

Substitute B 571

Chapter 571: Bewitching Technique That Enchants the Heart

Kyle hung his head low, not daring to retort, and could only murmur, "Father, you can only blame Serena Sterling for being so crafty. I never expected her to escape..."

"Shut up!" Titus Ashworth didn't want to hear a word from Kyle. It was said that comparison leads to pain, and compared to Seraphina Linden's daughter, Serena Sterling, his son was just a useless waste.

Titus Ashworth was now seething with anger. Clearly, this time Serena Sterling had played them all. At his palace party, Serena performed stunningly, shattering his plans to wed her to Kyle. Now, she had even attracted the attention of Kaleb Newman, the head of the Imperial Guards, making this an even bigger mess.

Titus Ashworth, in his fury, smashed an antique vase. Feeling unsatisfied, he went up and kicked Kyle several times.

Kyle yelped with each kick. He had never been treated this way before and held Serena Sterling accountable for all of it.

Recalling Serena Sterling's enchantingly beautiful visage and her combination of courage and cunning, truly a peerless wonder, Kyle already felt himself overheating. He swore that one day he'd crush Serena Sterling beneath him until she begged for mercy.

Lord Titus Ashworth was enraged, and all the servants withdrew to one side, not daring to make a sound.

Just then, a delicate and charming voice sounded in his ear, "Lord, who dares to provoke such anger from you? Do calm down!"

Consort Willow had arrived!

Though Consort Willow had given birth to two children and was around forty years old, she somehow maintained herself so well that her face bore no wrinkles. She was extremely beautiful, richly endowed with an exotic allure, and her gown rustled melodiously as she moved.

Upon closer examination, a small bell was fastened around Consort Willow's slender waist, emitting this very seductive sound.

Seeing Consort Willow appear, Titus Ashworth reluctantly lowered his foot, spared Kyle, and sat on his dragon seat, still fuming as he said, "Who else could have angered me, Consort Willow? Just look at the fine son you have given me. Despite all the support I provided him, paving the way for him, he's just a worthless sluggard, ruining my grand strategy and leaving me with a big mess!"

Consort Willow came forward, pulling out her kerchief to wipe Titus Ashworth's brow, speaking softly, "Lord, Kyle didn't handle this well, but I will give him a thorough scolding!"

Titus Ashworth immediately inhaled the familiar fragrance on Consort Willow's kerchief, a scent that had followed Consort Willow for many years and had become something he relied on.

It seemed that without that fragrance for a day, he felt absent and disoriented.

Titus Ashworth's rage quickly subsided, though he still let out a cold snort.

Consort Willow nestled beside Titus Ashworth, her movements akin to a serpent, her breath enchanting as she said, "Lord, what's done is done. The pressing matter now is how to resolve it. Rosalind Newman is Kaleb Newman's only daughter, and Kaleb has led the Imperial Guards for over forty years, with a loyal band of officers and deathsworn soldiers. He's vital. No matter who marries his daughter, he won't rest easy, will he? In fact, Lord, you had long intended to marry Rosalind to Kyle as a concubine. So, this is the perfect opportunity to marry Rosalind to Kyle, silencing the critics and putting your mind at ease."

Consort Willow's words were precisely in tune with Titus Ashworth's heart. Titus was so paranoid, suspecting everyone of wanting to seize his imperial power, relying on yet wary of Kaleb. Whoever became Kaleb's son-in-law, he wouldn't trust. Thus, he had long planned to marry Rosalind to Kyle.

Titus Ashworth extended his arm, embracing Consort Willow. Through the years, his favor for her had never waned, for Consort Willow was his strategist, a force to reckon with.

"But," Titus Ashworth expressed concern, "Kaleb has only this one daughter, cherished dearly. Even though Kyle's escapades have been suppressed, Kaleb is surely aware of them. He would never willingly marry his daughter to Kyle."

Consort Willow, with nails lacquered in bright crimson, slowly trailed her fingers along Titus Ashworth's chest, batting her eyes seductively, "Why doesn't the lord simply issue a royal decree, announcing it to the world? Can Kaleb defy it?"

Titus Ashworth grasped Consort Willow's chin, "And if Kaleb truly defies it?"

Consort Willow smiled enigmatically, "Then accuse him of treason and rebellion, seize him, wipe out his entire clan, and bloodily cleanse the Imperial Guards, placing them firmly under Kyle's control!"

Titus Ashworth's eyes gleamed. He laughed heartily, planting a forceful kiss on Consort Willow, "A clever plan! Truly clever!"

Seeing his mother consort had not only placated his father but delighted him, Kyle finally breathed a sigh of relief. Indeed, when his mother acts, there's nothing she cannot accomplish.

Kyle, smug and arrogant, adjusted his attire, "Serena Sterling, just you wait and see!"

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Nightfall.

Serena Sterling had finished her bath and sat before the vanity as Cherie, the lady-in-waiting, combed her silky hair.

In the mirror, Serena Sterling's freshly bathed face looked as dewy and supple as a freshly peeled lychee. The vivid red flower on her forehead accentuated her breathtaking beauty, truly a woman of Alani, dazzling the world.

"Finished." Serena put down her pen, satisfied with her drawing.

Cherie glanced over. Serena had drawn a bell, but it wasn't a regular bell; it seemed peculiar.

"Your Highness, what is this you've drawn?" Cherie asked.

Serena contemplated for a moment, "I heard a string of bell sounds in the palace, which carried a seductive Bewitching Technique. I feigned entering a room before slipping away. I glanced at the maid's waist and saw this bell. There must be something odd about it. I'll photograph it and send it to my mommy. She'll definitely know what it is."

Cherie hurriedly fetched her phone. Serena took a photo and sent it to a number.

Shortly after, a "ding" sounded as a reply came from Seraphina Linden, "Serena, where did this bell come from?"

"In Titus Ashworth's harem," Serena replied.

"This is a demon bell of The Merfolk Clan," responded Seraphina Linden.

The Merfolk Clan?

A demon bell?

This was Serena's first time hearing of such things. She had many questions and was about to send another message, but Seraphina Linden had already texted back, "I'm having tea and shopping with a friend, let's talk later."

Serena sighed, "..."

Mommy is always so busy. Based on the timing, shouldn't Mommy and Aunt Yara be in... The State of Westria by now?

While Julian Rathborne and Jude Crawford are turning the world upside down looking for them, are they not afraid of being caught appearing so openly?

At that moment, Cherie quietly reported, "Your Highness, just now Titus Ashworth officially decreed the marriage of Rosalind Newman to Kyle as a concubine."

Chapter 572: Do You Really Want to Marry Him?

Titus Ashworth moved quickly, and the royal edict for the arranged marriage was issued promptly.

However, Kyle Ashworth's antics at the royal party had spread like wildfire among the populace; it was impossible to suppress. Titus Ashworth had to produce a solution before the rumors further fermented, or else the situation would only worsen.

