out."

Noelle smiled gently, feigning bashfulness. "Alright, alright, please stop praising me... Oh, Miss Yara, you're here?"

The crowd subconsciously turned their heads.

Just looking at these three women made Estelle sick. "Why are you here? I recall Nathaniel already sent someone to kick you out."

Hearing this, Laura was instantly infuriated. Yesterday, Noelle had come to her crying, saying she had been kicked out. After pressing for details, Laura found out that it was all Yara's doing!

"I am Nathaniel's mother! I can bring whoever I want here!"

Estelle remained expressionless. "Do you think this is your backyard? So what if you're Nathaniel's mother? I'll kick Nathaniel's mother out too. Get out."

"You!" Laura fumed.

"Yara, please don't be angry." Noelle hurriedly stepped forward. While it sounded like she was explaining, everything she said between the lines was intended to show everyone how special she was to Nathaniel. "Nathaniel gave two percent of the profits to the Lockwood Group, so the Lockwood Group added to their investment. My mother and I are here to attend the investors' gathering. Yara, Aunt Laura didn't explain it clearly just now, so I'll apologize on her behalf. But you shouldn't be so impulsive next time."

Rose suddenly felt emboldened. She planted her hands on her hips and commanded arrogantly, "You hear that? Noelle isn't here to cause trouble. Some people had better keep their schemes in check!"

Estelle's face turned frosty as her gaze met Nathaniel's, who was approaching from a distance. "President Sloan is willing to take a loss just to support his fiancée's family business. How truly touching."

After saying that, she brushed past Nathaniel and quickly walked away.

Chapter 56: Are You Explaining to Me?

Chapter 56: Are You Explaining to Me?

Noelle broke into a smile and hurried over to him. "Nathaniel..."

"Since when did you become an investor?" Nathaniel Sloan interrupted flatly.

Noelle's smile instantly froze. "I..."

"Oh, Nathaniel, this was my decision!"

Laura Jennings was very dissatisfied with her son's attitude. "The Lockwood Group is a perfume company, after all. If you exclude the Lockwood family, wouldn't that make us a laughingstock to outsiders?"

"You're not short of money anyway, so what's wrong with helping Noelle? You have no idea how arrogant that Yara Lockwood was just now, acting as if Noelle didn't even deserve to speak to her just because she isn't an investor... Nathaniel, Nathaniel?!"

Before Laura could finish, Nathaniel had already turned around to catch up with Estelle Lockwood. Her face instantly flushed red with anger. "What is the meaning of this? His fiancée is right here, yet all he knows is to chase after that little bitch!"

Noelle said gently, "Mrs. Sloan, it's fine. Nathaniel is just going to take care of official business."

Laura had always been petty, judging others through her own narrow mindset. "Hmph, a man and a woman together—what kind of serious business could they possibly be discussing? She really knows how to seduce men..."

"Ah, Grandma, so you're saying that when a man and a woman discuss business together, it's inappropriate?"

Zachery had just walked over. Hearing this, he was so furious he almost wanted to run everyone over.

Wearing Christian's face, he pinched his throat and said sarcastically, "But last time, I saw Grandpa and Chairman Sullivan talking for a long, long time about the downtown garden project.

"According to what you just said, could it be that Grandpa and Chairman Sullivan are having an affair too? Wow, I'm going to go ask them!"

Chairman Sullivan was in her early fifties and was one of the Sloan Group's largest partners. The downtown garden project was the only Sloan Group venture that did not rely on Nathaniel, and the entire Sloan family valued it highly. Chairman Sullivan was also present today, and she was standing right nearby when Zachery said those words.

Laura's cheek twitched. "How can that be compared..."

"I think President Lockwood did the right thing just now. There's no need to waste breath on these people," Chairman Sullivan smiled. "Perhaps a woman like Mrs. Sloan, whose entire life revolves around her husband and who only knows how to eat, drink, be merry, and get jealous, truly doesn't understand us."

In the perfume industry, the largest consumer base was female. Many of the perfume designers and distributors were also women. Hearing Laura and Noelle's remarks, they all felt somewhat speechless and nodded in frequent agreement with Chairman Sullivan.

Word had it that Laura herself was a former mistress who had usurped the original wife to become Mrs. Sloan. Perhaps in the eyes of mistresses like her, men were indeed more important. Anyone who approached her husband would immediately be labeled a "vixen."

Laura was so angry that her face cycled between red and white. Rose Lowell, standing off to the side, didn't dare to speak up either. After all, she also thought that Yara was just a seducing vixen.

Zachery trotted away, his mission accomplished.

Three days later, Estelle walked toward the changing rooms at the racecourse. Before she could reach them, a flurry of footsteps suddenly rang out behind her, rapidly approaching from a distance.

"I didn't authorize Noelle to come over, nor do I know how they got here," Nathaniel spoke up to explain.

Estelle raised an eyebrow. "Is Mr. Sloan explaining this to me?"

Nathaniel paused. "After all, we are the closest of business partners. I don't want others to cause unnecessary misunderstandings between us."

"Then you can rest assured, Mr. Sloan. I never hold a grudge against money," Estelle said slowly, twirling a curl of hair around her fingertip. "The Lockwood Group's bills are going through your side. You are solely responsible for your own profits and losses—it has absolutely nothing to do with me."

