

## **Substitute B 137**

Chapter 137: I'll Never Have Children in This Lifetime

Serena Sterling: Blame me then.

"Serena, getting back to the point, I've already flown to Bayside today, and I'm calling you because in a couple of days I'm hosting a small gathering. I'd like to invite you to join; do you have time?" Iris Crawford asked expectantly.

This gathering is the one that Yasmine was boasting about earlier. If she attends, Yasmine's reaction is bound to be interesting. However, Serena didn't immediately agree because she wanted to ask Hayden Crawford first.

"Principal, thank you for the invitation, but I can't give you an answer right now."

"Alright, I'll wait for you. Serena, you must find the time to come. If you don't show up, there won't be any point to this gathering!" Iris pleaded earnestly.

"Okay."

Serena agreed and then hung up the phone. She began to study the mandrake flowers, determined to cure Mr. Crawford as soon as possible.

Soon it was six in the evening, and everyone was off work. At that moment, a melodious ringtone sounded; this time, it was Mr. Crawford calling.

Serena quickly answered, her voice sweet and clear, "Hello, Mr. Crawford, are you off work?"

"Yes, I'm off work. Just leaving the company. Mrs. Crawford, I find that you're busier than I am. You're still at the research institute. Do you get overtime pay for this extra work?" Hayden Crawford teased in a low, magnetic voice.

The light in Serena's bright eyes shifted with thought. She didn't plan to tell him about the mandrake flowers since testing poisons to make medicine was very risky. If Mr. Crawford knew, he would surely stop her.

"Mr. Crawford, why don't you come pick me up after work now?"

"Can't do it right now, I need to make a trip back to Orchid Court."

"Going back to see Grandma? I haven't seen her for a few days either; take me with you."

While driving, Hayden Crawford's well-defined hands were on the steering wheel. His handsome features were filled with a gentle fondness, but when Serena suggested going with him, he pursed his thin lips, "Not today. I'm just going back to get a document. Be good, I'll pick you up in about an hour and take you to dinner."

Serena didn't think too much about it and nodded obediently, "Alright then, I want a seafood feast."

"Okay, I'll have the secretary book a table in advance."

...

Orchid Court.

Iris Crawford had arrived early. She came straight here after getting off the plane to see her aging mother, as the old lady was her biological mother.

In the living room, Iris unloaded a suitcase full of dolls for her mother, nestling affectionately against the old lady's shoulder, "Mom, you've been staying in Bayside for so long, when are you going back to Aethelgard? I have such a busy schedule that it's hard to even meet you, and aren't you missing your son? He is your son, after all."

The old lady adored this daughter dearly. Iris had inherited her beauty from her youth and maintained it well. She wore a beige silk blouse with a bow at the waist over a black pencil skirt, an elegantly professional outfit, making her look as though she were still in her thirties.

The old lady stroked Iris's curls and smiled lovingly, "I don't want to go back right now, I want to stay here with Hayden."

Hayden Crawford and Zane Crawford were both Iris's nephews, but when Hayden was mentioned, Iris stiffened for a moment, "Mom, you're always so biased. You don't only have one grandson. You've spent all these years focusing on Hayden, but what about Zane? Have you ever cared about him? He's also come to Bayside."

"Really, Zane is here too? I'm not worried about Zane; doesn't he have you all doting on him?"

Iris moved away from her mother's shoulder, "Mom, Zane is different from Hayden. Zane is a prodigy. The Crawford family will be handed to him in the future. But Hayden... he's a patient. Isn't his sleeping disorder getting worse? He has mental issues, and the episodes will become more frequent. In time, that dark, tyrannical, bloodthirsty second personality of his will completely take over; he's extremely dangerous. Mom, you need to stay away from him!"

The old lady's expression remained neutral, with only a couple of "heh heh" laughs, "So you all know about it. I thought you didn't."

Iris abruptly stood up from the sofa, "Mom, what do you mean?"

The once harmonious and warm living room suddenly felt heavy and oppressive. Beryl wanted to serve a fruit platter, but her steps faltered in fear.

Butler Felix took the fruit platter, signaling Beryl to leave with a glance.

The old lady looked up at Iris, "Why should I return to the City of Aethelgard? Look at how well your lives are going. Hayden's father was a business empire king; you, his aunt, are a principal at The St. Lyra Academy of Medicine; and yes, Zane, that brother of his, is a prodigy too, becoming Aethelgard's youngest scholar at 20. You all know Hayden is ill, but what have you done for him?"

"Did his father fulfill his duty as a father? You, as his aunt, who teaches and guides, have you ever taught Hayden anything personally? Zane works in medicine, saving lives; has he thought about saving his own brother first?"

"I don't need you all to do anything for Hayden, but don't come here and immediately say he's ill and dangerous. A child you all have abandoned, why do you still feel the need to step on him? Isn't he your flesh and blood? Do you intend to send him to the mental hospital again?"

At the mention of the "mental hospital," Iris's face turned pale, and her hands at her sides clenched into fists. Heartlessly, she said, "It's because he has such a mother. Mom, have you forgotten how his mother seduced my husband? I was seven months pregnant at the time, and I fell down the stairs, lost the child, and my uterus was injured. I'll never have children in my lifetime!"

The bloody past was revealed once more. Iris's eyes quickly turned red, tears falling uncontrollably, "I'm already in my forties. Women my age have long had children of their own, but I was deprived of the right to be a mother. Mom, have you ever pitied me?"

The old lady looked pained, "Iris, you..."

Just then, a sudden "knock, knock" at the door broke the suffocating tension in the room.

Both the old lady and Iris turned their heads to look toward the door, where a tall, imposing figure stood in the entrance: Hayden Crawford had somehow returned. Dressed in a black suit, one hand in his pocket, the other clutching car keys, he knocked twice on the villa's door, "knock, knock."

The entrance was dimly lit, obscuring the man's refined, handsome features. But his deep, chilly eyes glimpsed over indifferently.

Iris stiffened, quickly raising her hand to wipe away her tears.

Hayden stepped in with long strides, his steps steady as he curved his thin lips into a slight smile, "Aunt, why didn't you call me when you came to Bayside? I would have picked you up from the airport."