Cherie said, "Princess, while Titus Ashworth was issuing the marriage edict, he also ordered the purging of rumors from the populace. They're employing tactics with ghostwriters, intentionally steering the public

opinion toward Kyle Ashworth and Rosalind Newman's affable tale. So far, the results seem promising, and Kyle Ashworth might be completely exonerated."

Serena Sterling slowly folded the paper with the alluring bell drawn on it, a smirk tugging at her lips, "Want to cleanse his reputation? It's not that easy. It looks like tonight will be a sleepless night for many. Cherie, prepare the car."

"Princess, where do you wish to go?" Cherie asked.

Serena Sterling smiled softly, "To find someone."

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The Warren family.

Rosalind Newman stood in the back garden when a maid rushed over, "Miss Newman, something terrible has happened! The people just came from the palace; the master's edict for an arranged marriage has arrived, wanting to marry you off to Prince Kyle as a concubine."

Kaleb Newman had only this daughter, whom he adored immensely. Rosalind was well-educated and had followed Kaleb into the forbidden barracks since childhood, possessing a broad vision. Hearing the marriage news, her expression showed no emotion; she merely curled her lips in sardonic darkness, "I already anticipated this outcome. The master aims to silence overwhelming public opinion, sacrificing my lifelong happiness."

"Miss Newman, don't worry. Your father dotes on you and hasn't agreed to the arranged marriage yet. Perhaps he'll refuse it."

Rosalind gently shook her head, "My father is a lifelong fool who loyally serves. He's utterly devoted to the royal family. Now that the master directly decrees marriage, he will surely comply."

"What should we do? Miss Newman, perhaps... we should consider it from another perspective? Prince Kyle is favored by the master and is a strong candidate for succession. With your father's support as your backbone, even if you enter as a concubine, Prince Kyle will certainly respect and cherish you."

Rosalind sneered coldly, "Others might not know Kyle Ashworth's true nature, but I do. Kyle Ashworth is rotten to the core, with a harem full of wives. He particularly loves abducting respectable girls, not even sparing any beautiful married women. Recently, a young girl he toyed with was directly buried in the ground, and I never imagined marrying such a man. Thinking about how he pounced on me that day, babbling vile words—I felt more repulsed than by a deadly snake!"

The maid found herself speechless, "Miss Newman, then... what should we do?"

Rosalind looked up at the darkened sky, "What else can be done but resign to fate? As a daughter of the Warren family, this is my destiny."

Seeing the troubled expression on Miss Newman's face, the maid could only sigh.

Just then, a clear, melodic voice suddenly chimed beside her ear, "People say the Warren women have been exceptional since childhood, fighting alongside their fathers on the battlefield no less than men, yet today's sight only brings disappointment!"

Who?

Rosalind turned to see a slender, ethereal figure beneath the pear tree. The figure wore a black cloak and a hat, making it difficult to discern features in the dim light.

"Who? Who are you? How dare you! This is the residence of the Warren family, headed by the forbidden army. How did you intrude? Someone, hurry!" the maid called out in panic.

But Rosalind quickly raised her hand, "Stop calling out; that's no other than... the Princess of Alani!"

What, the Princess of Alani?

Then, the ethereal figure ahead elegantly lifted a slender hand, brushing off the hat to reveal a breathtakingly beautiful face.

Serena Sterling had arrived!

Rosalind recognized Serena Sterling at first glance. Rosalind had seen Serena Sterling at the royal party before; Serena Sterling had a peerless appearance and out-of-this-world aura; anyone who saw her would remember her forever deeply.

Now seeing Serena Sterling, Rosalind showed no kindness, merely coldly snorting, "Princess of Alani, do you still dare come here? When Kyle Ashworth plotted against you, you tricked me into that room; how heartless of you, you've caused me great suffering!"

Serena Sterling, beneath the black cloak, wore a pink silk gown. The Princess skirt of Alani was woven with gold threads, delicate and uniquely fashionable. As Serena Sterling walked over, the flowing gold threads accentuated her ethereal aura; her captivating presence was too stunning to look at directly.

Serena Sterling looked at Rosalind, "Miss Newman, we are both intelligent, so let's not beat around the bush. If I didn't invite you into the scheme, would you remain an outsider? Don't tell me you didn't know the master already intended to marry you off to Kyle Ashworth?"

That comment pierced Rosalind's heart; she had already acknowledged her fate as a Warren family daughter.

"Princess of Alani, the master intends to marry me to Kyle Ashworth, so what about you? Aren't you merely trying to have my father ally with the King of Nine Peaks? Am I wrong?" Rosalind provocatively asked Serena Sterling.

Serena Sterling's clear eyes were exceedingly lucid, reflecting the flowing light, "Excellent, it seems Miss Newman understands my intentions."

"..." Rosalind felt her punches were hitting soft cotton, unable to exert strength.

Serena Sterling stood beside Rosalind, gazing at the dark sky, "Does Miss Newman wish to marry Kyle Ashworth as a concubine?"

"No." Rosalind replied decisively, "But if I refuse, the master will surely seize the opportunity to launch an attack and then the Warren family will be in danger."

Serena Sterling gently curled her lips into a slight smile.

Rosalind looked at her, "Princess of Alani, why are you smiling?"

"I smile because, although you perceive the present situation clearly, why do you fail to see future prospects? Even if you marry, will the Warren family be safe? The master Titus Ashworth is too suspicious, and Kyle Ashworth is a cunning villain. How could they let the Warren family prosper in peace?"

Rosalind's face turned pale, her body drenched in cold sweat; she swiftly shut her eyes tightly.

"Miss Newman, I've said all I needed to. Destiny is in your hands; if fate is unjust, why resign to it instead of fighting against the heavens!" Serena Sterling's slender figure disappeared from view.

"Miss..." The maid approached, "What are you planning? Would you truly choose... the King of Nine Peaks?"

Rosalind opened her eyes, looking at Serena Sterling's departing direction, slowly shaking her head, "No, I didn't choose the King of Nine Peaks; I chose... the Princess of Alani!"

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The following morning.

Serena Sterling went to The Manor of the Ninth Spire to play chess with Axel Ashworth.

Chapter 573: The Princess of Alani Truly Is Formidable

Axel Ashworth held the white chess piece and glanced at Serena Sterling across from him. Today, Serena wore a light purple chiffon dress, perfectly outlining her youthful waist. Around her neck hung a child's golden amulet, her pure black hair draped obediently over her shoulders, and her milky white skin radiated a shimmering gloss.

Now, Serena was focused and serious, holding the black chess piece. Her long eyelashes hung like little fans, needing nothing to add to her presence, as stunning as a masterful ink painting.

Axel Ashworth smiled, "Princess of Alani, I've noticed that everything from clothing to jewelry from your Alani is exquisite and captivating — for instance, the amulet you wear, which I haven't seen on the market."

