

Mommy, Daddy Has Already Regretted It

The study plunged into a sudden silence.

Nathaniel's voice dropped sharply. "A paternity test? For Christian and me?"

"Yeah," Zane said over the phone. "I was absolutely floored. Nathaniel, you really need to book your mom an appointment with a neurologist whenever you get the chance."

Nathaniel let out a cold sneer. "And the results?"

"The results of a paternity test don't come out that fast," Zane replied, shaking his head. "But how could Christian possibly not be your biological son?"

"I really don't know how your mom's brain is wired to even entertain such an absurd idea..."

After Zane finished, Nathaniel's voice was hoarse. "Let me know when the results are out."

Hanging up, Nathaniel headed back to his room. As he passed Estelle's door, he paused for a long while. He truly hadn't meant to distrust her today; he had just wanted an answer. He wanted to explain himself, but it was too late. He raised his hand to knock, only to let it fall.

To his surprise, Estelle left the house early the next morning. For the next few days, she consistently left early and returned late. Nathaniel didn't even catch a single glimpse of her.

KNOCK KNOCK.

A knock sounded at the office door.

Without waiting for an answer, Zane pushed the door open and hurried inside, looking like he was ready for a good show. "Nathaniel, the paternity test results are out!"

Nathaniel didn't even lift an eyelid. "Hmm."

Zane raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you curious?"

The man's eyes were utterly unruffled. "Curious about what? Like you said, how could Christian not be my biological son?"

"Fair enough," Zane nodded. "The results show that Christian is one hundred percent your biological son. The hospital director said Mrs. Sloan's face completely contorted when she came to pick up the report."

Nathaniel scoffed and suddenly stood up.

Zane froze. "Where are you going?"

Nathaniel adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and replied methodically, "To Sloan Manor."

Zane's intuition told him there was a good show to catch. "Wait for me! I'm coming too!"

When they arrived at Sloan Manor, a dead silence hung over the main hall. Two copies of the paternity test certificate had been slapped onto the coffee table.

Iris looked at Laura with mocking eyes. "Come on, explain this. What is this?"

Laura was seething with rage. The moment she had returned home, Iris had intercepted her, snatched the paternity test from her hands, and blocked her path in the hall without giving her a shred of face.

She was the lady of the Sloan family, for goodness' sake! Iris was just a spinster who couldn't get married—an old bitch! What right did she have to point fingers at her?

Seeing Laura's defiance, Iris let out a cold laugh. "To think you actually doubted the relationship between Christian and Nathaniel. If word gets out, who wouldn't laugh and say there's something wrong with your head?"

Laura's expression twisted.

Thinking of the hesitant looks on those doctors' faces earlier, she felt a surge of fury rising to her chest.

She was doing this for Nathaniel's own good! Who knew if the child Estelle was pregnant with back then was actually his? Noelle had said they needed to be careful when it came to children. What was wrong with that?

She couldn't understand it. Why did every single one of them look down on her?

Laura suppressed her anger over and over again before biting back, "I just felt that Christian had changed a lot lately, that he wasn't acting like himself at all. I only did the paternity test for peace of mind!"

Iris laughed out of pure exasperation. "Christian's features look almost exactly like Nathaniel's did when he was little. As Nathaniel's own mother, how could you not know

that? Anyone with eyes can see it, yet you insisted on listening to Noelle's instigations and doubting your own biological grandson! No wonder people don't like you!"

Laura immediately bristled. "Noelle was only looking out for Nathaniel and the Sloan family! How is that instigating? Besides, Christian's behavior lately has been completely out of line!"

"Do tell, Mother. How exactly has Christian been out of line?"

A cold, clear male voice suddenly cut in. The people in the living room looked back.

Laura instantly looked sheepish. "Nathaniel, why are you here?"

Nathaniel swept a frosty gaze over her. "If I hadn't come, I wouldn't have known that my mother had done something this absurd."

Laura panicked for a moment, but remembering that Nathaniel was her son gave her an inexplicable surge of confidence.

"Nathaniel, don't you think Christian has changed? He's not steady or mature at all anymore. He only thinks about playing all day, which I bet is his true nature coming through! You were so well-behaved when you were little. Christian doesn't resemble you at all, which is why I was suspicious..."

"Mother, Christian is only five years old," Nathaniel said, his dark eyes darkening further like a looming storm. "Just how mature do you expect him to be?"

Laura's self-righteous tone faltered, her momentum deflating. "I... I..."

"Laura Jennings!" Iris couldn't stand listening to her anymore. "What's wrong with Christian being a little lively? Don't think I don't know that Noelle constantly suppresses Christian. It's bad enough you don't feel sorry for him, but you even help Noelle at every turn and make life difficult for your own biological grandson!"

Feeling she hadn't said enough, Iris scoffed. "You even listened to Noelle regarding this paternity test. I think you should just stop being Mrs. Sloan and go be a mother to Noelle at the Lockwood family!"

Seeing everyone turning against her, Laura couldn't hold it in anymore. She let out a loud wail, plopping down onto the floor to throw a tantrum.

"What did I do wrong then?! Noelle isn't wrong! Who knows if a country bumpkin like Estelle has been married before or had kids in the countryside? For all we know, she could be making Nathaniel the sucker who raises another man's kid!

"You guys don't know the place where Estelle grew up! Women there get married and have kids at fifteen or sixteen. Someone like her has definitely slept with other men long ago. What if she married Nathaniel while pregnant with another man's child? I had to look out for him—"

"Shut up!" Nathaniel spun around, shouting her down furiously.

His expression was completely frigid, devoid of a single trace of a smile. Even his gold-rimmed glasses seemed to act as a barrier, making him appear indifferent and distant.

"Mother, Estelle is my wife. She was before, she is now, and she will be in the future! Christian is our child. I will not allow you to insult her!

"You say she's dirty because she grew up in a place like that."

Nathaniel took a step closer, his voice like the cutting wind of a winter night, chilling to the bone.

"Then let me ask you, Mother. Who was the one who was supposed to be dirty?"

The air seemed to freeze.

Nathaniel sneered. "You look down on Estelle's background, her family, and her upbringing. But all of that was originally supposed to be the life of your beloved Noelle. Wasn't it?"

Zane clicked his tongue twice. He felt like he'd missed a huge opportunity. He should have dragged Noelle over here too, so she could get a good listen to these words and stop using Estelle's background to put her down all day long.

Slumped on the floor, Laura was instantly rendered speechless.

"Nathaniel, you... you..."

"Enough, shut your mouth!" From the side, Nathaniel's father, Ethan Sloan, hurried in. He took a deep breath and addressed his son. "Nathaniel, let's not blow this paternity test incident out of proportion. If Christian finds out, it'll only break his heart for no reason. I'll keep a close eye on Laura from now on to stop her from causing more trouble. She is your mother, after all. Don't make things too ugly."

Nathaniel cast a cold glance over the room before turning and walking out.

Zane hurriedly followed, while Iris lingered to take another long look at the paternity test.

Outside the villa, Nathaniel's face remained impassive. Just then, his phone rang. Seeing the caller ID, he raised an eyebrow.

Chapter 92: Acquiring Lockwood Group for His Wife

The caller was his younger brother, Laura Jennings's other son. The two were neither close nor distant. He was currently in charge of acquiring shares in the Lockwood Group.

"Was he calling because the acquisition of the Lockwood Group isn't going smoothly?" Nathaniel wondered.

Nathaniel Sloan answered the call and heard Liam Sloan say, "Hey, I have a friend who's also interested in the Lockwood Group. Do you have time to drop by?"

Nathaniel frowned upon hearing this.

"Someone else has their eyes on the Lockwood Group?" he mused. "Who would even want a company like that? What terrible taste."

On the other side, Liam hung up the phone and turned back to Estelle Lockwood. "I'm sorry, Miss Lockwood. My brother set his sights on the Lockwood Group a long time ago. Why don't you two discuss it once he gets here?"

Estelle was curious. Who else would want to buy shares in the Lockwood Group?

The company had been on a steady decline for years and was practically run into the ground. Her only reason for acquiring it was to make life miserable for the Lockwoods. Yet, someone else had beaten her to the punch.

It wasn't that she was looking down on anyone, but for someone to actually be interested in a hollow shell of a company like the Lockwood Group... that person either had a screw loose or completely terrible taste.

After Nathaniel hung up, Zane Grant asked, "You're acquiring the Lockwood Group?"

"Yes."

"Why? The Lockwood Group isn't worth it."

Nathaniel paused as he got into the car. "The Lockwood Group originally belonged to Estelle," he said flatly.

Just because it originally belonged to Estelle, he was buying it.

Zane choked on his words. He supposed that made sense... It was intolerable for his wife's belongings to fall into Noelle Lockwood's hands. Even if Nathaniel bought the company just to let it collect dust, he couldn't let anyone else have it.

But what was going through the head of the woman on the other end of the line who also wanted to buy it?

"By the way, are you just going to let this paternity test issue slide?" Zane asked, feeling a knot in his chest when he recalled the Sloans' attitude earlier. A biological grandmother doubting her own grandson and cursing her deceased daughter-in-law? What kind of nonsense was that?