"However, President Sloan, a word of advice: I have plenty of ways to make the Lockwood Group suffer loss after loss. You might be able to protect them once, but can you protect them every single time?"

She had returned to the country to deal with the Lockwood family. How could she possibly give the Lockwood Group a chance to make a comeback?

Nathaniel looked at her lips, his voice turning hoarse. "I won't protect them."

Estelle didn't believe him for a second. "How many words out of President Sloan's mouth are actually true?"

Nathaniel blocked her path, but she simply sidestepped him and walked into the women's changing room. His gaze was profound, leaving his thoughts unreadable.

"Daddy."

A faint, spectral voice suddenly echoed beside him. Zachery, as the Master of Sarcasm, unleashed his Skill of Sarcasm. "Do you know the story of the boy who cried wolf?"

Nathaniel's eyelid twitched. For some reason, he recalled Zachery's comment about "giving up eating for fear of choking" from that morning, and a bad premonition washed over him.

Zachery continued, "The story goes like this: the first time you lie, everyone believes you. The second time you lie, everyone believes you again. But the third time, when you finally tell the truth, no one believes you anymore because they've been deceived twice before."

"Look at you—you've disappointed Ms. Yara so many times. Now that you're finally telling the truth, she doesn't believe you. Daddy, how tragic!"

Nathaniel was almost exasperated into laughter. Just what had his usually obedient Christian been learning lately? He spoke with such bizarre sarcasm.

"So you're saying this is my fault?"

Zachery looked utterly shocked, as though the words "Is that even a question?" were written in bold letters across his face. "Daddy, is there some kind of misunderstanding in your self-awareness? Did you actually think you had a high credibility score?"

"Tsk, tsk. I'd sooner believe a sow could climb a tree and fly a plane than believe you. Oh, my apologies, how could I lump you and a sow together? You don't even deserve to be compared to a sow."

Eavesdropping nearby, Zane Grant was speechless. What on earth was going on with Christian? He was even rhyming his insults.

Nathaniel felt both amused and helpless. He knew Christian liked Yara, but this was a bit much...

Perhaps his guess was right—Yara really was Estelle. And Christian was Estelle's biological son to begin with. Even if the boy knew nothing of the truth, it was only natural for him to feel an innate closeness to his own mother.

Nathaniel leaned down. "Christian, you've been much more lively lately."

Zachery had just been enjoying the thrill of his roasting session, but upon hearing this, he realized he might have broken character. He quickly scrambled to cover up his secret identity, his eyes darting around.

"Of course! I get happy whenever I see Ms. Yara, and when people are happy, they become lively. Who would want to be withdrawn when they could be lively instead? Daddy, before you ask me this question, you should reflect on why I didn't like talking in the past. You may present your argument and explain why it was all Noelle's fault."

"Alright, I'm going to go play with Mr. Grant now. Bye, Daddy!"

Nathaniel was left speechless.

Zane let out a cough. "Haha, Nathaniel, we'll head to the racecourse first. Haha."

Who could possibly hold back their laughter at a time like this? Haha.

Inside the racecourse, everyone had changed into their equestrian gear and was selecting their horses. This was the Kendrick family's racecourse, so Estelle had her very own pony here. She was just about to lead her little white horse out when she heard Noelle's hypocritical voice ring out behind her.

"Ms. Yara, I am truly sorry about what happened earlier. I've come to apologize to you."

Noelle wore an expression of gentle helplessness, as if she genuinely wanted to make amends. "I wonder if you know how to ride a horse, Ms. Yara? If you don't, I can teach you."

Estelle paused in her tracks. Narrowing her eyes, she turned around.

When she was eighteen and had just returned to the Lockwood family, Noelle had gathered a group of wealthy heiresses and brought her to a racecourse. They had deliberately given her a fierce, untamable horse, forcing her to mount it over and over again—only to be thrown off, mount again, and be thrown off again.

Then, Noelle had remarked, "My sister is unbelievable. She just can't seem to learn how to ride a horse. Sigh... it's probably because she grew up in the countryside and was never exposed to things like this."

Noelle's little clique of friends had roared with laughter, mocking and belittling her. Only after they had laughed enough did Noelle put on a fake display of trying to stop them.

And now, Noelle was asking her the exact same question. Did she want to pull the same old trick again?

Estelle lowered her gaze. In that case, she would settle both the new scores and the old grudges all at once.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 57: Noelle, You're the Real Country Bumpkin, You're Not a Lockwood by Blood

Estelle Lockwood smiled leisurely, raising an eyebrow. "You're going to teach me?"

In front of the crowd, Noelle Lockwood smiled with perfect grace. "Yes. Equestrianism is quite difficult to grasp without proper instruction. Since I've been learning since childhood, I can offer Miss Yara some guidance."

Estelle's smile deepened. "Is that so?" she said casually. "But even if Miss Lockwood knows how to ride, she isn't a professional instructor. What if I get hurt?"

People nearby were already glancing in their direction.

Noelle's voice was gentle, yet every word she spoke dripped with thinly veiled condescension: "You don't need to worry about that, Miss Yara. I've taught my sister how to ride before. Although she never quite managed to learn..."