As the King of Nine Peaks, Axel had seen all kinds of rare treasures, yet he had never seen the style of amulet Serena was wearing.

"This amulet," Serena Sterling blinked mysteriously, "Of course, King of Nine Peaks hasn't seen it outside because my aunt custom-made it for me — globally unique."

"Oh, I wonder who this aunt of the Princess of Alani is; I know quite a few top jewelry designers."

"My aunt is very capable, but I won't say much here; I'm worried it might scare the King of Nine Peaks," Serena said with a smile.

Axel knew Serena was unwilling to reveal her aunt's identity, so he did not press the matter.

"Our Alani is a utopia, and all the girls dress beautifully like me. My mom always says that girls are naturally beautiful, so the clothes of Alani are overseen by her, while the unique jewelry is entirely designed by my aunt," Serena said, straightening her chest with a touch of pride.

Axel listened seriously but did not reply. Alani used to be adjacent to The State of Westria. For unknown reasons, Alani completely vanished later.

Its disappearance lasted a century.

This time, Serena chose to cooperate with him and must hold some kind of motive, certainly related to the mystery of Alani's disappearance years ago.

"Princess of Alani, I see you calmly playing chess here with me, yet you seem not at all worried about the Warren family? This morning, Kyle Ashworth's betrothal gifts arrived at the Warren family, rumored to be dozens of boxes of fine jewelry. Now, the rumors about Kyle Ashworth and Rosalind Newman are widely believed." Axel Ashworth said.

Serena placed a chess piece and smiled, "King of Nine Peaks, don't worry."

"I heard last night the Princess of Alani sneaked into the Warren family and met Rosalind Newman," Axel Ashworth said.

Serena looked up at Axel Ashworth, "The King of Nine Peaks truly has keen information."

Axel raised his brow, "Isn't it too rash to bet everything on Rosalind Newman?"

Serena looked at the chess piece she placed, "I have no regrets. I chose Rosalind Newman with my reasoning; when in doubt, I won't use them. I trust her."

Axel looked into Serena's clear eyes; they were truly beautiful, shining with brilliant intelligence and determination, captivating and entrancing, "Alright then, I await eagerly."

Both focused on playing chess, when suddenly, Axel's confidant ran over and whispered a few words in his ear.

Axel's chess-moving hand suddenly paused.

The confidant retreated, and Axel looked at Serena Sterling across from him, "Princess of Alani, congratulations, you won the bet."

Serena put down the chess piece and also looked at Axel, "Tell me."

"I've just received news; Kyle Ashworth's dozens of boxes of betrothal gifts were brazenly delivered to the Warren family, but then the rear courtyard of the Warren family caught fire. Apparently, Rosalind Newman set her own boudoir ablaze and left behind a farewell letter before disappearing." Axel said.

Serena elegantly raised her willow eyebrows, "What did the letter say?"

"In the farewell letter, Rosalind passionately denounced Kyle Ashworth, listing his romantic escapades over the years and stating she would rather die than marry such a person. Originally, Kyle's promiscuous affairs were suppressed, but now, with Rosalind meticulously exposing these incidents, the once-legendary romance has been ruthlessly unveiled, leading everyone to discuss the crimes of Lord Kyle." Axel explained.

Serena showed no surprise; Seth Sullivan chose Rosalind for her, believing Rosalind would fulfill her greatest potential.

This opening act played loudly and clearly.

Serena picked up her black chess piece; now, several strands of hair gently fell from behind her snowy white ear, adding to her girlish charm, "King of Nine Peaks, I'm not leaving today. Have someone prepare a sumptuous meal. I'm bringing a friend to dine here."

"A friend? What friend?" Axel Ashworth asked curiously.

Serena didn't look up, "King of Nine Peaks, don't worry; this friend will be here soon."

At that moment, a series of footsteps sounded, and Cherie escorted someone in, "Your Highness, the person is here."

Serena looked up at Axel, "King of Nine Peaks, my friend has arrived!"

The person behind Cherie stepped forward, "Princess of Alani, King of Nine Peaks, I'm here."

Axel's eyes slightly narrowed because it was none other than Rosalind Newman!

Rosalind had set her boudoir on fire and left a farewell letter exposing Kyle's wrongdoings. Now she's gone missing, and the royal family must be frantically searching for her.

At this crucial moment, Serena brought Rosalind to his Manor of the Ninth Spire.

All along, Axel maintained neutrality, being the most capable contender for royal power to cooperate with Serena, yet he hadn't agreed to the alliance.

Now, with Serena publicly bringing Rosalind to his Manor of the Ninth Spire, surely the royal family has already gotten wind, leaving Axel with no clean way out.

Axel's gaze sharply fell on Serena, smiling vaguely, "Indeed, the Princess of Alani is extraordinary; while scheming against the palace, you put me on the spot as well. The Princess of Alani came alone to Westria with no initial advantage, yet she's able to stir the entire situation by herself — truly impressive!"

Serena curled her lips, "The King of Nine Peaks is flattering me; now, there's no turning back for the King. He can only choose to cooperate with me."

As she spoke, Serena lowered her gaze and took his chess piece, her clear voice powerful and bold, "I've paved the way for the King of Nine Peaks; at this point, why hesitate to stride forward toward royal authority and command respect far and wide!"

Axel looked into Serena's clear eyes; now she regarded him, her gaze sharp like the sun blossoming on the horizon, shining brilliantly with peerless magnificence.

Chapter 574: Gave Him a Good Scolding

Axel Ashworth looked at Serena Sterling, and his heart was unavoidably captivated.

After a moment, Axel slowly curled his thin lips, "Princess of Alani, do I have any retreat now? I've already been invited onto your ship, and I can't leave even if I wanted to."

"King of Nine Peaks, here's to a pleasant collaboration." As she spoke, Serena elegantly took a sip of tea, "The news of Miss Newman's disappearance has already caused an uproar. To stabilize the situation, Titus Ashworth will most certainly detain the Chief of the Imperial Guards, Kaleb Newman, immediately..."

"Princess of Alani, is my father in danger?" Rosalind Newman quickly interjected.

At this moment, Cherie stepped forward, "Miss Newman, when Kyle Ashworth was about to detain your father, he suddenly suffered a heart attack and collapsed on the spot."

What?

Rosalind's expression changed dramatically, and she turned to leave, "My father has only one daughter, I must go back to see him now."

Rosalind was about to rush out, but at that moment, another person walked in—it was Kaleb Newman himself.

"Father, why are you here? Didn't you suddenly have a heart attack and collapse? Is your health okay?" Rosalind looked at Kaleb nervously.

Kaleb, now sixty, still maintained the vigor of a military officer, though he appeared quite disheveled in his disguise, clad in all black.

Seeing his daughter unharmed, Kaleb fixed his gaze on Serena Sterling, "Ronia, this was all arranged by the Princess of Alani."