Nathaniel's expression was calm, but his eyes were piercingly cold. "Of course I won't just let it slide."

Zane opened his mouth, wanting to ask what Nathaniel planned to do next. But on second thought, Christian was the person Nathaniel cared about the most. Now that Christian's identity had been questioned, Laura Jennings—the biological mother he already had little affection for—probably wouldn't fare well.

Ignoring the mess left in the villa, Nathaniel drove toward his destination.

Azure River Law Firm.

Estelle had returned to the country specifically to take revenge on the Lockwood Group, and acquiring its shares had long been part of her plan. She just hadn't expected to hit a roadblock at the final step.

The young man in front of her was Liam Sloan. He seemed a bit unreliable on the outside, but he was actually a lawyer. Back when Estelle was still abroad, she had crossed paths with him over an infringement case and lent him a hand. She never expected to run into him here after returning to the country.

Liam still owed her a favor and felt quite embarrassed. "Don't worry, Yara. When my brother gets here, I'll do my best to mediate. I won't let you get the short end of the stick!"

Estelle's lips twitched uncontrollably. "If you don't mind me asking... why does your brother want to acquire the Lockwood Group?"

Liam also knew that while the Lockwood Group looked glamorous on the surface, it had rotted to the core a long time ago. Even if someone took over, they'd just be inheriting a massive mess. He rubbed his nose. "You wouldn't know this, but my brother is buying it for my sister-in-law."

Estelle was taken aback. "Your sister-in-law?"

Liam really didn't want to admit that his brother was hopelessly lovesick, so he put it tactfully. "Yeah. It was actually my sister-in-law who set her sights on the Lockwood Group, so my brother decided to buy it without a second word. Nobody could talk him out of it!"

So that was it... That made things complicated.

A deeply devoted man would naturally do anything to satisfy his wife's wishes. Not to mention, based on what Mia had said, Estelle figured this CEO certainly wasn't short on cash. Under these circumstances, how was she supposed to get her hands on the Lockwood Group?

While Estelle was deep in thought, Liam seemed to have become addicted to the topic, practically itching to share every detail of his brother and sister-in-law's epic romance.

"I've actually never met my sister-in-law, but since my brother is so deeply devoted to her, she must be a real beauty! I heard that back when he wanted to marry her, he went against everyone's objections and even had a huge falling-out with his mother!"

Estelle's mind was racing as she tried to figure out how to negotiate later, paying almost no attention to what Liam was saying. "How touching," she replied perfunctorily.

"Right? You think it's touching too, don't you! I heard my sister-in-law came from a poor background, and back then, aside from my grandfather and aunt, nobody else approved. But my brother said she was the only woman he would ever marry in this lifetime!"

Estelle chimed in, humoring him, "Mhm. An epic romance."

Right then, footsteps approached from outside the door. Immersed in their own worlds, neither of them heard a thing.

Liam had talked until his mouth was dry. Suddenly, he remembered that when he first met Yara, she had two little kids with her. A business partner had told him that although Yara was married, her husband was total scum, and it was very hard on her to raise the children all by herself.

At this thought, Liam felt he was being far too insensitive! Miss Lockwood was trapped in an unhappy marriage, yet here he was, endlessly praising his brother and sister-in-law's epic romance. He couldn't do this; he needed to be considerate of Yara's feelings.

So, Liam asked, "Miss Lockwood, how are things with your husband? Have you divorced him yet?"

Estelle's train of thought derailed. Seemingly confused, she asked, "Hmm?"

"I know you married the wrong man, Miss Lockwood, and that your scumbag husband abandoned his wife and children. If you ever need help, you can come to me. I'm an expert at divorce lawsuits!

"Men these days are terrible. We absolutely cannot let that scumbag gain a single advantage!"

Estelle paused in peeling her orange. "You're an expert at divorce lawsuits?"

"That's right!" Liam's eyes lit up. "I've fought all kinds of divorce cases! Don't be afraid, Miss Lockwood. When facing a scumbag, you have to bravely say 'no' and bravely get a divorce!"

Liam shifted into work mode in a split second, pulling out a pen and paper. He even started using formal honorifics. "You can explain the situation in detail: the date of your marriage, and the man's contributions toward your pregnancy, childbirth, and raising the children. I need to keep a detailed record on my end."

Estelle was stunned.

Seeing her stay silent, anger surged in Liam's heart. "Were there no contributions at all? Miss Lockwood, your husband is truly a monster! He ignored you while you were pregnant, showed zero interest after the children were born, and hasn't even paid basic child support! I really want to ruin a scumbag like that and destroy his reputa—"

CLICK.

Right at that moment, someone grabbed the door handle.

Nathaniel raised an eyebrow. The amusement in his eyes vanished completely as he cast a meaningful glance at the law firm's nameplate.

"Liam, you've really outdone yourself," he thought.

Nathaniel pushed the door open.

Liam was just getting fired up when he suddenly heard a click. He turned his head and immediately said, "Miss Lockwood, my brother is here. Nathaniel! I'm advising Miss Lockwood to get a divorce. Her husband is practically dead weight. Don't you think she should divorce him—"

Before he could finish speaking, Estelle had already looked up, coming face-to-face with Nathaniel as he walked through the door.

The air seemed to freeze, and Estelle's expression instantly stiffened.

"Wait... the 'brother' Liam was talking about is actually Nathaniel?!" she realized.

Chapter 93: Miss Lockwood Still Has Lingering Feelings for Her Husband

Estelle Lockwood felt completely overwhelmed; she had the urge to turn tail and flee.

But on second thought, why should she feel guilty? She wasn't the one who had done something shameful!

Liam Sloan noticed something was off, his gaze darting back and forth between the two of them. "What, you two know each other?"

Estelle instinctively tried to deny it. "We don't..."

Nathaniel Sloan's lips curled into a smile, though it didn't reach his eyes. "Of course we do."

Liam didn't pick up on the danger in Nathaniel's tone. "What a small world! Nathaniel, tell me, don't you think Miss Lockwood should get a divorce?"

Nathaniel asked chillingly, "You really want her to get a divorce?"

Liam slapped his thigh. "Well, duh! What's the point of keeping a scumbag like that around?"

Nathaniel looked back at Estelle, narrowing his eyes. "Is that what you think too, Miss Lockwood?"

Estelle opened her mouth to speak, but Liam beat her to it.

"Hey, Nathaniel, you're asking the wrong person. I've been urging Miss Lockwood to get a divorce for ages, but she always hedges and refuses to give me a straight answer. If you ask me, she still has lingering feelings for her scumbag husband!"

Nathaniel's fingers paused, his eyes growing darker. "Lingering feelings?"

Liam nodded. "When I met Miss Lockwood three years ago, I advised her to get a divorce. She dodged the question back then, and even today, she still... Sigh! Miss Lockwood, I know men too well. You can't handle a scumbag like him, so you'd better divorce him sooner rather than later!"

Nathaniel suddenly smiled, the expression filled with profound meaning. "So, Miss Lockwood still has lingering feelings for her 'ex-husband'."

He heavily emphasized the word "ex-husband."

They weren't divorced yet, but Estelle kept calling him her ex-husband. When did he become her ex-husband?

Liam tried to correct him. "Nathaniel, not ex-husband—current husband. They aren't divorced yet. Isn't she just preparing for the divorce lawsuit..."

Before Liam could finish his sentence, Estelle shot a cold glance at Nathaniel. "Lingering feelings? You're overthinking it. Why would I have any lingering feelings for a scumbag?"

Liam immediately nodded. "Miss Lockwood is right. It's good that you can let go..."

Nathaniel sneered, looking straight into Estelle's eyes. "But last time I asked about your marital status, you said your ex-husband was already pushing up daisies."

Liam was surprised. "Huh? Miss Lockwood, your husband is dead?"

Estelle said coldly, "Nathaniel, pushing up daisies is a metaphor. It means he's long been dead to me. You can't even understand that? Go back to elementary school and retake your language classes.

"On the other hand, Mr. Sloan, you claim you want to acquire the Lockwood Group for your wife, yet you're caught up in rumors with Noelle Lockwood. Just who exactly is this wife you speak of?"

Liam chimed in, "Ah, so that's what pushing up daisies means. No, wait, Miss Lockwood, why are you so concerned about Nathaniel's marriage..."

A light smile played on Nathaniel's lips. "Then why must Miss Lockwood insist on acquiring shares in the Lockwood Group?"

Liam hurriedly interjected, "Right, I forgot about our actual business! Nathaniel, Miss Lockwood is very interested in the Lockwood Group..."

Estelle said faintly, "What does my desire to acquire it have to do with you, Mr. Sloan? Even if I lose money, it's my own money. Why do you care?"

Liam fell silent, then frowned in confusion. He wondered, "Hold on, is anyone even listening to me?"

Seeing the atmosphere growing increasingly tense, Liam took a quick step forward and blocked the space between them. "Let's talk this out calmly! The acquisition is negotiable too!"

Five minutes later, Nathaniel and Estelle sat on opposite sides of the desk and began discussing the acquisition. Nathaniel did not push back; he gave Estelle however many shares she asked for.

Once the negotiation concluded, Estelle didn't spare him a shred of courtesy. She picked up her bag and left without looking back.