"If Miss Lockwood couldn't even teach her own sister," Estelle replied coldly, "I'm not exactly reassured by your teaching skills."

Noelle offered a helpless smile, prompting a bystander to step forward and intervene.

"You've completely misunderstood, Miss Yara! It's not that Miss Noelle is a poor instructor; it's that Estelle Lockwood was just too stupid!"

Quite a few minor investors had attended today's event, each bringing their respective dates. Although the Lockwood Group was steadily declining, it remained an unattainable titan in their eyes, and they were eager for any chance to curry favor with Noelle.

"Miss Noelle tried so hard back then, but that Estelle couldn't even manage to climb onto the horse! She completely wasted Miss Noelle's painstaking efforts!" another chimed in.

"Exactly! I've never seen such a country bumpkin in my life. It was absolutely humiliating. She didn't have the slightest bit of elegance expected of a wealthy heiress. If no one had mentioned she was the true daughter of the Lockwood Family, I would have assumed she crawled out of a slum."

"Estelle fell off the horse several times that day. No matter how Miss Noelle taught her, she just couldn't learn. She was hopelessly inept. But you're different, President Lockwood. You..."

The man was trying to flatter Yara by contrasting her with Estelle. Just as he was feeling smug about his perceived cleverness, Estelle interrupted him mildly. "How do you know Estelle was hopelessly inept? Did you see it with your own eyes?"

The man choked on his words, stammering, "W-Well, I wasn't there, but that's what everyone says..."

Estelle let out a cold laugh. "So you believe whatever 'everyone' says? If I told you your son isn't yours, would you believe that?"

The man's throat tightened, and he didn't dare say another word.

"Alright, alright, please stop talking. My sister wasn't as bad as everyone thinks." Noelle quickly stepped forward and said gently, "You misunderstand, Miss Yara. They didn't mean it like that."

"It's just that my sister grew up in the countryside and had never been exposed to equestrianism, so she was terrified of riding. People felt she couldn't uphold the prestige of being a Lockwood heiress, which is why..."

"I'm afraid I don't follow, Noelle," Estelle said slowly.

"The true Lockwood heiress grew up in the countryside without any exposure to horseback riding, and people thought she was unworthy of the Lockwood Family.

"But logically speaking, Miss Noelle, *you* should have been the one growing up in the country. *You* should have been the one deprived of riding lessons, deemed vulgar and unworthy of the Lockwood Family, shouldn't you?"

Pausing, Estelle let out a long *oh* of mock realization. "Wait, no, how could I say that?"

"Even though the true heiress grew up in the country, she shares the Lockwood Family's blood. It was only right for her to be brought back. But if it weren't for that hospital mix-up scandal, Miss Noelle, you wouldn't have even been able to touch the threshold of the Lockwood home. You likely would have spent your entire life in the very 'countryside' you look down upon.

"You stole eighteen years of her life, yet you turned around and branded her a vulgar country bumpkin who couldn't learn high-society etiquette," Estelle asked with a cryptic smile. "You don't actually think you're a good person, do you?"

Her words were a blatant slap to Noelle's face. Noelle's expression stiffened; she swayed unsteadily, her eyes instantly brimming with red.

Many in the crowd suddenly realized the truth in her words. They realized that the Lockwood Family had poured all their resources into raising Noelle, turning her into a high-society socialite. But if the mix-up had never happened, they would have devoted those exact same resources to Estelle. Who was to say Estelle would have been any worse than Noelle? Yet, the way Noelle told it, Estelle was made out to be entirely worthless and unfit to be the Lockwood heiress, to the point where the family publicly claimed she was merely an adopted daughter.

Meanwhile, Noelle constantly paraded around playing the kindhearted sibling, always calling Estelle her 'dear sister.' If she genuinely cared about her sister, shouldn't she have left the Lockwood Family and returned the position of the eldest daughter to its rightful owner?

"Nonsense!"

An angry female voice abruptly pierced the silence. Rose Lowell stood with her hands on her hips, utterly exasperated. "What do any of you know?! If Estelle hadn't been so unreasonable, why would we have favored Noelle?!"

The crowd froze for a moment before realizing the speaker was Rose, Estelle's biological mother.

Rose's shrill voice lashed out in a bitter roar. "When Estelle came home, we arranged tutors for her so she could eventually work at the Lockwood Group! But instead of focusing on her studies, she spent all day plotting ways to torment Noelle!

"Relying on her status as the true heiress, she repeatedly tried to kick Noelle out of the house, stole Noelle's bedroom, and even demanded that Noelle serve her like a maid!

"We figured we owed Estelle a great deal, so we didn't say much about it. But who could have known she'd go so far as to push Noelle down a flight of stairs?! If Noelle hadn't been incredibly lucky, she wouldn't have survived! Tell me, who would want a daughter like that?!"

Tears streamed down Noelle's face. "Mom, please stop..."

"I will not stop! Why shouldn't I say it? If I don't, who knows how badly they'll misunderstand you!" Rose's face twisted in agony. "Think about it, everyone! Estelle is our biological daughter. We couldn't wait to make it up to her, so why wouldn't we like her? It's not because she grew up in the countryside; it's because she was rotten to the core!"