"What does this mean?" Rosalind was puzzled.

Serena set down the chess piece in her hand and stood up. She approached Kaleb and Rosalind, smiling, "Miss Newman, last night I visited you and also visited your father. However, your father is loyal to the royal family and directly drove me out."

Kaleb recalled last night's events and continued, "The Princess of Alani had just left, but she stood outside and said a few words to me. She said that something unexpected would definitely happen today, and if Kyle Ashworth were to detain me, he would kill me to prevent future troubles. At that time, I angrily rebuked the Princess of Alani, thinking that after serving the Imperial Guards for over forty years with unwavering loyalty, I was even willing to let Ronia marry Prince Kyle as a concubine despite the pain. I couldn't believe that the ruler and Prince Kyle would want my life, and I absolutely refused to believe it!"

Rosalind, upon hearing these snippets, could already imagine how intense the meeting between Serena and her father was last night. Her father's blind loyalty was his lifelong belief, never shaken.

"Father, what happened then?"

"Then..." Kaleb recalled last night, and when he said those words, Serena's bright and sharp eyes fell on him like an unsheathed sword, "Then the Princess of Alani scolded me outright."

"Oh, this is getting more interesting. How did the Princess of Alani scold the Chief? I am very interested," Axel remarked curiously.

"Back then, the Princess of Alani pointed at me and angrily condemned me, calling me a fool as dumb as a pig!" Kaleb imitated Serena's domineering manner from the previous night, doing so with great accuracy.

Both Axel and Rosalind laughed. In their lifetime, the only person daring to point at Kaleb and call him as dumb as a pig was probably Serena Sterling.

"Who would have thought the Princess of Alani not only has unsurpassed intelligence but also remarkable courage to rush into someone else's house to scold them. I truly admire her," Axel joked.

Serena shook her plume slightly, "King of Nine Peaks, please don't find amusement in this."

Kaleb continued, "The Princess called me a fool and then scolded, 'Kaleb, your death is negligible, but if you die, Titus Ashworth and Kyle Ashworth will certainly spill blood over the good generals and warriors who followed you for years to control the Imperial Guards. You would cause their unjust deaths, which is unrighteous!'

'To fulfill your blind loyalty, Miss Newman, without her father's protection, would become a nationwide fugitive. As a man, if you can't protect the nation or the family, how will you face the ancestors of the Warren family if you die—it's unfilial!'

'The current ruler is brutal and unjust. Prince Kyle is treacherous and despicable. I just don't believe you haven't noticed, but you live numbly, holding onto your loyalty. If one day Prince Kyle ascends to the throne, people will be driven into hardship and suffering. I ask you this: are you loyal to Titus Ashworth's realm, or are you loyal to the people's realm? Are you guarding Titus Ashworth, or are you guarding the true royal family of Westria—you are disloyal!'

'Kaleb, you've pretended to be deaf for too many years. An obstinate, disloyal, unfilial, unrighteous person like you—I was completely mistaken about you.'

'After saying these words, the Princess of Alani turned and left immediately.'

Axel and Rosalind heard the thrilling words, turning their gaze on Serena Sterling once more. Now, Serena stood tall in her light purple gauze dress, exuding a subtle grace amid the tranquility of the years, entirely captivating all attention.

Rosalind said, "Princess of Alani, regardless of my father's actions, he is still your elder, yet you chose such harsh words against him..."

"However," Rosalind suddenly smiled, "I think you scolded him well, scolded him wonderfully, and scolded him with such authority!"

With those words, everyone laughed.

At this moment, Kaleb stepped forward, stood tall, and folded his fists in salute towards Serena with a ninety-degree bow, "Princess of Alani, it was only after hearing your words last night that I realized I had lived the past forty years in vain. I, Kaleb Newman, have learned my lesson!"

Serena quickly walked over, extending her small hands to lift Kaleb up, "Chief Newman, I was rude last night. I hope you won't hold it against me."

Kaleb looked at Serena. People say to give a blow and then a sweet date, and the Princess of Alani's methods indeed command admiration.

"King of Nine Peaks, if you don't mind, I will follow you from now on, ready to face any hardship or danger," Kaleb said to Axel.

Axel promptly smiled, "With Chief Newman's support, my achievements are surely within reach."

"King of Nine Peaks, I've delivered this gift of my first meeting; you all take your time to chat. This midday feast should properly entertain Chief Newman and Miss Newman. I will take my leave." Serena left with Cherie.

Watching Serena's elegant figure disappear from sight, Axel returned to the chessboard, "Chief Newman, please have a seat."

Kaleb sat opposite, and Rosalind accepted the tea from the maid and dismissed all the servants.

Axel and Kaleb spoke face-to-face, "Chief Newman, what do you think of this Princess of Alani?"

Kaleb pondered deeply, "This Princess of Alani is no mere mortal; when the storm comes, she could very well become a soaring dragon. After all, who says women are inferior to men!"

Chapter 575: The Imperial Maiden Flower on Serena Sterling's Forehead

Axel Ashworth nodded, "I think so too. After all, the Princess of Alani is an Alani native. If one day Westria goes to war with Alani..."

Kaleb Newman asked, "King of Nine Peaks, this time you are collaborating with the Princess of Alani. Do you know what exactly she wants?"

Axel Ashworth shook his head, "The Princess has never told me. She simply wants to ally with me first. I have a feeling what she desires should be in the royal family, and it is related to the secret that vanished back then from the ancient kingdom of Alani. By the way, as the chief, are you familiar with the ancient kingdom of Alani over the forty years of your reign?"

"The ancient kingdom of Alani has been gone for a hundred years, so I'm not familiar with it, but..." Kaleb Newman hesitated.

"But what?"

Kaleb Newman lowered his voice, "I once inadvertently saw a mysterious scroll in the palace, which records the origins of our State of Westria and the ancient kingdom of Alani."

"Chief Newman, please continue."

"Our State of Westria and the ancient kingdom of Alani have deep connections. Back then, the founder of our country and the ancestor of the ancient kingdom were a couple. The ancestor of Alani was a legendary woman who not only had astonishing medical skills but was also a natural... wolf trainer, commanding an iron cavalry of wolves that struck fear into hearts."

Axel Ashworth, who commanded the Nine Peaks, the foremost general of Westria, perked up upon hearing the "iron cavalry of wolves," realizing that the legend of the "wolf trainer" was indeed true and originated from the ancient kingdom of Alani.

Kaleb Newman continued, "The ancestor of Alani and our ancestor were a couple. So back then, the ancestor of Alani used the iron cavalry of wolves to help expand territories for our ancestor, and the two founded the State of Westria together. Originally, our ancestor should have made the ancestor of Alani his queen, but something happened between them, and our ancestor betrayed the ancestor of Alani. Angered, the ancestor of Alani created her own kingdom with The Serpent River as the boundary, thus founding the ancient kingdom of Alani."