It wasn't until her figure disappeared from sight that Liam approached Nathaniel, acting as if he had just discovered a new continent. He asked with a cheeky grin, "Nathaniel, are you interested in Miss Lockwood?"

Nathaniel cast a faint sidelong glance at him. "Why do you ask?"

Liam said, "I've never seen you pay so much attention to a woman. Besides, didn't you say the Lockwood Group was a gift for your wife? If you give half the shares to Miss Lockwood, what about your wife?"

"I already told Miss Lockwood that you're acquiring the Lockwood Group because your wife wanted it. Miss Lockwood even praised the beautiful love between you two!"

Nathaniel paused mid-sip of his coffee, his gaze darkening. "Beautiful love?"

Liam couldn't help but claim credit. "Of course, Nathaniel. Everyone out there says you and Noelle have a thing going on, but I don't buy it. I was just clearing your name! However, Miss Yara didn't seem very interested..."

"Do you know why Yara wasn't interested?" Nathaniel asked flatly.

Liam obviously didn't know.

Then, he heard Nathaniel say nonchalantly, "Because I am that dead husband of hers who is supposedly pushing up daisies."

With that, without even checking Liam's reaction, he walked straight out the door.

CRASH! The sound of someone falling echoed through the office.

Liam had lost his balance, flipping backward along with his chair. Ignoring the pain, he scrambled to his feet, his expression stiff. He felt like his brain had just short-circuited.

Yara was Nathaniel's wife? He had been praising their beautiful marriage while simultaneously condemning Nathaniel as a scumbag?!

No, wait. Although he had always stayed far away from the Sloan family for certain reasons and had never met that legendary wife of Nathaniel's, he knew she had died five years ago!

By the time Zane Grant arrived, Nathaniel had already left. Zane only saw a dumbfounded Liam. "What are you doing? Where's Nathaniel?"

"...I don't know. He probably went to chase after his wife..."

Zane's expression instantly became conflicted. "Yara?"

Liam snapped out of his daze. "Zane! Did you know Yara is Nathaniel's wife too? But she clearly, clearly..." had already turned to ash!

Zane rubbed his nose. He didn't understand why Nathaniel was so certain that Yara was Estelle. From his perspective, they were clearly two different people.

Liam felt that a disaster was looming. Taking a massive step back, what if Yara really was Nathaniel's wife? She wouldn't divorce Nathaniel just because of what he said, right? If she did, Nathaniel would beat him to death!

No, he had to think of a way to help Nathaniel coax his wife back!

Meanwhile, Estelle had left the firm in such a hurry that she nearly tripped and fell. Thinking about the scene that had just unfolded, she silently bit her lower lip.

She wondered, "Did I forget to check my horoscope before leaving the house today?"

She should have figured it out sooner. Liam's last name was Sloan. How could a young man in his early twenties secure such massive contracts in a foreign country like the USA three years ago without powerful backing?

He was actually a member of the Sloan family; he was Nathaniel's supposedly favored and mysterious younger brother!

And then there were the words he had just spoken...

Nathaniel had chosen to acquire the Lockwood Group for his wife...

Noelle was the daughter of the Lockwood family and the heir to the Lockwood Group. Barring any accidents, the Lockwood Group would eventually be handed over to her. If Nathaniel wanted to give the Lockwood Group to Noelle, he wouldn't need to acquire it in secret.

Therefore, this "wife" absolutely could not be Noelle; it could only be...

"Miss Lockwood."

Without realizing it, Estelle had reached her car. She was just about to get in when she suddenly heard a man's voice. She looked up to see Nathaniel leaning casually against her car, his dark eyes betraying neither joy nor anger.

"Doesn't Miss Lockwood have anything to ask regarding what Liam just said?" Nathaniel slowly parted his lips. "For example, aren't you the slightest bit curious about who this wife he mentioned is, Miss Lockwood?"

Mommy, Daddy Has Already Regretted It

Estelle's breath caught in her throat. She abruptly lowered her head, trying to bypass Nathaniel Sloan and get into the car. "Not interested."

Nathaniel's eyes darkened as he blocked the car door. "The wife he was referring to is named Estelle Lockwood."

Estelle's back instantly stiffened. She wanted to evade him, but Nathaniel gave her no chance. He tipped her chin up, forcing her to look at him, and enunciated every word, "I acquired the Lockwood Group for her, not for Noelle Lockwood."

Estelle's heart pounded like a drum. Acquiring the Lockwood Group... The wife in Liam Sloan's "beautiful love story"... Was it her? How was that possible! She had seen Nathaniel's blatant favoritism toward Noelle with her own eyes back then. And now he was saying the one he loved was her?

Estelle took a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down. "Mr. Sloan, your acting is quite convincing. If I didn't know your true nature, I almost would have believed you."

Nathaniel narrowed his eyes. "My true nature?"

Estelle turned her head away. "You act as if you love your wife so much, yet you couldn't care less that Noelle treated her like a servant."

Nathaniel detected a hint of grievance in her voice. Perhaps even Estelle herself hadn't realized that this wasn't the right time to bring the matter up. Mentioning it now made it seem as though she were genuinely jealous, angry, and feeling wronged over it. But her current identity was "Yara Lockwood." Why would Yara empathize so deeply with what Estelle had gone through? Unless they were the exact same person.

Nathaniel stared at her intently. Back then, he had indeed received a video call from Estelle. During the call, she told him how happy she was at the banquet that day, without mentioning a single word about being treated like a servant. However, after all these years, bringing it up again wouldn't change anything. Perhaps at the time, Estelle had just wanted to share the good news and hide the bad.

Nathaniel withdrew his gaze. "Has Miss Lockwood been too busy to check Weibo?"

Estelle was utterly bewildered. She didn't like browsing Weibo to begin with, at most only skimming the news. What did he mean? But very soon, she found out exactly what he meant.

Noelle was trending again. In the past, with both the Lockwood Group and the Sloan family backing her, Noelle had been the undisputed wealthy heiress in the entertainment circle. No one dared to offend her, and her trending topics were always positive. But today...

Realizing she had lost her composure, Estelle pursed her lips. Taking advantage of Nathaniel's distraction, she quickly slipped into the car. "Whether she makes a fool of herself or not has nothing to do with me. You don't need to put on a show just for my benefit."

With that, she drove off without looking back.

Nathaniel raised an eyebrow, a soft chuckle escaping his lips.

Liam Sloan let out a sharp GASP from where he was hiding a short distance away. "My aunt said Nathaniel's wife has a gentle temper and a shy personality. Even when she's furious, she would only lower her head obediently. Miss Yara dares to talk back to Nathaniel like that. Could she really be her?"

Zane Grant nodded in agreement. "Right! I feel like they're completely not..."

"I know!" Liam's eyes lit up. "Nathaniel must have gone too far five years ago. His wife learned her lesson, tore off her gentle disguise, and has now forced him to grovel to win her back!"

Zane was left speechless.

Liam hurriedly ran over to Nathaniel. "Nathaniel, let me give you some ideas! You're struggling so hard to win your wife back. Just watch and learn from me!"

Zane remained speechless, thinking that Liam was truly unreliable.

Meanwhile, after Estelle had driven a fair distance away, she clicked into the trending topic "Noelle Lockwood blacklisted by Pinecrest Hotel" on Weibo and read it with great interest.

A few minutes prior, Noelle had arranged to meet up with a few of her socialite friends at the Pinecrest Hotel.

The Pinecrest Hotel was one of the largest hotels in Crestfall. A single meal there cost an astronomical amount, but since the hotel was under Evernight International, Noelle held a permanent membership. Surrounded by a group of celebrities treating her like royalty, she entered the hotel and immediately demanded their most expensive suite.

However, the general manager looked troubled. "I apologize, Miss Noelle. The presidential suite is temporarily unavailable to you."

Noelle's smile froze. The minor celebrities around her immediately stepped forward. "What do you mean? Noelle is your premium member!"

"Exactly! This hotel is under Evernight, isn't it? Do you even know who Noelle is?"

Noelle waited until her friends finished their flattery before feigning helplessness. "Manager, is there some mistake? Every premium member has a designated presidential suite. Please go check again."

Some people nearby had already recognized Noelle. Hearing that she was a premium member, they all revealed expressions of envy. However, this envy didn't even last a second before the manager shook his head. The look he gave Noelle carried a hint of ambiguity.

"Miss Noelle Lockwood, there is no mistake. There is indeed no designated suite for you."

Noelle knitted her brows. Before she could speak, the general manager continued, "Or perhaps you need me to make it clearer? Mr. Sloan has revoked all of your special privileges at the Pinecrest Hotel and placed you on the blacklist."

The entire lobby descended into dead silence.

Noelle's eyes widened in sheer disbelief, unable to maintain her composure any longer. "What did you say?!"

Nathaniel revoked her premium membership? How could that be! Back then, Nathaniel had said that because she was Estelle's sister, she would always have premium membership. On what grounds was it revoked!

The manager was already growing impatient. "Miss Noelle Lockwood, is there anything else? If not, I have other work to attend to. Please excuse me."