Noelle covered her mouth and wept silently, as if unable to bear hearing another word.

The venue fell silent as people exchanged uncertain glances. They had to admit it made sense. Naturally, the Lockwood parents would have pitied their newly recovered biological daughter. If things had devolved to such a state, it must have been Estelle's own fault...

Rose sneered. "Now you know. It wasn't that Noelle refused to teach Estelle how to ride; it was Estelle who refused to cooperate!"

A frigid smile curled the corners of Estelle's lips. The Lockwood Family really never ceased to find new lows! To protect Noelle, they were willing to hurl any amount of filthy slander at a "dead" woman!

Estelle closed her eyes briefly before snapping them open. "So Estelle failed to learn how to ride because she was genuinely too stupid," she said icily. "It really wasn't Miss Lockwood's fault."

Noelle shook her head in helpless resignation. "My sister..."

"In that case," Estelle scoffed, "Miss Lockwood's equestrian skills must be exceptional. Why don't you give me a demonstration? I'd love to learn a thing or two."

At that moment, Nathaniel Sloan walked into the venue.

Noelle couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. However, she had only asked if Yara knew how to ride to showcase her own impressive talents. Since Yara didn't know how... this was the perfect opportunity to show off!

With that in mind, Noelle pretended not to notice Nathaniel. She casually pointed at a small white horse and offered a modest smile. "Then allow me to demonstrate, Miss Yara."

Hidden from the crowd's view, Estelle subtly winked at the little white horse. Without anyone noticing, human and horse silently exchanged a secret signal.

Chapter 58: "Estelle's Injuries Can't Be Let Go, Either."

Noelle's decision to ride a horse naturally drew a sizable crowd of onlookers.

A surge of thrill and vanity swelled within her, leaving her utterly elated.

She had thought Yara was so impressive, but the woman didn't even know how to ride a horse—just like that country bumpkin, Estelle.

Since she had been able to step on Estelle to climb the social ladder, she could do the exact same to Yara now.

Thinking back to how Estelle had been thrown from the horse time and time again all those years ago, Noelle felt a profound sense of satisfaction.

Later, when it was Yara's turn to ride, she could pull a few tricks and make her suffer!

Noelle's smile widened. She grabbed the reins and vaulted onto the horse. However, at that exact moment—

The originally docile little white horse suddenly thrashed, violently bucking Noelle off before she could even settle into the saddle!

THUD!

Pain instantly shot through Noelle as she hit the ground flat on her back, limbs sprawling in the air.

A dead silence instantly descended upon the surroundings. The crowd's eyes widened in disbelief.

They wondered if Noelle wasn't supposed to be a top-tier equestrian. What on earth had just happened?

Perhaps too stunned by the turn of events, no one spoke. The arena remained steeped in heavy silence.

After a long while, a woman's voice abruptly broke the quiet. Yara raised an eyebrow. "I think I finally understand why Estelle kept falling off her horse seven years ago.

"It turns out Miss Lockwood set such a stellar example," she added meaningfully.

The silence grew even more deafening.

Noelle nearly screamed, her entire body trembling with rage.

Rose hurriedly helped Noelle up, her heart aching for her daughter. Then, she turned to the horse, her face contorting with malice as she hurled a string of curses. "You little beast! How dare you hurt Noelle! You're dead meat! Someone come here and slaughter this horse right now!"

Someone eager to curry favor chimed in, "It's all this beast's fault. It was an honor for Miss Noelle to choose it, yet it doesn't know what's good for it."

"Please calm down, Mrs. Lockwood. This is Young Mr. Kendrick's equestrian club. I'm sure Young Mr. Kendrick wouldn't disrespect you over a mere animal."

Now back on her feet, Noelle's cheeks burned crimson with embarrassment. She wanted nothing more than to chop the horse into pieces, but she had to keep up appearances.

"Yes, this horse has too wild of a temperament. It shouldn't be kept at the club. It's fine that it hurt me, but it would be terrible if it injured someone else in the future," she said pretentiously.

The bystanders nodded in agreement, which finally brought some color back to Noelle's face.

Just as she was about to stand properly, she suddenly heard Yara chuckle. "Miss Lockwood, if you lack the skill, you shouldn't blame the horse. If you demand it be killed just because you couldn't mount it, does that mean you'll slaughter every horse in this club if you fail to mount the next one too?

"Leave at least a couple for Henry Kendrick. This is his property, after all. It hasn't even officially opened yet, and he's already losing horses because of you. What a massive loss."

The crowd stared at Yara in dumbfounded shock.

Noelle's fingers trembled with rage as she struggled to maintain her smile. "Yara..."

Rose shrieked, "What do you mean by that?! It hurt my daughter, so it deserves to die! How dare you take the side of that little beast! What are your intentions?!"

Yara, completely unfazed by this shrewish display, replied flatly, "Do you not understand human speech?"

Heartbroken for her daughter and furious at the insult, Rose completely lost the grace of a wealthy socialite. "Shut your mouth! Ahhh!"

"Mom!" Noelle hurriedly grabbed Rose's hand before putting on a desolate, mournful smile. "Nathaniel, you're here."