"Legend has it that the ancestor of Alani had a three-petaled flower on her forehead, which seemed natural and extremely vivid—it's said to be... the Empress Flower."

"The Empress Flower?" Axel Ashworth murmured, repeating the three words.

Kaleb Newman nodded, "Yes, the Empress Flower. It's said that not every queen of the ancient kingdom had one. To my knowledge, the first to possess the Empress Flower was the ancestor of Alani, and the second is... Princess Serena Sterling!"

"Chief Newman, you seem to have quite a fear of this Empress Flower." Axel Ashworth looked at Kaleb Newman.

Kaleb Newman nodded, "Indeed, the scroll I saw back then was missing many pages, so I didn't see the whole story, but I did see the ending."

"What ending?"

"The ending was that before the ancestor of Alani died, she left a prophecy with her own blood as a curse. She prophesied that a hundred years later, Alani would have a second king. At that time, either Westria or Alani would face extinction."

This ending contained two crucial pieces of information. First, Alani would have a second king—note, not a queen, but a king.

Second, Westria and Alani would inevitably face a war—a life-and-death blood war.

Axel Ashworth recalled the wandering monk from years ago, who once said that when the Emperor Star and the Empress Star appeared simultaneously, the world would welcome a dual-king era.

If the King of Alani is Serena Sterling, then who would be from Westria?

Kaleb Newman looked at Axel Ashworth, "King of Nine Peaks, in fact, you have the most power to pursue the throne, but why have you remained neutral all this time?"

Axel Ashworth showed no emotion, "Because I've been waiting."

"Waiting for whom?"

"Waiting for the person who genuinely possesses the blood of an innocent—a true ruler of our State of Westria."

Kaleb Newman nodded in satisfaction. He had indeed judged this correctly. All these years, Axel Ashworth wielded great power, but he never intended to seize the throne. He was simply waiting for the one who truly possessed the blood of innocence, who would be the ruler of Westria and his lord.

"All these years, I've been secretly searching for that baby girl born at the same time as my father, who was my father's sister, but unfortunately, all clues were cut off back then, and until now I haven't found any trace."

As he spoke, Axel Ashworth looked at the chess game he had just played with Serena Sterling. Serena's moves were calculated, and she had formed an encirclement, winning this game.

"Chief Newman, if I'm not mistaken, the missing pages of that scroll might account for the unending war between Westria and Alani. Our two countries are destined for a mortal battle, and this Princess is no ordinary person. If we can't find the rightful ruler with innocent blood, then Westria is in great peril."

Kaleb Newman pondered for a moment and then slowly said, "Recently, I've met someone—the maid who sent the baby girl away back then."

"What? Where is that maid now?" Axel Ashworth asked immediately.

"The maid's life hasn't been good. I heard she went to the City of Aethelgard and became a hostess at a bar. Later, she hooked up with a wealthy man and became his mistress, but the wealthy man's original wife was formidable and completely ruined the maid. The maid is now gravely ill, but fortunately, she bore a daughter for the wealthy man, who's very filial and has been taking care of the maid."

Axel Ashworth quickly stood up, "Where is that daughter now? If I'm guessing correctly, the daughter isn't the wealthy man's illegitimate child but the baby girl from back then, the Grand Princess of our State of Westria!"

"I heard the daughter flowed to the City of Aethelgard. To earn money to care for the maid, she became the blood asset and shadow for the wealthy man's legitimate daughter. Later, she caught the eye of a powerful man in the City of Aethelgard, but this romance didn't end well. The daughter ultimately jumped into the river from a tall platform, disappearing without a trace."

City of Aethelgard.

Axel Ashworth murmured this place name in his heart. It turns out that the baby girl from back then ended up in the City of Aethelgard, where her story unfolded.

"Chief Newman, is the daughter dead?"

Kaleb Newman shook his head, "I don't know about that. However, the maid is currently in my custody, and she's critically ill, with only a couple of days left to live. If the daughter is still alive, she will surely come to see the maid one last time. We just need to wait!"

Axel Ashworth slapped the table and stood up, "Good!"

...

Serena Sterling completed Kaleb Newman's tasks, and now she was about to set out to find... her mom and Aunt Yara.

This time, her mom and Aunt Yara arrived in Westria earlier than planned because Aunt Yara's birth mother is critically ill and won't last these next two days.

Chapter 576: Has She Returned?

Aunt Yara wants to come back to see her biological mother one last time.

But her mommy said that such a mother who exploits her daughter and treats her as a cash machine is not worth it, so she directly took Aunt Yara out for tea and shopping.

Serena needs to find these two mommies now, Cherie opened the door of the luxury car and respectfully said, "Your Highness, please get in."

But Serena stopped, because she saw a tall, handsome figure ahead — it was Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford is here.

Serena knows that Jude Crawford has been searching for Aunt Yara all these years. Now that Aunt Yara has appeared, Jude Crawford showed up earlier than she expected.

Serena walked forward, coming in front of Jude Crawford, "Uncle Jude, long time no see."

A luxury extended business car was parked by the roadside, and Jude Crawford stood tall and upright by the car. He wore a black, thin wool coat. They say time bestows men the most charm, and with Jude Crawford, this statement is classic.

Jude Crawford is already in his fifties, and his handsome face, as if carved by a knife, now has wrinkles. However, these wrinkles enhance the sense of history and gravity about him. The former pride of the Crawford family, an emperor of the business world, every gesture and action exudes an overwhelming depth and reserve. In his presence, Serena felt overly youthful.

Jude Crawford's deep, narrow eyes fell on Serena's face, then moved downwards, locking onto the peace pendant hanging around her neck. He slightly parted his thin lips, "She, is back?"

The former Willow family girl, Isabelle Willow, amazed the entire City of Aethelgard. At 18, she broke into the jewelry design circle and peaked soon after. Nowadays, Fly Jewelry remains a top brand, and many of the new rising top jewelry designers are fanatic fans of Isabelle Willow.

The name Isabelle Willow left an indelible mark in the jewelry industry.

Thus, when Jude Crawford saw this peace pendant around Serena's neck, he recognized it instantly as a design by Isabelle Willow.

Isabelle Willow was a player of unparalleled talent, possessing an elegance and creativity in jewelry design that ordinary people could not match.

Serena shook her head, "Not yet."

Jude Crawford's profound gaze once again landed on Serena's clear eyes. He watched her quietly, his eye devoid of emotion, yet a vortex seemed to lie within, making one feel they were facing a point of no return with a mere glance.

Serena met his gaze unflinchingly and did not show any retreat.

Soon enough, Jude Crawford curved his thin lips into a slight arc, and he uttered just two words, seeming amused, "Really?"