With that, the manager actually just walked away, no longer treating her like an esteemed VIP as he used to. How could Noelle accept such a drastic plunge in status?!

"She's been blacklisted, so what is she pretending for? Calling everyone over and wasting our time..." someone complained.

A few minor celebrities immediately took three steps away from her. "Noelle, you should have just told us if you weren't a member anymore. You insisted on playing the big shot, and now you've embarrassed us all..."

Noelle gritted her teeth in fury. In the past, these minor celebrities would fall over themselves trying to suck up to her, but now they actually dared to mock her! Why would Nathaniel do this? Why!

Very soon, the incident was trending online.

Estelle logged into her burner account, liked every single post cursing Noelle out, and put her phone away in complete satisfaction. That's right, she was just that petty! Whenever someone insulted Noelle, it brought her immense joy.

Meanwhile, Luke White reported respectfully, "Mr. Sloan, that Weibo burner account you are following has liked these posts."

Nathaniel glanced over and immediately chuckled. She held such a grudge? The Estelle of the past had been gentle and mild. Even when facing the Lockwoods' verbal abuse, she had habitually greeted them with a smile. The current Estelle...

Nathaniel didn't think he had mistaken her identity. So, had these five years changed her, or was this simply her true personality all along? He rubbed his phone thoughtfully, opened WeChat, found a profile picture, and sent a message: [You've liked the posts. Are you feeling happier now?]

Estelle's eyelid twitched upon receiving the WeChat message. She thought, "Wait, how does Nathaniel know that I liked every Weibo post? Does he know about my burner account? Impossible!"

Still, feeling a pang of guilt, Estelle promptly blocked Nathaniel's number.

Nathaniel waited for ages without a reply. He sent another message, only to receive a glaring red exclamation mark indicating he had been blocked.

The man's eyes grew cold as he turned to ask Liam, "Is this what you meant by a way to coax her?"

Chapter 95: Proving Sister-in-law Still Loves You

Liam Sloan stared at the red exclamation mark, his eyes wide, and slowly dropped to his knees.

Blocked?!

Impossible! Why?!

This trick of his had always worked perfectly in the past. Why had Estelle just straight up blocked his brother!

Liam smoothly launched into his usual plea for mercy. "Nathaniel, I was wrong..."

But on second thought, something wasn't right. Why had coaxing people never been an issue before, but when his brother coaxed Estelle, things went south? Wasn't this his brother's problem?

Liam quickly changed his tune, stiffening his neck. "I was wrong... but my mistake is only a tiny part of it. Nathaniel, you're the one to blame here! It must be because you treated her badly in the past, so Estelle blocked you in a fit of rage. It has absolutely nothing to do with me, your strategist!"

After Liam finished speaking, the study fell into a dead silence.

Liam waited quietly for the Grim Reaper to descend. To his surprise, after a long while, Nathaniel suddenly asked in a hoarse voice, "Then tell me, what should I do?"

What should he do...

Liam was stunned. Was this still his brother? His brother was actually asking 'what to do'? However, Liam quickly recovered. His eyes darted around as he immediately stood up, leaned close to Nathaniel's ear, and whispered a few words.

Nathaniel frowned slightly, then nodded.

Liam grew excited. "Do as I say, and there definitely won't be any problems!"

Zane Grant watched from the sidelines, dumbfounded. He wondered if something was wrong with Nathaniel's brain to actually believe Liam's words.

After Estelle Lockwood blocked Nathaniel, a call came in.

It startled her, making the phone feel like a hot potato that she nearly threw away. But upon closer inspection, she realized it was Iris Sloan calling.

"Aunt Iris?"

"Yara, the Sloan Family is throwing a banquet for me in a few days. Will you come?"

Iris had returned to the country to develop her career, and many people wanted to curry favor with her. The Sloan Group was hosting this banquet to welcome her back.

Estelle didn't refuse. "Alright, I'll be there."

Since she was attending the banquet, she had to bring a gift. After work the next day, Estelle went straight to a luxury mall in Crestfall.

"Nathaniel! Look, it's Estelle!" In a premium VIP lounge, Liam cried out hastily, as if he had discovered a new continent.

A glimmer of light finally appeared in Nathaniel's indifferent eyes.

"Nathaniel, I have a way to find out if Estelle still loves you!" Liam suddenly announced. He cleared his throat. "And that is to spend money on her!"

Zane wanted to point out that a woman with Yara's personality wouldn't be moved just because someone paid for her; she might even think he was being a busybody. Liam also understood this. He coughed and continued:

"Paying for someone is a very intimate gesture. Based on my understanding of Yara, if you're not close and you suddenly offer to pay for her, she will definitely decline politely. Even if she accepts, she'll find a way to repay you.

"But between partners, there's no need to calculate money so clearly. If she has you in her heart and trusts you, she won't refuse when you buy her clothes or jewelry, or foot the bill for her. That's because, in her heart, you're one of her own."

Nathaniel frowned slightly.

"Nathaniel, if you don't believe me, I'll prove it to you!"

Eager to prove the viability of his theory, Liam immediately took out his phone and called Estelle.

The three men looked down from the lounge and saw Estelle take out her phone. "Hello? Mr. Liam Sloan?"

"Ahem." Liam cleared his throat. "Miss Lockwood, where are you?"

Estelle was confused. "I'm at the Celestar Commercial Center. Why?"

"Oh, it's nothing. By the way, Miss Lockwood, I have shares in Celestar. If you see anything you like, you can put it under my name. Consider it a gift from me."

As his words fell, the three men saw Estelle frown deeply. She moved the phone away from her ear in confusion, checked the caller ID to confirm it was indeed Liam, and after a long silence, said tactfully: "Thank you for your kindness, Ms. Sloan, but that won't be necessary."

Liam shot Nathaniel a glance before continuing, "There's no need to be polite, Miss Lockwood. A little money is nothing."

Estelle's smile froze. "I really don't need it, Ms. Sloan. If there's nothing else, I'll hang up now."

After the call ended, Liam eagerly claimed credit. "Nathaniel, look, I told you so! Because Miss Lockwood and I are just ordinary friends, she immediately refused when I offered to buy her things! Nathaniel, try giving her a call!"

Nathaniel pursed his thin lips, his fingertips hovering over the screen for a long time without pressing down. Estelle had blocked his WeChat, but he could still call her. If...

In his daze, he had unconsciously pressed the dial button, and the other party picked up.

"Nathaniel?" Her voice was extremely impatient.

Nathaniel's throat tightened. Beside him, Liam was frantically giving him meaningful looks. He slowly closed his eyes and asked hoarsely, "Are you at the Celestar Center?"

Estelle was puzzled. Why was everyone asking where she was? "Do you need something?"

Nathaniel's fingertips twitched. He looked away, his tone calming down. "Celestar is a property under my name. If there's anything you want to buy, you can put it on my tab."

The woman on the other end of the line let out a laugh. Liam and Zane immediately pricked up their ears.

Estelle spoke unhurriedly. "A property under your name? Alright. Since Mr. Sloan is being so generous, it would be rude of me to decline. I can get whatever I want?"

"Yes," Nathaniel answered hoarsely.

Estelle laughed out of anger, wondering if this man was sick in the head. When they first got married, she didn't have much money and couldn't afford luxury goods at all, which led to frequent mockery from Noelle Lockwood. Why didn't Nathaniel give her things back then? Why didn't he say such words to her then?

Henry Kendrick had said that she suffered a massive loss in this marriage. When others divorced Nathaniel, they would at least get a share of his assets. She had gotten nothing and suffered an unprovoked disaster for nothing.

Nathaniel buying her things? That was what she deserved in the first place!

He liked playing the good guy, didn't he? Then she would let him play it! She wanted to see how long Nathaniel could keep up the act!

The more Estelle thought about it, the angrier she became. She didn't hold back at all. "Fine. Then all my expenses today will be put on Mr. Sloan's tab. Don't go complaining that I spend too much, Mr. Sloan!"

With that, she hung up with a loud CLICK.

The lounge was completely silent.

After a long while, Liam finally snapped back to his senses and stammered, "Nathaniel, I... I was right, wasn't I? Estelle still has you in her heart!"

Although something felt a bit off, he didn't care anymore. His theory was flawless! Liam grew excited. "This proves she still has you in her heart! She must still love you!"

Nathaniel felt that Estelle seemed to be angry again, but... he looked at Liam. "She has me in her heart?"

"Exactly! Look, she flatly rejected me and was so polite to me because she doesn't want any conflict of interest or favors tying us together.

"But she didn't reject you. She's even willing to spend your money. What does this mean? It means she cares about you!"

Nathaniel's Adam's apple bobbed. "...I see."

Zane was speechless. He wondered if they were serious—one actually dared to spout this nonsense, and the other actually dared to believe it.

Right at this moment, another man appeared beside Estelle.

Chapter 96: Why Is the Smell of Vinegar So Strong?

Nathaniel accepted Liam's logic—Estelle really did treat him differently than she treated Liam.

However, the next moment, Henry ran up to Estelle.

Before Liam could even ask who this man was, he heard Henry say, "What are you buying? Need my advice?"

Estelle replied naturally, "A gift for an elder."