Rose immediately stopped her screaming and put on an expression of extreme grievance. "Nathaniel, you have to stand up for Noelle! This Yara has repeatedly mocked her, and even when she saw Noelle fall off the horse, she still made cynical, sarcastic remarks! My poor Noelle is already in so much pain, boohoo..."

Noelle wept silently, looking the picture of meek submission. "Nathaniel, I'm fine."

Nathaniel furrowed his brows deeply.

Refusing to give the mother-daughter duo the chance to play the victims, Yara scoffed. "Mr. Sloan, don't tell me you're feeling sorry for her?"

"Noelle has only fallen once. Years ago, your wife fell over and over again until she couldn't even stand. She was covered in blood, yet Noelle forced her onto the horse's back time after time. Why didn't anyone feel sorry for her back then?"

Noelle's weeping expression instantly froze as the color violently drained from her face.

Rose was also startled. She never expected an incident from so long ago to be dug up again. She hurriedly tried to explain. "N-No, Noelle only did that for Estelle..."

Before she could finish, she was shocked into silence by the intense murderous intent swimming in Nathaniel's dark eyes. She could only shut her mouth sheepishly.

Biting her lower lip, Noelle spoke in a fragile voice. "Nathaniel, Ms. Yara must have heard some baseless rumors from somewhere and misunderstood me. But you, of all people, should know best whether I was earnestly teaching my sister back then... I don't know why Yara is targeting me like this, I..."

"Noelle, I saw everything," Nathaniel said, his dark eyes lowering, deep and unfathomable.

Noelle's heart skipped a beat. "W-What?"

"Aunt Noelle, Daddy and I arrived even before you insisted on teaching Aunt Yara how to ride."

Zachery unceremoniously exposed her lies. "So, we saw every bit of how you mocked Aunt Yara just now and how you brought this entirely upon yourself."

Noelle's eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets in horror!

Yara was actually a little surprised. Why was Young Master Christian here? Furthermore, Christian's tone of voice sounded remarkably like her precious Zachery.

Perhaps this was a case of being influenced by one's surroundings. Even the young master had started speaking with such cynical sarcasm.

Rose had not expected Nathaniel to have witnessed the whole ordeal either. She instantly panicked. "Nathaniel, listen to me. What happened just now... it was all a misunderstanding..."

"Old Mr. Lockwood brought out that old token and begged me for a long time before I agreed to give the Lockwood Group a chance to collaborate." Nathaniel's tone was indifferent. "But from the looks of it, neither of you seems to cherish this opportunity. Forget it then. Luke, go inform Old Mr. Lockwood that Mrs. Lockwood looks down on this collaboration."

Rose was fraught with panic. "Nathaniel, we don't look down on it! Not at all! Noelle, say something, hurry up and beg him..."

Rose knew full well just how desperately the Lockwood Family needed this partnership—how much they needed to build a relationship with Star in order to secure their standing in the fragrance industry.

That was why she was genuinely panicking now.

Noelle looked at him through a veil of tears. "Nathaniel, I pulled all-nighters for two days straight for this collaboration. How could we possibly look down on it? If you're removing us from the project because of Ms. Yara, I..."

Nathaniel cut her off. "If the two of you truly valued this partnership, you wouldn't have mocked and belittled Star's chief director, accused her of harboring malicious intentions, demanded she apologize, and then ordered the slaughter of a horse at Vice President Kendrick's equestrian club.

"Mrs. Lockwood, you've offended the two most crucial directors of this collaboration. Do you still expect me to believe you value it?"

Noelle and Rose's faces drained of all color as a terrifying realization suddenly dawned on them—

Yara was the chief director of this collaboration!

Yara was not Estelle. Estelle was someone they could beat, scold, and humiliate at will. But Yara... uttering even a single bad word against her could drag the entire Lockwood Group down with them!

Rose's voice trembled as she spoke. "B-But even if we were in the wrong, Noelle is injured. We can't... we can't just let this go..."

Since this was Henry Kendrick's equestrian club and Noelle had been injured on his property, it was only natural that Henry should bear the responsibility!

Noelle lowered her eyes and remained silent, clearly harboring the exact same thought.

Nathaniel, however, glanced back with eyes entirely devoid of warmth. "You're right. We certainly can't just let this go."

A spark of joy leaped in Rose's heart.

The very next moment, Nathaniel's icy voice shattered her hopes. "Therefore, the injuries Estelle sustained at the equestrian club seven years ago cannot just be let go of, either."

Mommy, Daddy Has Already Regretted It

As Nathaniel Sloan's words hung in the air, a dead silence fell over the area.

Estelle Lockwood snapped her head up. Did he just say... the injuries she suffered back then wouldn't be let go either?

Noelle Lockwood was terrified. Her heart was about to pound out of her chest! Terrified that Nathaniel might notice something amiss, she hastily put on a fake act and turned to Rose Lowell. "Mom! What are you saying? I'm fine. How could I possibly hold a grudge against Miss Yara over such a minor scratch?"

Rose also realized her slip-up. Her face turned pale as she stammered, "Yes, right. I just wasn't thinking straight for a moment."