"Uncle Jude, I'm not lying to you. I didn't meet Aunt Yara in the State of Westria, and according to the plan and schedule, both my mommy and Aunt Yara should attend my wedding to The King of Nine Peaks." Serena's every word was true, though strung together, it was a lie.

Jude Crawford nodded, "Alright, if you see her, let me know."

"Okay."

Jude Crawford got into the extended business car and sped away.

He left.

He was dismissed so easily, which felt odd to Serena. In her memory, Jude Crawford was the craftiest of foxes.

"Your Highness, let's get in the car," Cherie said.

Serena got into her luxury nanny car and left as well.

What Serena didn't know was that Jude Crawford's extended business car didn't really leave but parked across the street.

Jude Crawford glanced at Serena's car disappearing from the pavement through the bright window glass, and then turned his gaze to the little boy beside him, "Caden, you're up. Your mommy must have contacted your grandma or grandaunt, help me track your mommy's phone signal and locate where your grandma is now."

Little Caden Crawford had arrived and was now sitting beside his grandpa, Jude Crawford. He had seen mommy from inside just now, but mommy left.

"Grandpa, is this really okay? If mommy knows I'm tracking her phone, maybe she won't like me anymore."

Jude Crawford gave Little Caden a look, "Come on, Caden, I'm not your mommy. You don't need to play innocent in front of me. It's not like this is the first time you've done it."

Little Caden quickly furrowed his chubby brows, "Grandpa, is this a threat?"

Jude Crawford leaned his strong back comfortably against the sofa, "You could consider it a negotiation."

Little Caden thought for a moment, "Alright then, but grandpa, you mustn't ruin my good child image in front of mommy. Mommy really likes my innocent side."

Jude Crawford made an okay sign.

Only then did Little Caden open his phone, his small fingers flying swiftly over the keyboard. A few minutes later, Little Caden reported an address, "XX Tower."

XX Tower?

The secretary, Riley Sutton, quickly and respectfully spoke up, "Sir, XX Tower is the largest shopping mall in the State of Westria, known as a shopping haven for women."

Jude Crawford, "...Let's go."

...

XX Tower.

Jude Crawford entered with Little Caden, and as soon as this grandparent-grandchild duo appeared, they attracted everyone's attention. The place was already teeming with women, all gathered to gossip.

Wow, this little boy is so adorable, I really want to hug him!

Oh, please, you want to be hugged! That man is so handsome and manly.

Is this little boy his grandson or his son?

I bet he's his son, definitely born from a mistress!

Little Caden looked up at Jude Crawford with his cute, chubby face, "Grandpa, they're saying I'm your son."

Jude Crawford didn't even glance at those young and beautiful women, his deep, narrow eyes scanning the vast shopping mall like an eagle, casually replying, "Your dad doesn't have a brother like you."

"..."

Jude Crawford didn't find the figure he was looking for, so he glanced at Little Caden, "Where's your grandma, hurry up and lead the way."

"Follow me." Little Caden took out his phone, coolly and steadily walking ahead of Jude Crawford, leading the way.

Ahead, within a boutique, another little boy, Pip, sat on the sofa, waiting for Isabelle Willow to change clothes.

The boutique's shop assistants surrounded Pip, admiring him more and more, "Little boy, won't you stay and be our son? You're just too handsome and cute."

Pip had grown used to this; he grew up in the company of women, and all the older sisters and aunties wanted to take him home as their son.

"Ladies, you're all so young, still like children who need to be pampered and loved. How could you have a son as big as me?" Pip replied, smiling sweetly.

Chapter 577: She Is the Most Beautiful Picture in His Eyes

The sales assistants were overjoyed when little Pip said this,

Little kiddo, come, sister will give you candy.

Little kiddo, sister will treat you to bubble tea.

The sales assistants piled delicious treats near little Pip.

Little Pip sighed inwardly, these women, they're so easy to please.

It's often said women are the hardest puzzle in the world, the most difficult creatures to handle, but for little Pip, handling women is so easy.

At such a young age, he's carrying all of this weight.

Just then, with a "ding," little Pip's phone sounded an alert.

Little Pip quickly took out his phone. After the encounter with little Caden Crawford that day, he had tracked down Caden's ID, and now the phone showed that Caden is nearby.

Oh no, big brother is here!

This big brother is definitely here for grandma!

Little Pip jumped off the sofa at once. He intended to notify Isabelle Willow in the fitting room, but soon stopped his steps and changed his mind.

Little Pip turned around and walked out while dialing a phone number.

The melodious ringtone rang once and was picked up, and Seth Sullivan's warm and composed voice came through, "Pip, what happened?"

"Uncle Seth, can't I call you if there's nothing?"

"Would you call me if there wasn't anything?" Seth retorted.

"...Uncle Seth, come quickly and take grandma away. Caden Crawford is coming with people, if you're late, grandma will be exposed."

There was a brief silence from the other end, "Why don't you take grandma and leave?"

Little Pip cunningly smiled, "Because I want to take this chance to meet my big brother."

"..." Seth directly hung up the phone.

Little Pip went to the second floor. He stood at the glass railing and looked down. Very soon, he saw a big and small figure accompanied by Jude Crawford and little Caden Crawford.

Little Pip's heartbeat accelerated instantly, that telepathic sensation was back. He looked at little Caden, today he wore a white shirt with suspenders, with a bow tied at the collar, a typical little aristocrat gentleman. Of course, his fair complexion had a cool, aloof vibe. At just 3 years old, he already carried the aura of a cold distant CEO.

Is this my big brother?

Why does big brother look exactly like that handsome uncle?

Little Pip suddenly thought of something, Hayden Crawford, Caden Crawford... turns out they are family, father and son.

That handsome uncle Hayden is Stella and my daddy?

Little Pip could hardly accept it, in his heart, daddy was already dead, who would have thought daddy would suddenly come back from the dead.

Downstairs, Jude Crawford felt the little Caden beside him stop walking abruptly, "Caden, why aren't you moving?" he asked.

Little Caden looked at his phone, "Someone is interfering with my signal, the signal source was cut off here."

As he spoke, little Caden looked up. As he walked closer earlier, he felt his heart racing, as if something in the air was calling out to him; he felt a similar sensation at the airport before, only this time it was even stronger than last.

Little Caden looked up towards the second floor and immediately caught sight of little Pip upstairs.

Their eyes met instantly, the eyes of two brilliant young boys, highly intelligent beyond measure, collided.

Little Caden slowly narrowed his grape-like large eyes, revealing a hint of sharp coldness.

At that moment, little Pip upstairs turned around and vanished.

"Grandpa, grandma is nearby, you find her yourself. I'm going to meet someone." Leaving that statement, little Caden quickly caught up to the second floor.

Jude Crawford gazed towards the second floor, the only one capable of interfering with Caden's signal was his other grandson Pip, no one else could do it.

His second grandson had appeared, so the person he sought must be here.

Jude Crawford glanced at the women's clothing store in front of him, then strode inside.