Henry nodded. "A shop just got a new batch of sea pearls in. They're very popular. I happened to pre-order two necklaces of sea pearl, so I'll give you one to use as a gift."

Up in the lounge, Liam's eyes lit up. Without even fully grasping the situation, he decisively proclaimed:

"Bro, look, another man trying to hit on my sister-in-law! Just you wait. Knowing her personality, there's no way she'll accept his gesture! *'Oh, let me give you a necklace.'* You think she'd accept? She'll only accept gifts from my brother—"

Before he could finish his sentence, Estelle's eyes lit up.

"A necklace of sea pearl? That actually sounds nice. I'll take it, then."

A deathly silence fell over the lounge.

Zane silently covered his face, while Nathaniel's expression turned pitch-black. As for Liam... he gently dropped to his knees.

He frantically wondered why this was playing out so differently than he had predicted, and who on earth this man could be!

His theory had been meticulously tailored to Yara's personality. Logically, it shouldn't have failed—especially since he had just proven it moments ago. But his sister-in-law hadn't rejected this man. She had even happily accepted his gesture of goodwill.

That could only mean...

"Bro, in my sister-in-law's heart, this man is more important than you!"

As soon as the words left his mouth, Liam's spine stiffened. Feeling his brother's murderous glare, he quickly backpedaled. "But—but you're not bad either! You probably rank second in her heart!"

Downstairs, Henry spoke up again, "Oh, right. Big Brother said he bought that violin you wanted. It's at the house, so you can play it when you get back."

Liam shakily corrected himself. "...Uh, bro, you rank third in her heart."

Henry continued, "Also, Second Brother said that since your perfume brand can't find a spokesperson, he'll just do it for you. He won't take a single cent. We're family, so there's no need for pleasantries."

A look of sheer terror washed over Liam's face as he amended, "...Bro, at least you still rank fourth."

"Right!" Henry exclaimed, suddenly remembering something else. "Your two little ones said they wanted to give you a surprise! Mia went around reading fortunes and saved up a ton of pocket money, all to buy you gifts!"

Liam was completely numb by this point. "...Bro, even if you're dead last in Miss Lockwood's heart, at least you're in there somewhere. Be content."

Nathaniel sneered coldly. Keeping his composure, he sat back down on the sofa and opened a bottle of wine. "There's nothing else to see. Come back here."

Zane clicked his tongue. He could practically smell the jealousy from across the room. He was just about to tell Liam to drop it when he heard the younger man gasp.

"Bro! I'm really not making things up this time, this is actually a great opportunity! Look, isn't that Noelle Lockwood?"

Nathaniel's gaze darkened.

Estelle chatted with Henry for a bit more before he left to fetch the necklace of sea pearl. Left to her own devices, she began strolling through the Celestar Mall.

To think this commercial center was actually a property under Nathaniel's name...

Meanwhile, outside a boutique on the second floor, Noelle and Vivian were walking arm in arm, trailed by a long line of sales assistants.

Even though Noelle's reputation had taken a hit recently, everyone still viewed her as the only daughter-in-law approved by Mrs. Sloan. Since she was destined to marry into the Sloan family, no one dared to slack off in her presence. Noelle absolutely reveled in this feeling. She was born to trample everyone beneath her feet!

Just then, Vivian's eyes widened. "Noelle, look! Isn't that Yara?"

A flash of disgust crossed Noelle's eyes. "It seems it really is... Why would Miss Yara be here? Vivian, let's go."

Vivian huffed indignantly. "Why? Just because Yara is here, you have to leave?"

Noelle smiled bitterly. "I offended Miss Yara last time..."

"That's just Yara being petty!" Vivian shouted. "Don't be afraid, Noelle. I'll vent your anger for you! You're the future proprietress of the Celestar Commercial Center, why should you be scared of her?"

A wave of immense satisfaction washed over Noelle, though she feigned hesitation. "I don't think that's a good idea..."

"What's wrong with it? This bitch barely has any friends. If I become her friend, she'll be entirely at my beck and call! Just wait, I'll definitely humiliate her!"

With that, Vivian immediately dashed downstairs.

"Yara, it really is you!"

Estelle, who had been leaning against a corner scrolling through her phone, raised an eyebrow at the sudden female voice. "Vivian Lowell."

Staring at Yara's face—which bore a sickeningly striking resemblance to Estelle's—Vivian felt a wave of disgust. Taking on a condescending tone, she announced, "I'm here to apologize to you!"

Estelle tapped her screen twice before glancing up. "Apologize?"

Despite her words, Vivian maintained her arrogant demeanor. "I mistakenly thought you plagiarized Noelle before. I didn't expect the perfume to be your original creation. It was a misunderstanding on my part."

The way she phrased it made it sound as though Estelle should be deeply grateful just because Vivian had admitted to her mistake.

Estelle glanced back at her phone. Henry had just sent her a very interesting audio recording. And the star of that recording—the very same Vivian who was currently plotting against her—was putting on a dramatic act right in front of her.

Estelle took her time, looking thoroughly unbothered. "Hmm, I accept."

Vivian hadn't expected things to go so smoothly, so she immediately pushed her luck. "Then why don't we become friends? I heard that you haven't made any since returning to the country, Miss Lockwood."

Estelle replied with a lazy drawl. "Sure. Miss Lowell is indeed my first 'friend'."

Vivian sneered inwardly. This woman was far too easy to manipulate! She was exactly like the old Estelle.

When Vivian suddenly noticed the necklace around Estelle's neck, a glint of greed flickered across her face. Her eyes darted around as she said, "Since we're friends now, friends should exchange greeting gifts, shouldn't they? You'll have to pick carefully. Personally, I think this necklace of yours is quite nice!"

Estelle abruptly turned to look at her.

Her gaze was so cold and piercing that Vivian's heart skipped a beat, making her feel as though all her schemes had just been laid bare.

But the next moment, Estelle nodded. "That makes sense. However, this necklace is old. How could I possibly give you something old?"

Vivian's eyes immediately lit up, and she instantly tossed her previous uneasiness to the back of her mind. "Oh, my! You're far too polite, Yara. Then come with me to check out that women's boutique first!"

Later, she was absolutely going to squeeze every last penny out of Yara to teach her a lesson! Who asked Yara to make Noelle suffer such grievances? She was exactly like the old Estelle—they both deserved to die!

Estelle pretended not to notice the raw greed and calculation in Vivian's eyes, offering a light nod. "Mm, let's go."

Up in the lounge, Nathaniel narrowed his eyes.

Chapter 97: Noelle Lockwood, Take Your Giant Baby Sister to the Hospital

Estelle Lockwood and Vivian Lowell entered a women's boutique. As soon as the sales assistant saw Estelle's outfit and aura, they knew she was a VIP and hurriedly called the store manager down.

The manager hovered around Estelle with a fawning smile. "Miss, we have many pieces in the store that would perfectly suit your figure and aura. What style are you looking for? I'll have someone brew some coffee so you can take your time browsing."

This scene stung Vivian's eyes. These sales clerks were completely blind! How dare they suck up to Yara while ignoring her!

Estelle curled her lips into a nonchalant smile. "I'm not buying anything. She is. Why don't you show her around?"

Only then did the manager turn to look at Vivian. Although Vivian's aura was leagues behind Estelle's, the two seemed to be friends. The manager didn't dare neglect her and personally stepped forward to show Vivian around the store.

Over the years, the Lowell family had prospered thanks to Rose Lowell. Vivian was used to only the best in food and clothing, so naturally, she turned her nose up at ordinary clothes. Moreover, she had intended to make Yara bleed money today. Thus, she grabbed every single dress that caught her eye.

Estelle glanced at the pile. Each dress cost around two hundred thousand, and Vivian had picked out over a dozen in one go. She really had some nerve.

Vivian dropped a very obvious hint. "Yara, I think these are all pretty nice. What do you say?"

Holding her coffee, Estelle cast a sideways glance at them. "Yes, they're not bad. If you like them, have them wrapped up."

Vivian scoffed inwardly. Noelle was absolutely right. Yara was an idiot who could be easily manipulated. At this thought, Vivian didn't hold back. With a grand wave of her hand, she ordered, "Wrap them all up for me!"

The manager beamed with joy and personally instructed the staff to bag the dresses before respectfully presenting the card reader to Vivian.

Vivian looked straight at Estelle. Her meaning was obvious—she expected Estelle to pay.

However, Estelle continued sipping her coffee, not even sparing her a glance.

The atmosphere instantly turned awkward. The manager couldn't help but cough to remind her, "Miss, the total is 3.15 million. Please swipe your card."

Vivian turned her head in anger and urged displeasedly, "Yara, what are you standing there for? Pay up!"

How dare this Yara not offer to pay on her own and make her lose face? She would definitely teach this bitch a lesson later!

Estelle had finally been waiting for this moment. Propping her chin on one hand, she feigned confusion and asked in surprise, "Hm? I didn't buy anything. Why should I pay?"

The store instantly fell silent. Vivian felt as if she had been struck by lightning and shrieked, "Of course you're the one paying! If you don't have money, why did you even come to the mall?!"

Estelle set down her coffee, looking genuinely puzzled. "You were the one who said you wanted to check out some clothes at a boutique, so I followed you in. I'm not buying anything. Vivian, don't tell me you don't have any money?"