Estelle let out a mocking laugh. "Noelle, Nathaniel said he wants to settle the score with you from seven years ago, yet you're blabbering about being fine and not holding a grudge against me. Are you answering a completely different question because you're guilty, or do you just not understand human speech?"

Noelle's expression instantly stiffened, and Nathaniel's eyes darkened.

Noelle took a deep breath. A brief flash of malice crossed her eyes before she feigned a gentle tone. "Nathaniel, I know my sister's death has always been a heavy burden on your heart.

"When she got injured learning to ride a horse, I felt terribly guilty too. It was all my fault. So much time has passed, and I have no way to prove my innocence anymore. Just punish me... COUGH COUGH COUGH..."

"Noelle, Noelle!" Rose cried out in exaggerated dismay. "Noelle, what's wrong? Nathaniel, Noelle has always been in poor health. No matter how angry you are, you can't treat her like this! What did my daughter ever do wrong? SOB SOB SOB..."

Estelle's smile grew increasingly cynical. After all these years, they were still using the same old trick. By weeping and wailing, they forcefully minimized their own wrongdoings until they were brushed off entirely.

Next, Nathaniel would probably start defending Noelle, wouldn't he? She wondered if it would be just like before, where he would tell her that Noelle's heart couldn't take the shock and that they would discuss it later.

Estelle had no interest in listening any further. She took her horse by the reins and turned toward the racetrack.

Noelle lowered her eyes and gave Rose a gentle tug. Getting the hint, Rose shamelessly spoke up. "Nathaniel, Estelle was my biological daughter! When she was hurt, it pained my heart! I know that allowing her to get injured was a failure on our part as parents. But you know how stubborn Estelle was. She was determined to learn horseback riding back then—how could we possibly stop her?"

Nathaniel's gaze was heavy. "So, Ms. Lowell, are you saying that Estelle deserved to get hurt?"

Rose cursed inwardly, thinking that the girl absolutely deserved it. She was just a country bumpkin who insisted on learning to ride a horse. Noelle was kind enough to take the time to teach her. Not only did she fail to learn, but she even had the audacity to blame Noelle for falling off the horse! Noelle was so innocent! It was clearly Estelle's own stupidity, so how could anyone blame Noelle?

"I... I didn't mean it like that," Rose quickly backpedaled. "But you know Estelle's temperament. She never gave up until she hit a brick wall. She couldn't get the hang of riding and fell off time and time again. Noelle tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn't listen. Besides, Estelle didn't even blame Noelle back then. Isn't Dr. Yara overstepping her boundaries today?"

Nathaniel scrutinized Rose.

In the past, both Austin Lockwood and Rose Lowell had always claimed how much they doted on Estelle. They insisted she was just introverted, sensitive, and bad at expressing herself. But today, Nathaniel couldn't help but reflect—were the Lockwoods telling the truth?

He was almost certain that Yara was Estelle. And her attitude toward the Lockwood family made him start to suspect things. After the biological daughter returned to the Lockwood family, had she been ostracized? Did everyone love the adopted daughter they had raised for eighteen years, while they excluded and despised the newly returned biological daughter, hating her for coming back and threatening to steal Noelle's place?

Rose wanted to say more. "Nathaniel..."

But Nathaniel cut her off. "Does Ms. Lowell truly not know why Estelle didn't blame Noelle back then?"

Rose suddenly had a bad premonition.

Nathaniel spoke indifferently, "Because she had just returned home and was the 'country bumpkin' you all saw her as, while Noelle was the pampered heiress of the Lockwood family. Even if she had blamed her, would Ms. Lowell really have punished Noelle for her sake?"

Rose immediately panicked. "I, I'm not..."

Noelle bit her lower lip tightly, tears welling in her eyes as she shook her head desperately. "Nathaniel, it's not like that..."

Nathaniel had no desire to listen to their excuses. "Since Estelle didn't hold her accountable back then, I will do it for her."

He waved his hand. Luke White immediately understood Mr. Sloan's intention and made a phone call.

Nathaniel cast them a cold glare. "You had best watch yourselves." With that, he turned and walked toward the racetrack.

Noelle felt like she was truly going to faint this time!

Estelle... It was Estelle again! After all these years, the person Nathaniel held in his heart was still Estelle!

A few bystanders discreetly glanced over, their eyes filled with disdain. Having grown up in wealthy families, they perfectly understood what was going through Rose's mind. Wasn't it just her disliking her biological daughter for coming back from the countryside and deeming her inferior to the adopted daughter? Therefore, when the biological daughter got hurt, Rose not only refused to blame the adopted daughter, but even felt that her biological daughter was being a nuisance.

Waves of dizziness washed over Noelle. Rose quickly grabbed her hand and gritted her teeth, whispering, "Noelle, it's okay. It's going to be okay. You saved Nathaniel's life once. He won't be that heartless..."

Inside the racetrack.

Estelle rode her horse for two laps. It wasn't until she returned to her starting point that she saw Nathaniel. She had no idea how long he had been standing there. Too lazy to acknowledge him, she dismounted and prepared to leave.

As she walked past him, she heard him ask, "How long have you been learning to ride, Miss Lockwood?"

Estelle raised an eyebrow. "What are you getting at?"