The sales assistant quickly greeted him warmly, "Sir, what do you need to purchase?"

Jude Crawford's deep eyes deliberately swept over the boutique. There was no one evidently shopping, nor did he see the figure he's been searching for all these years.

Just then, a slight sound of a zipper could be heard, like someone was changing clothes. Jude turned his head, his eyes locking onto one of the fitting rooms.

The door of that fitting room was firmly closed, inside unseen, yet it was half a door; Jude's eyes wandered down to a pair of beautiful legs exposed under the door.

Those were a pair of exquisite legs, fair and shapely, below were champagne-colored high heels, not the kind a young woman chooses, exuding a gentle, serene vibe from the passage of time.

Jude approached the door of the fitting room, pausing slowly. It seemed as if the world quieted momentarily, everything turned blissful.

He's had women around him for years, young and beautiful girls always gravitating towards him, but he was disinterested. Isabelle Willow had been gone for over twenty years, and he lived austerely for so long, often he wondered if something was wrong with himself. Young love tasted first in Jill's room unwittingly, now had restrained him this way.

Now Jude felt his body awakening, just looking at those beautiful legs, he sensed the suppressed desires of years piling on as if wild waves.

Jude hesitated for a moment, then reached to push open the fitting room door.

More than twenty years, he had long forgotten the beautiful and captivating look she had in youth, so he couldn't imagine what she'd become after twenty years in the passage of time.

Jude looked up, seeking to see her.

But, regrettably, the fitting room was empty, void of anyone.

Isabelle Willow disappeared.

"Huh, what happened, where's the person inside?" The sales assistant was stunned, indeed—vanishing in broad daylight.

Jude turned and left, pulling out the phone to make a call, "Block off XX Building immediately, no one gets in or out..."

Before Jude finished his call, raising his head, he saw through the gleaming floor-to-ceiling window across the street. Two people were walking now. Seth Sullivan clad in black, holding an umbrella; he stepped lightly, bearing a more ethereal charm than three years ago.

Beside Seth, there was another person, Isabelle Willow!

Jude slowly lowered the phone in his hand, his gaze landing on Isabelle Willow, unable to look away.

Over twenty years ago, Isabelle Willow, a stunning talent, dazzled the entire City of Aethelgard. Now, twenty years later, she wore a softly hued qipao, its smooth cuts elegantly outlining her full, womanly curves. Her aura akin to a delicate orchid in the air, inheriting the gentle beauty of The Riverlands' daughters, she entered his sight, becoming the most beautiful picture in Jude's eyes.

Chapter 578: Seraphina Linden Appears

Separated by a floor-to-ceiling window, isolating two worlds, Jude Crawford stood here, staring dazedly at Isabelle Willow across the street.

Soon, the figures of Seth Sullivan and Isabelle Willow disappeared from his sight.

She walked away.

Twenty years, he searched for her for twenty years, and after such a brief glimpse, she disappeared from his view once again.

At this time, a tender voice sounded in his ear, "Grandpa, did you find Grandma?"

Jude Crawford came back to his senses, looking at the little kid by his leg, little Caden Crawford had returned. He nodded gently, "Yes, found her. What about you? Didn't you go to find someone?"

Little Caden Crawford furrowed his brow, "That person ran away, slipped away really fast."

As he spoke, little Caden Crawford raised the phone in his hand, "Grandma is also in this mall. To prevent any accident, I have already informed Grandpa. Grandma may run away, but she can't hide forever, because Grandma's son is in our hands. Now that Grandma is alone, we can capture her first!"

...

Outside the building, a stretched business luxury car slowly pulled up, and the private secretary respectfully opened the rear door, Julian Rathborne got out.

Julian Rathborne strode fiercely up the steps into the building.

Now all the entrances and exits inside the building were sealed off, the senior management of the building had mobilized, standing respectfully in front of Jude Crawford and little Caden Crawford, bowing and scraping.

Jude Crawford's expression was indifferent, revealing nothing.

Julian Rathborne walked over, and little Caden Crawford quickly called out in his tender voice, "Grandpa~"

Those high-level executives standing in front of Jude Crawford had already been sweating profusely, and seeing Julian Rathborne now, they were so scared that their knees went weak.

Jude Crawford and Julian Rathborne, these two men are legends in the business world. They have withdrawn from the public eye for years, who would have thought they would appear together today? Seeing these two figures, no one could keep their knees from shaking.

"Mr. Rathborne, welcome to our humble abode."

Julian Rathborne reached out and touched little Caden Crawford's head, "Caden, where is your Grandma?"

"Grandpa, just now when I was tracking Grandma, the ID signal was interfered with, so I temporarily changed my ID and locked onto Grandma's location. Grandma is now...at The Zephyr Gardens." Little Caden Crawford pointed to the location displayed on the phone.

The Zephyr Gardens?

Julian Rathborne glanced at the nearby building manager, "What is The Zephyr Gardens, a place for hot springs?"

The building manager wiped the sweat off his forehead, stammering, "Mr. Rathborne, The Zephyr Gardens is not a place for hot springs, but...it's for women's massage spas."

A massage spa for women?

Born as a noble, Julian Rathborne's private life had always been remarkably clean, never frequenting those places for entertainment. He couldn't understand what this meant.

"Mr. Rathborne, let me clarify, I've never been to The Zephyr Gardens, but...the place is quite well-known in the State of Westria. The male technicians there are all exceptionally handsome, and wealthy women and socialites enjoy visiting there for fun, letting those male technicians give massages..."

The building manager's words couldn't continue because a fierce glare from Julian Rathborne had already shot over, filled with displeasure.

The building manager was dumbfounded, which of his words was wrong?

"Jude, hurry up and go to The Zephyr Gardens to find Seraphina Linden. It's your first meeting, I think she will surprise you." Jude Crawford spoke with a meaningful hint.

Seraphina Linden and Isabelle Willow were once celebrated throughout the capital, with vastly different characters. Isabelle Willow possessed the gentle softness of a daughter of The Riverlands beneath her outstanding talent, and Seraphina Linden boldly fought her way up, with a playful and reckless nature.

Julian Rathborne would never forget that dark and windy night when she climbed onto his bed and "blessed" him.

So, she had arrived in the State of Westria, and went to the most famous technician hall to find those handsome male technicians for massages and entertainment?

Julian Rathborne thought this surprise was too much!

...

The Zephyr Gardens.

Julian Rathborne walked in. A man like Julian Rathborne entering a venue like this made all the eager women in the place freeze at the sight, desperate to pounce on him.

The boss lady of The Zephyr Gardens quickly came out, extremely enthusiastic, "Sir, would you like a massage? All our female technicians are as beautiful as flowers, feel free to choose."

Julian Rathborne glanced at those female technicians, all of them heavily made-up, filled with the fragrance of cosmetics, utterly unbearable.