At those words, the manager's expression instantly soured, and he looked at Vivian with evident dissatisfaction. She didn't look at the price tags when picking out dresses earlier,

and now she claimed she had no money? Did she think he had all the free time in the world to play house with some spoiled heiress?

Vivian's face flushed bright red. "I don't care! You're my friend, and you said you were going to buy me a gift. You have to pay for me!" With that, she roared at the manager, acting entirely self-righteous. "This woman said she wanted to gift me something and told me to pick whatever I wanted. That's why I came! Go ask her for the money!"

For a moment, the manager was unsure of what to do.

Estelle's gaze swept over her. "Vivian, I treat you as a friend, but what do you take me for? An ATM? I said I'd get you a welcome gift, but I never said I'd get you one worth over three million. Besides, we only became 'friends' today. Who demands someone they just met spend three million on them? I don't think you ever treated me as a friend to begin with. Since that's the case, let's just forget it."

Estelle made as if to leave, and Vivian almost choked on her own breath. She had no time to ponder the deeper meaning behind Estelle's words. All she knew was that her ATM was walking away. In a fit of exasperation, she violently smashed a coffee cup off the table. Pointing a finger right at Estelle's nose, she lunged forward and shrieked like a shrew, "I deigned to be friends with a shady bitch like you! What do you mean by this? How dare you look down on me? I told you to pay and you refuse?! Huh?! Who gave you the guts?!"

Estelle lifted her eyes coldly. "Why don't you ask everyone present here? See if anyone would believe that we're friends."

The onlookers all shook their heads. Friends? They looked more like sworn enemies. This woman bought over three million worth of items and demanded a friend she'd known for

a single day foot the bill. When refused, she cursed her out and called her a bitch. Where in the world was the logic in that?

Vivian was still fuming. "You have a death wish—"

"Vivian!" a woman's voice suddenly rang out.

Noelle Lockwood approached with a gentle expression, looking as if she had no idea what had just transpired. Smiling softly, she asked, "What took you so long?"

It was as if Vivian had finally found her backer. "Noelle! This bitch is bullying me!"

Noelle acted as though she had only just noticed Estelle. "Oh, Yara, you're here too. Did something happen?"

Noelle's appearance instantly shifted the atmosphere in the store. For no other reason than the fact that she was the designated daughter-in-law of the Sloan family. If she was backing Vivian, then...

Estelle couldn't even be bothered to spare her a glance. "If you have the free time to ask me what happened, Miss Lockwood, you might be better off taking your overgrown toddler of a friend to the hospital for a diagnosis. See if she's beyond saving."

Vivian exploded with rage once again. "Who are you calling an overgrown toddler?!"

"Whoever buys things and demands others pay for it is one," Estelle said leisurely.

Vivian let out a screech and lunged forward, trying to claw at Estelle's face.

Noelle bit her lower lip, looking entirely innocent. "Yara, how could you say that? Vivian only asked you to pay because she genuinely considers you a friend..."

—"Noelle, this bitch doesn't have any friends around her. If I become her friend, won't she just follow my every command!"

Suddenly, an arrogant female voice played from Estelle's phone. It was clearly an audio recording!

Vivian's expression drastically changed, but before she could stop it, the recording continued.

—"Noelle, I'm just venting on your behalf. Just you wait, I'll make this bitch lose face right away!"

—"Our Noelle is the future Mrs. Sloan. What the hell is Yara? How dare she disrespect you!"

Another helpless-sounding female voice chimed in on the recording. "Vivian... Forget it. Don't take it too far..."

Dead silence fell over the crowd.

Estelle put her phone away and slowly raised an eyebrow. "Noelle Lockwood, still putting on an innocent act? What, didn't you know the true motive behind Vivian 'befriending' me?"

The way the onlookers looked at Noelle completely changed.

Noelle's face paled, her expression stiffening drastically. How did Yara have a recording of that?! She immediately put on a helpless guise, shaking her head. "I didn't..."

"Ah!! You bitch, I'll kill you!!"

Vivian suddenly shrieked. Triggered by who knew what, she charged forward and viciously swung her hand for a slap!

Estelle dodged to the side. Vivian missed her entirely and plummeted toward the floor—

THUD! Terrified of falling, Vivian instinctively grabbed onto whatever was nearby. With a violent RIP, she completely tore the pure white wedding dress displayed next to her, sending diamonds clattering all over the floor.

Not too far away, Liam Sloan watched the scene unfold in absolute shock. He swallowed hard. "Bro... your wife is kind of fierce."

Chapter 98: Nathaniel Sloan, Word by Word: "I Saw Everything"

A hint of amusement flashed through Nathaniel Sloan's eyes, but his gaze quickly frosted over again.

"Let's go take a look."

Nathaniel walked forward. Liam Sloan hurried to keep up. "Wait for me!"

Vivian Lowell slumped on the floor. By the time she processed what had happened, she was completely dumbfounded.

She knew that wedding dress well. It was the work of the renowned designer, Kendrick. It was the only one of its kind in the world, embellished with over nine hundred diamonds and sapphires. The main body of the dress was made of a rare mermaid silk—light, sheer, dazzling, and worth a fortune.

But now, she had torn the silk, and the diamonds were scattered all over the floor.

The wedding dress was ruined!

Noelle Lockwood's face changed drastically!

"AH!" Vivian could not accept it. Trembling all over, she scrambled backward. "No, it has nothing to do with me. It wasn't me, I don't know..."

Never mind the fact that she couldn't afford to offend Kendrick, she couldn't even afford to pay for the dress! Vivian was truly panicking. Desperate, she frantically tried to shift the blame onto someone else.

"Yara Lockwood! It's you! It's all your fault! You ruined the dress, it has nothing to do with me! Go ask her for compensation!" After speaking, she looked around, pleading for validation. "You all saw it, right? The person I was trying to hit was Yara. I only bumped into the dress because she dodged! It has nothing to do with me. It's all Yara's fault!"

Amidst her rambling, a commotion arose nearby. Henry Kendrick walked over briskly. "That's hilarious! You try to hit someone, and Yara isn't allowed to dodge? Does she have to just stand there and let you hit her?"

"That's how it..." Vivian was about to roar back when Noelle suddenly pinched her wrist, cutting her voice off abruptly.

Following Noelle's gaze, everyone shuddered.

Nathaniel Sloan!

Vivian's eyes lit up. She hurriedly scrambled up from the ground as if she had found her savior. "Noelle, Mr. Sloan is here!" Immediately, Vivian couldn't help but tattle. "Mr. Sloan, Yara intentionally ruined this wedding dress and framed me for it. Make her pay for it!"

Estelle Lockwood narrowed her eyes, letting out a soft scoff.

Noelle's expression shifted. Biting her lip lightly, she suddenly took a step forward, looking as though she was enduring a great grievance. "Nathaniel, we actually can't blame Yara completely. I don't know what got into her earlier, but she seemed very angry and got into an argument with Vivian. Vivian acted out on impulse and accidentally ruined the dress." She sighed. "I am Vivian's older sister. I apologize on her behalf. Nathaniel, if you must blame someone, blame me."

Estelle sneered. She wondered why this two-faced manipulator was pretending to be an innocent little victim. What she meant was obvious: although Vivian ruined the dress, it was all because Estelle deliberately provoked her into lashing out. If they traced it back to the source, it was entirely Estelle's fault. But here was Noelle, gentle and magnanimous, willing to take the blame.

Hearing this, Vivian immediately chimed in, "Right, right! Yara deliberately baited me. Otherwise, I wouldn't have even touched the dress! You all saw it. Am I right?"

As her voice fell, the onlookers exchanged glances for a moment.

The saleswomen who had followed Noelle naturally wanted to flatter the designated future daughter-in-law of the Sloan family. Besides, given Noelle and Nathaniel's status as an engaged couple, would Mr. Sloan actually punish his fiancée's sister? Someone had to take the fall for this incident, and pinning it on Yara was obviously the best option!

"Yes, yes. It was indeed Yara's fault just now. If she hadn't provoked Vivian, Miss Vivian wouldn't have acted so impulsively..."

"Yara insisted on dodging. When she dodged, Miss Vivian ended up bumping into the wedding dress, didn't she?"

"Mr. Sloan, Yara did it on purpose. You definitely can't blame Miss Noelle!"

Nathaniel's eyes grew cold. "Yara, you speak."

Estelle clicked her tongue. She thought to herself, speak about what? This man always showed up exactly when Noelle needed him. Now, after hearing a few words of Noelle twisting the truth, he was coming to interrogate her.

She turned directly to Henry. "Go pull the security footage. Let's not waste our breath on people who can't understand basic human logic."

Nathaniel's lips drew into a tight line. She had actually ignored him!

Liam grew increasingly disturbed the more he listened. He wondered if Estelle had a massive misunderstanding about his brother. And honestly, with that stiff, ice-cold tone, who could possibly tell that his own brother had come all this way for Estelle?

Nathaniel abruptly raised his eyes. "There's no need to pull the footage."

Joy flashed across Noelle's face. Nathaniel had refuted Yara's words and said there was no need for the security footage. Didn't that mean he believed her?