Nathaniel replied calmly, "Your movements are very practiced, and you control the horse well. However, some minor habits still show that you haven't been riding for very long. No more than three years."

Estelle's eyes darkened. It had indeed been exactly three years since she started learning.

In her first year away, she had just given birth and suffered a terrible ordeal. Although Old Mr. Kendrick had saved her, she spent every day recovering from her illnesses, living in a complete daze. During the second year, she found the will to live for the sake of her children. However, because her health was still exceptionally poor, she could only rest quietly. It wasn't until the third year that Henry Kendrick took her to his family's private racetrack, where she finally learned how to ride.

Estelle's red lips curled into a slight smile. "So, what are you trying to say, Mr. Sloan?"

Nathaniel rubbed the string of Buddha Beads on his wrist, his dark eyes profound. "When you mounted the horse, there was a brief moment of hesitation. Your movements were exceptionally cautious. Is it because you've been thrown from a horse multiple times in the past?"

That was why she subconsciously acted with such care. These tiny, inadvertently revealed details were things she herself might not have even noticed.

Estelle was noncommittal. "It's quite normal for a beginner to take a few falls, isn't it?"

Nathaniel took a step toward her. "Is that so?"

Estelle smiled radiantly. "What exactly are you suspecting, Mr. Sloan? Don't tell me you found out your wife took several falls back then, and suddenly growing a conscience, you want to compensate her.

"But your ex-wife has been dead for a long time. Unable to soothe your guilty conscience without offering compensation, you turned your sights on me—"

At this point, Estelle retorted without holding back, "You don't still think I'm your ex-wife, do you? I've told you so many times—if you suffer from delusions, go to a hospital. Do you need me to book you an appointment with a specialist?"

Chapter 60: Christian and Zachery Seem a Little Alike

Estelle finished speaking and left without looking back.

Nathaniel watched her retreating figure, silent for a long time.

"Daddy."

Just then, a faint voice sounded by his ear. He turned his head, only to see "Christian" looking at him with utter disgust.

Zachery wanted nothing more than to beat up his scumbag of a father. "Daddy, do you know why the horses run away, the flowers stop blooming, and the sun disappears the moment you arrive?"

Nathaniel was already used to Christian's nonsensical remarks. "...Why?"

Zachery looked at him with disdain. "Heh, Daddy, you really have no self-awareness. It's because they're disgusted by you, of course.

"Can't you tell that Ms. Yara doesn't want to talk to you? But it's not surprising. Ms. Yara is pretty, rich, and knows how to run a business and manage a company. With such a wonderful woman, others would be lining up to court her. Why would she want to pay attention to a scumbag?"

Nathaniel fell silent for a moment and looked at "Christian."

Having praised his mommy without batting an eyelid or skipping a heartbeat, Zachery faced Nathaniel's suspicion without a trace of fear. "Daddy, I'm just expressing my true feelings! You can't crush a child's enthusiasm for telling the truth!"

Zane Grant chimed in at the right moment, marveling, "Christian has really changed. He's so much more lively now. If this keeps up, his illness won't be an issue at all."

Zachery immediately nodded. "So Daddy, just make a little sacrifice and let me say a few words!"

Nathaniel closed his eyes, feeling somewhat helpless. He wondered, "What kind of twisted logic is this?"

Two days later.

The inspection at Rosalind Garden concluded, and the project officially began. Estelle and Nathaniel got into the car for the return trip.

During the ride back, Estelle cast several glances at "Christian." She found it strange. She wondered why the young Mr. Christian's sitting posture looked a bit like Zachery's.

Usually, Christian sat perfectly straight, practically a miniature version of Nathaniel. But now, he was sprawled all over the seat, looking exactly like Zachery.

Perhaps the young Mr. Christian had just spent too much time with Zachery. Estelle shook her head, dismissing the thought.

Upon returning to Imperial Crest, she went to her room to change clothes. Zachery immediately ran upstairs. "Young Mr. Christian, let's swap back!"

Then, he saw the scene of Christian and Mia sitting at the desk, counting gifts.

Mia was completely immersed in a sea of presents. "Zachery, you little dummy, come look! These are all the gifts the kids and teachers at kindergarten gave to young Mr. Christian!"

After speaking, she picked out a small cake. "I want this one!"

Christian said dotingly, "Alright, they're all yours."

"Thank you, brother! You're the best!"

Zachery was speechless. He felt a sudden illusion that his place in the family had been stolen, striking him like a bolt from the blue.

He thought indignantly, "Well, well, Mia! While I was out there pretending to be young Mr. Christian, protecting Mommy, and roasting our scumbag daddy, you were here calling him 'brother.' Who is your real brother?!"

He glared angrily at Christian, thinking, "This is my sister! Don't you have your own sister? Why are you stealing mine?!"

Before he could even finish fuming, Christian stood up and stuffed a beautifully crafted puzzle into his hands.

"Zachery, you seemed to like this last time, so I bought it for you. Do you like it?"

Mia chimed in from the side. "Zachery, you little dummy, just accept it! Let me tell you, young Mr. Christian really won the hearts of those teachers and parents, but they all thought he was you. Now your reputation is amazing!"

Christian smiled gently and nudged the puzzle forward.

Zachery was speechless again. He thought, "Oh no, my heart is melting."