Noelle took two steps forward, intentionally or otherwise pressing against Nathaniel's arm. She pointedly looked at Estelle and said, "Yara, it's not that Nathaniel doesn't believe you. It's just that it wouldn't be good to blow things out of proportion. Pulling the footage is too troublesome and wastes everyone's time. Don't you agree?"

Estelle's smile grew cold. She couldn't tell if the feeling in her chest was bitterness or pure irony. Nathaniel really knew how to play blind, completely twisting the truth when the facts were right in front of him. She had thought that after everything that had happened, he would at least distance himself somewhat from Noelle, but it turned out she had been overthinking it!

Vivian felt utterly vindicated and shouted arrogantly, "You hear that! Mr. Sloan, I heard this dress is worth a hundred million. Since Yara ruined it, shouldn't she be made to pay for it and then get thrown out!"

Vivian breathed a massive sigh of relief in her heart. She knew that with Noelle protecting her, she would definitely be fine. Wasn't everything perfectly resolved the moment Mr. Sloan arrived?

Nathaniel's eyes were indifferent. "The person who ruined the wedding dress should indeed be thrown out."

Liam's eyes widened as if struck by a bolt of lightning.

He mentally screamed, "Nathaniel! My own brother! Do you even know how to romance a woman? If you don't, let me do it for you!"

"Not only are you helping Noelle bully Estelle, but you also want to throw Estelle out. Forget about trying to win her back later—your chances are already dead and buried!"

As Liam rolled his eyes, he heard Nathaniel speak again, his voice entirely unruffled. "Security."

The bodyguards quickly stepped forward.

Vivian's smile grew wider and wider. It was happening, it was finally happening! Mr. Sloan was about to throw Yara out!

A coy smile also surfaced on Noelle's face. Although Nathaniel had been blowing hot and cold with her recently, when it came down to things like this, he still cared about her. She hadn't wanted to drive Yara away either, but who told Yara to insist on standing in her way?

Noelle bit her lip hypocritically. "Nathaniel, Yara is a woman, after all. Throwing her out just like this would be terribly humiliating for her. Why don't we..."

"Security, throw Vivian Lowell and Noelle Lockwood out."

Nathaniel issued the order indifferently. The surroundings instantly fell dead silent as everyone exchanged bewildered looks.

The words got abruptly caught in Noelle's throat, and her face drained of color!

Estelle froze, looking up subconsciously.

Liam lowered the hand he was using to pinch his brow, feeling immensely gratified. Good, excellent! His brother had managed to save his own relationship from the grave!

Vivian was stunned for a good few seconds before hastily saying, "Mr. Sloan, did you make a mistake? The one who ruined the dress was Yara! Why are you throwing me and Noelle out? When you said there was no need to pull the footage just now, didn't you mean you believed Noelle?"

Noelle bit her lip and said nothing, but she was definitely thinking the exact same thing.

Nathaniel let out a slow, low chuckle. His gaze was ice-cold. There was not a shred of warmth in his light gray eyes as they quietly fell upon Noelle.

"I said there was no need to pull the footage because..."

The man enunciated every word. "I saw everything."

Chapter 99: Nathaniel Sloan Protects His Wife, Questions Noelle Lockwood

Noelle Lockwood's expression suddenly froze.

She realized Nathaniel had seen her. How much had he seen?!

Noelle felt cold sweat seeping down her spine. Nathaniel Sloan's gaze was like a knife, piercing right through her. She shuddered instinctively.

Putting on a look of surprise, she gritted her teeth and spoke with difficulty, "Nathaniel... I didn't understand the whole story just now. I didn't realize it was actually Vivian's fault. I originally just wanted to smooth things over..."

"Miss Lockwood's idea of 'smoothing things over' is pushing the blame onto me, forcing me to apologize and pay compensation while you and Vivian Lowell remain completely innocent?"

Estelle Lockwood interrupted mockingly. She looked at the store manager. "The work of the designer 'Kendrick' is worth a hundred million. It was placed in your store, and now it's damaged. Shouldn't there be compensation?"

The store manager snapped back to reality. With a ghastly pale face, she suddenly looked at Vivian Lowell. "Yes, compensation! This piece is a work that took the designer Kendrick two years to complete. Its auction price is one hundred and five million!"

Estelle nodded. "Vivian Lowell, pay up."

Hearing this amount, Vivian was completely stunned.

The Lowells only managed to scrape by on a few minor favors from the Lockwood Family. They only had one mid-sized company to their name.

Forking over ten million all at once would be an astronomical price for Vivian. Where was she supposed to get a hundred million? Her legs would be broken for this!

Vivian instinctively looked at Noelle. "Noelle, please help me..."

In her heart, Noelle cursed Estelle hundreds of times, but her face remained incredibly delicate and fragile, her eyes welling with tears. "Nathaniel... this is too much money. How could Vivian possibly pay that much at once? Could you help Vivian and plead with Yara..."

"Miss Lockwood, you might be mistaken about something. This is the designer Kendrick's work. What's the use of pleading with me?" Estelle scoffed, "Don't tell me you expect me to front this one hundred and five million for you?"

Noelle's face paled slightly. She wept beautifully, making it seem as though Estelle was being incredibly unforgiving.

"Yara, I'm just trying to discuss a solution with you nicely. Please don't be so defensive. Such a large sum of money... even if I tried to scrape it together now, I wouldn't be able to do it on such short notice. I don't ask for your understanding, but Yara, could you please not kick us when we're down..."

Estelle's face darkened.

Before she could speak, Nathaniel suddenly turned his head. His gaze was sharp as a knife, cold and merciless.

"What are your intentions in begging her?"

Noelle froze, her teardrops clinging to her eyelashes.

Nathaniel's voice was icy. "The wedding dress is the designer Kendrick's work. Vivian Lowell ruined the dress—what does that have to do with Yara? You're crying and begging for her forgiveness, but then what? So what if she forgives you? Does that mean you don't have to pay the hundred million in compensation?"

Noelle felt that things were spiraling completely out of her expectations. Even her voice trembled.

"Nathaniel, that's not what I meant..."

"Then what did you mean?" Nathaniel's expression remained calm. "Beg her first, wait for her to refuse, and then cry about how malicious she is for rejecting your apology and refusing to forgive you?"

"But what does this matter have to do with Yara, from beginning to end?"

Nathaniel's tone was so cold that even the surrounding guests realized something was amiss.

Wasn't Noelle supposed to be Nathaniel's fiancée? Even if Noelle and Vivian were in the wrong today, surely Mr. Sloan didn't need to be this angry, did he? However, they had to admit Mr. Sloan was right. The one who had suddenly rushed over to hurl insults at Yara was Vivian. The one who had wanted to hit someone and ruined the wedding dress was also Vivian. Did any of this have anything to do with Yara? Since it didn't, why should anyone beg her?

Henry Kendrick's gaze shifted back and forth between Nathaniel and Noelle. He clicked his tongue.

Sensing the strange looks from the people around her, Noelle hurriedly explained, her voice trembling and her face deathly pale.

"Nathaniel, I didn't... I just heard that the designer Kendrick is also a member of the Kendrick Family, and Yara has close ties with the Kendricks, so... so I wanted to ask Yara to do it as a favor to me..."

Nathaniel cut her off faintly. "Why should she do you a favor? Are your favors really that valuable? Can a hundred million in compensation be written off just for your sake?"

"Even if she does have close ties with the Kendricks, why should she plead on your behalf? You and Vivian Lowell target her at every turn, yet you expect her to cash in her own favors to exempt you from a hundred-million compensation?"

Sparing her no dignity whatsoever, Nathaniel raised his eyes and demanded, "Do you think she's some kind of living saint?"

Noelle's nails dug fiercely into her own flesh!

Estelle was a bit surprised. She never expected Nathaniel to say something like this.

Five years ago, this man had defended Noelle in absolutely everything. If this had happened back then, Nathaniel probably would have swept things under the rug long ago, or demanded that she go plead with the Kendricks!

Speaking of which, she really had done plenty of things like this in the past.

Once, an elderly lady from a wealthy family really liked her perfumes. But after Noelle offended that lady, the Lockwood Family made Estelle go and plead for mercy. She had

used her own connections to secure forgiveness for Noelle. Yet everyone felt it was simply what she ought to do, and they even praised Noelle for being so blessed that she could turn any crisis into a minor issue.

Heh... Hadn't she been exactly that—a living saint—in the past? Now, she didn't want to be a living saint anymore. She didn't want to sacrifice herself for others, endlessly dedicate herself to the Lockwood Family, or let Noelle bleed her dry. And yet, one by one, they were all displeased by it.

Noelle almost fainted on the spot, barely able to maintain her smile.

"I didn't mean it like that. I just felt that blowing things out of proportion wouldn't do Yara any good either. What if word gets out and people say Yara is unforgiving even when she's right..."

"Since she is right, what's wrong with being unforgiving?"

After saying this, Nathaniel made a "go ahead" gesture toward Henry, indicating that he could go collect the compensation and that he wouldn't interfere.

Henry almost applauded her ex-husband.

That was so satisfying to hear!

Estelle pursed her lips, her feelings somewhat complicated.

Nathaniel had truly changed so much. In the past, he never would have...

Wait, why was she thinking so much about this? Even if Nathaniel had changed, it had nothing to do with her.

Henry had already stepped forward and drawled, "Miss Lowell, one hundred and five million. Card or check?"

Vivian had just snapped out of her shock. Trembling all over in disbelief, she cried, "No... No! It's just a wedding dress! Yara, you clearly could have helped me, so why won't you? How can you be so cruel!"

Henry couldn't be bothered to waste his breath. "No money to pay up, huh? Then we'll call the police. One hundred and five million, Vivian Lowell. Get ready for prison. You can come out whenever you pay it off."

"Ah, no!!" Vivian was completely panicked. "Noelle! Noelle, please help me! I did this all for you!"

Noelle lowered her head and hid behind her bodyguard, acting as if she hadn't heard a thing.

She cursed inwardly, "Idiot! You made a fool of yourself, and now you want to drag me down with you! What a useless piece of trash!"

After Vivian was dragged away, Nathaniel walked up to Estelle and asked hoarsely, "Are you still angry? Can you take me off your blacklist now?"

Chapter 100: "Yara Lockwood, I Am Pursuing You."

As soon as Nathaniel Sloan finished speaking, the surrounding crowd's jaws dropped; they couldn't believe their ears.

Take Mr. Sloan off of what?

The blacklist?

This woman had blocked Mr. Sloan?!

What was even more shocking was that Mr. Sloan wasn't angry at all. Instead, he gently asked if she had cooled down and if she could unblock him.

So subservient, so incredibly humble... Was this really Mr. Sloan?!

"Ah, I get it..." someone suddenly whispered to their companion. "Mr. Sloan and Yara Lockwood must be dating!"

Estelle Lockwood was speechless.

To make matters worse, their companion actually agreed, "That makes sense... No wonder Mr. Sloan showed Noelle Lockwood zero respect just now. It turns out Yara is his real sweetheart."

Estelle snapped back to reality, glaring at the man in front of her with a hint of annoyance. "Mr. Sloan, could you please have some self-respect?"

Nathaniel nodded. "I'm simply asking my business partner to unblock me. How is that lacking self-respect?"

Estelle frowned instinctively. "Your tone makes it very easy for people to misunderstand..."

Before she could finish her sentence, she suddenly realized she had walked right into his verbal trap and abruptly snapped her mouth shut.

Nathaniel's lips curled into a faint smile. "What's wrong with my tone? Which of my words made Miss Lockwood overthink and feel that I lacked 'self-respect,' hmm?"

Estelle stared at him, dumbfounded.

He actually had the nerve to ask?

Because of what he just said, everyone around them thought they were a couple. Wasn't that a massive misunderstanding?

"However, they didn't misunderstand," Nathaniel said slowly. "In fact, Miss Lockwood, I have been pursuing you this whole time."

Liam Sloan nearly did a spit-take with his cola.

Zane Grant also froze. The two men exchanged bewildered glances, wondering what kind of playbook this was.

Although Liam was a lawyer, he had a simple mind. Plus, he had never met Estelle before, so he believed whatever Nathaniel said. But Zane had always felt that Yara and Estelle were fundamentally different people. With Nathaniel pursuing Yara now, what if he realized he'd made a terrible mistake later?

However, Nathaniel had said those words after careful consideration. From various clues, he had discovered that there was a significant misunderstanding between him and Estelle. Perhaps these misunderstandings were the reason she refused to acknowledge her true identity to him.

Furthermore, the identity of 'Yara' left him feeling chronically insecure, keeping his heart suspended in mid-air. Yara didn't belong to him—she could leave at any time, and if she did, she wouldn't have to answer to anyone. So, he would simply bind her to his side first.

Estelle almost thought she had misheard. She knitted her brows deeply, utterly baffled. "What did you say?"

Nathaniel lifted his gaze casually. "You heard me correctly."

Estelle let out an exasperated laugh. She was just about to shoot back a sarcastic retort when she caught a glimpse of Noelle looking like she was about to faint from fury. Her eyes darted playfully as she suddenly broke into a radiant smile and looped her arm through Nathaniel's. "Alright, I'll give you a chance. Accompany me upstairs to pick out a gown."

Nathaniel lowered his eyes mildly. "It would be my honor."

Estelle walked past Noelle, tossing her a breezy, dismissive glance.

Noelle was on the verge of going mad with rage. *That bitch!*

Once upstairs, Estelle released Nathaniel's arm. The man raised an eyebrow. "Tossing me aside the moment you're done using me?"

Estelle frowned, unable to figure out what this man was trying to do. Did he have some sort of scheme? Who was he trying to please by using her this time? In the past, knowing that Aunt Iris liked her, Nathaniel would demand that she put on a smile and not look so miserable every time they returned to Sloan Manor. Once his aunt was happy and gave Estelle a gift, Nathaniel would immediately turn around and give that very gift to Noelle.

During those moments, Nathaniel was always gentle. He would accompany her home for dinner, hold her as they slept, and even when they were intimate, he would be endlessly tender and affectionate. But once Noelle reaped the benefits, he would instantly lose his patience with Estelle. What did he want to get out of her this time?

Puzzled, Estelle secretly messaged Henry Kendrick to discuss it.

Henry replied: [He said he wants to pursue you, so he has to put in the actual work. Just string him along! Do you know how to play the heartbreaker? Treat him exactly how your ex-husband treated you!]

Estelle: [Then what do you think his motive is? For Noelle? But he gave her zero respect just now.]

Henry was still downstairs. Not far from him, Liam and Zane were deep in conversation.

"Nathaniel specifically told the store manager to reserve the women's clothing section upstairs," Liam said. "He said he wanted to accompany Yara shopping."

"Is he serious?" Zane asked. "...Then again, Nathaniel is always serious about the things he decides to do."

"Well, Yara is Estelle, after all," Liam reasoned. "Hasn't Nathaniel treated his wife exactly the same for seven years?"

"That might be true, but Nathaniel has no idea how to cherish a wife. Now he wants to turn back time? Tsk, tsk," Zane replied. "If you ask me, if Yara really is Estelle, he won't be able to win her back."

"Why?" Liam asked in confusion.

"Because Estelle was deeply hurt," Zane said faintly. "And Nathaniel has absolutely no idea why she was hurt or what he did wrong. From his perspective, he did nothing, yet his wife suddenly faked her death and left..."

"Believe it or not, if the person who returned is indeed Estelle, even if Nathaniel offered his beating heart to her on a silver platter, she wouldn't spare it a single glance."

Although Zane felt that Yara wasn't Estelle, since she wasn't, Nathaniel had even less of a chance of catching her!

"Ah... then Nathaniel is in a pretty pathetic spot..." Liam murmured.

Henry looked at his phone as Estelle sent another text: [Could it be that he wants to use the status of boyfriend and girlfriend to force me to give up my business margins? Or maybe he's worried that Christian's illness won't improve, so he wants to tie me to his side!]

Henry felt that Zane was right. He probed tentatively: [What if—and I mean just what if—there's a possibility your ex really wants to win you back? Maybe he realized his true feelings. He loves you.]

Estelle replied with a single question mark before adding: [Call an ambulance for yourself. How long have you had this fever? Did it burn your brain to a crisp?]

Too lazy to entertain Henry's nonsense, Estelle put her phone away. She raised an eyebrow at Nathaniel, finally answering his earlier question. "It's not exactly tossing you aside after use. After all, I'm not done using you yet."

Nathaniel glanced back at her.

Within his gaze, something Estelle couldn't quite decipher faintly surfaced. It was as if this man was incredibly deeply in love. It was a pity... she didn't buy a single second of it.

Estelle looked at him leisurely. "You said you wanted to pursue me. Were you serious?"

"Of course," Nathaniel replied methodically.

Estelle asked with a half-smile, "How does Mr. Sloan plan to pursue me? By spending money on me?"

"If you want me to, of course."

Estelle nodded without hesitation. She walked right into a women's boutique and directly picked out over a dozen dresses. These dresses were significantly more expensive than the ones Vivian Lowell had picked out earlier. Over a dozen of them would cost nearly ten million.

Nathaniel watched her quietly. Suddenly, he recalled Liam's previous deduction.
"Nathaniel, if she's willing to spend your money, she definitely has you in her heart!"

This seemingly delusional piece of logic actually made a bit of sense to Nathaniel at this moment. Estelle was indeed that kind of person. Only when she treated someone as her own would she stop keeping score about money.

Just like when they were newlyweds... she loved to act coquettishly. Once, Estelle had taken a liking to a very cheap necklace. Her eyes sparkling, she threw herself into his arms and coaxed, "Nathaniel, I really love this necklace. Could you buy it for me?"

At the time... what had he said back then? Nathaniel couldn't even remember. He only remembered that from then on, Estelle never asked him for a gift again. On Valentine's Day, Nathaniel had prepared a necklace for her, but up until the day she left, it remained unopened. She hadn't even spared it a single glance.

But right now, the Estelle in front of him had finished picking out her clothes and returned to the counter.

Nathaniel's breath suddenly caught in his throat.