"Young Mr. Christian is so good at bewitching people! Who wouldn't be charmed by this? Let alone the kindergarten teachers, even I can't resist it!"

"Al... alright, I'll accept it then..."

"Mhm. By the way, Zachery, could I trouble you with a favor?"

The completely bewitched Zachery nodded eagerly. "Uh-huh, uh-huh, of course."

Christian said softly, "Great. Then I'd like to keep swapping places with you for a bit longer. Let's not switch back just yet."

Zachery nodded mindlessly. "Uh-huh, uh-huh..."

Christian smiled. "Then I'll take that as a yes."

Zachery suddenly snapped out of it. "Wait, no..."

Before he could finish, Christian handed him a slice of cake. "Thank you in advance then. You're so good to me, Zachery. I really like you."

Zachery was instantly coaxed into a dizzying spell of happiness.

Mia looked at him with the worldly-wise gaze of someone who had seen it all. She knew it—no one could withstand young Mr. Christian's innocent act.

She thought, "Is it that I can't spot a manipulative act? No! It's just that young Mr. Christian's act is too irresistible!"

Christian lowered his eyes. Today at kindergarten, he had overheard someone talking about an upcoming educational event on paternity testing.

When the time came, he would beg Mommy to do a DNA test with him. Once it was confirmed that they were mother and son, he would reveal his true identity and let Mommy know that he was also her child.

Then, he could rightfully act spoiled and affectionate with her!

A few minutes later.

Christian took Mia by the hand and went to find Estelle.

Excited, Mia threw herself at her. "Mommy!"

Christian stopped in his tracks and said, "Mommy."

Estelle looked surprised. "Zachery, my darling, aren't you going to come over and give me a hug?"

Christian cracked a smile and immediately leaped into her arms.

He thought, "Is this what Mommy is like? She smells so good and feels so soft. I love it."

"How have you been these past few days? Everything okay?" Estelle picked Mia up and asked, "By the way, Zachery, you had a fever a few days ago. What happened? Are you completely recovered now?"

Zachery had always been in excellent health. Let alone a fever, he rarely even caught a cold. The sudden fever had worried Estelle to death.

Mia and Christian exchanged a glance. Mia instantly felt a little guilty.

She panicked inwardly, "Oh no, what do we do? Of course Zachery is fine—the one who had a fever was Christian!"

Christian remained remarkably calm. "I'm all better now. Don't worry, Mommy."

"That's good." Estelle felt relieved.

Seeing that Estelle didn't have the slightest suspicion, Christian couldn't help but ask in a soft voice, "Mommy, you haven't seen us for several days. Weren't you afraid we might have been swapped with someone else?"

Estelle was shocked. "Swapped? Little Zachery, do you really think Mommy wouldn't recognize you?"

In truth, there was something neither Zachery nor Mia knew. Even Zachery himself probably didn't remember.

When Zachery was younger, he had a very quiet and shy personality. However, while they were living abroad, they looked different from the other children, and some kids would always try to bully Mia.

To protect Mia, Zachery's personality became more fierce and outgoing. Now, perhaps feeling that his environment was safe, his personality was gradually reverting to how it used to be after returning to the country.

Estelle rubbed the heads of her two little ones. "Let's go have dinner."

At the Lockwoods' home.

Rose Lowell paced back and forth. "Noelle, what do you think we should do? That Yara Lockwood is such a vixen. Now you can't even go back to Imperial Crest. We have to think of a way..."

Noelle had already calmed down. "Mom, it's not like there are no options. As long as Christian Sloan asks me to go back, no one can stop me."

Rose hesitated. "But that little brat..."

Noelle smiled with the confidence of someone holding the winning ticket. "Remember Christian's piano teacher? Children are the most vulnerable to provocation. When he's learning piano, I'll just have the teacher mock and belittle him a bit, and then I'll step in to comfort him.

"Once I coax him into depending solely on me, why would we ever have to worry about him not obeying?"

The next day.

After breakfast, Zachery wanted to go back to his room to act spoiled with Mommy, but then he heard Mr. Chapman say, "Young Mr. Christian, your piano teacher is here."

Zachery was horrified. He didn't know how to play the piano! Was it too late to swap back with Christian?!

He quickly sprinted upstairs. Before he could even knock on Christian's door, he heard the piano teacher speaking in an arrogant tone.

"Has young Mr. Christian not been practicing the piano lately? Sigh, he's already dull-witted to begin with. If he doesn't study hard, I won't be able to teach him anymore. My previous students were all brilliant; they picked things up the moment they were taught. Yet young Mr. Christian can still only play a few pieces. If Miss Noelle hadn't begged me to come, I wouldn't even spare a second glance at a student like him."

Zachery was dumbfounded. He thought, "Dude, who are you trying to gaslight?"

He thought furiously, "Young Mr. Christian is dull-witted? Oh, I see! This piano teacher was brought in by Noelle Lockwood specifically to put young Mr. Christian down, wasn't he!"

Zachery immediately turned around. Swap back? Forget about swapping back! He absolutely could not let young Mr. Christian suffer this kind of emotional manipulation anymore.

He decided he would be the one to fire the first shot against this gaslighting!