He said nothing and walked directly inside, searching for Seraphina Linden.

"Sir," the boss lady enthusiastically followed Julian Rathborne, "you're not satisfied with our female technicians? Do you perhaps want a male technician? Don't be shy, everyone has a little particular hobby, we at The Zephyr Gardens can satisfy all, ensuring your satisfaction."

Julian Rathborne, "..."

At this moment, several black-suited bodyguards stepped forward, directly blocking the boss lady, as the private secretary said, "Please stop."

The boss lady was quickly frightened by the scene, surrounded by three layers of bodyguards inside and outside The Zephyr Gardens.

Timidly, she watched the dignified and imposing figure of Julian Rathborne. This...this man, who exactly was he?

Julian Rathborne was searching for Seraphina Linden, there were many rooms here. He casually opened one, finding a female aristocrat and male technician passionately embracing.

"Ah, who are you, pervert!" The people inside screamed.

Julian Rathborne closed the door, his handsome face turned extremely grim; she had come to this kind of place for fun!

Julian Rathborne opened another room door, stepping inside, a young attractive female technician rushed over. Seeing Julian Rathborne, the technician's eyes lit up, "Sir, would you like a massage? Quickly take off your clothes, let me massage you well, my massages are very comforting."

Julian Rathborne turned around and left.

"Sir, don't go~" The female technician reached out, grabbing Julian Rathborne's sleeve, "Sir, shall I help you take off your clothes~"

The bold and enthusiastic female technician started undressing Julian Rathborne's coat.

Julian Rathborne's handsome brow furrowed tightly; he had been educated to the highest standard, his very bones and blood flowed with noble blood, entirely a noble gentleman. But now, in the quest for Seraphina Linden, he felt a sense he was in a dubious place.

Seraphina Linden!

Julian Rathborne thought angrily about that person's name, just intending to wave off the clingy technician recklessly.

Just at that moment, "creak," the room door suddenly opened, revealing a graceful and charming figure outside.

That person had incredibly beautiful eyes, those eyes peeked inside, and quickly she covered her eyes with her hands, "Sorry, I entered the wrong room, I didn't see anything, go on, please continue."

Chapter 579: Little Brother Julian Rathborne

After saying "continue," the person quickly retreated from the room, thoughtfully closing the door behind them.

Julian Rathborne, "..."

Julian's handsome face instantly darkened, a cold frost covering his entire demeanor. Though he had never seen what Seraphina Linden looked like, he had always remembered those enchanting eyes from that night.

The person by the door just now was...Seraphina Linden!

She glanced inside with those flowing, mesmerising eyes, she saw him, yet she surprisingly did not recognize him.

That damn woman!

For the first time, Julian had an impulse; he wanted to strangle her!

She slept with him, dumped him, ran away with his child, and, in the end, completely forgot about him. What did he even mean to her?

She came to hire a male masseuse herself, thinking he was here for fun, and even closed the door for him. That damn woman!

Julian extended his hand, directly throwing off the female masseuse who was clinging to him, and a chilling syllable rolled out from his throat, "Get out!"

The female masseuse didn't want to miss out on such a rare specimen like Julian and attempted to cling on, but seeing the sinister, cold look in his eyes, she shivered immediately and backed away bashfully.

Julian's strong chest heaved a few times as he quickly closed his eyes, his mind filled with that fleeting glance from earlier.

He saw her, though it was just a hurried look, now her face was deeply embedded in his mind, impossible to forget.

What kind of face was that?

Julian now realized that his daughter Serena Sterling not only inherited those eyes from her mother but also her dazzling beauty.

Seraphina Linden's features were incredibly delicate, entirely composed into a stunning face. However, Serena had an ethereal, clever charm, while Seraphina exuded more feminine allure. When those sparkling eyes turned to you, a coquettish glance beamed through her cheeky youthful aura.

Julian thought for a moment. His daughter was already 23, which meant Seraphina Linden must be at least over forty, yet there was not a trace of time on her face. Even God is especially partial to beauties.

Importantly, Seraphina lived like a young girl.

Julian didn't need to guess to know just how well she had been living these years.

She was the woman from that night!

Julian quickly opened his eyes and walked out.

His personal secretary approached and whispered, "Sir, based on the location sent by the young master, we've already locked onto the target. The target entered this room just now, and we didn't alert her."

Julian pressed his thin lips, "Did she notice?"

The personal secretary shook his head, "No, the target was in a good mood, humming a tune as she went in."

"..."

At this moment, someone approached from the front, wearing The Zephyr Gardens' work uniform. It was the male masseuse that Seraphina Linden had called for.

The male masseuse had come to give Seraphina a massage.

"Who are you people? Why are you gathered here?" the male masseuse asked in confusion, looking towards Julian.

Julian looked down at the male masseuse with detachment, then slightly parted his lips, "Are you the masseuse ordered by the guest of this room?"

The male masseuse nodded, "Yes, I'm the top choice at The Zephyr Gardens, and my fee is the highest too."

Julian turned to his personal secretary, "Throw him out for me!"

"Yes, sir." The personal secretary motioned two burly, black-suited bodyguards over. The bodyguards lifted the male masseuse head and tail and tossed him out.

"Who are you, and why..." The male masseuse tried to shout, but the bodyguards sensibly covered his mouth.

With the male masseuse gone, Julian felt slightly better; otherwise, he felt as though a heavy stone sat on his chest, making it hard to breathe.

"Stay here, I'm going in," Julian instructed, then opened the door to the adjacent VIP room.

...

The VIP room was very luxurious. As Julian walked in, he immediately saw Seraphina Linden.

Seraphina had already changed her clothes. She had taken them off and wrapped herself in a large bath towel, lying on the soft bed, waiting for the male masseuse to give her a massage.

Seraphina was indeed in a great mood; she had asked Isabelle Willow to come with her for a spa day, but Isabelle had refused. So she took some time to sneak out herself for a bit of relaxation.

Watching her from behind, Julian noticed that Seraphina was humming a lively tune; her voice was very sweet, and the two exposed fair calves dangled happily in the air.

She was genuinely happy.

Julian was both amused and annoyed. The female masseuse tangled with him earlier, and it seemed his coat still bore her makeup's scent. Julian, being quite fastidious, lifted his distinctively jointed fingers, took off his coat, and then sat on the sofa.

Now Julian wore a handmade dark shirt, with two buttons undone at the collar, revealing his masculine, elegant Adam's apple and collarbones. The silver cuffs on his shirt were tightly fastened, immaculate. On his robust wrist was a highly expensive men's watch. With the ambient light lacing around him, he looked magnificent, with the depth of life's experience he's accrued nearing fifty.

Quietly seated, Julian's phoenix-like eyes observed her keenly. Suddenly, Seraphina, who was humming a song, paused and called out in a charming voice, "Young man, why don't you come over and give me a massage? Have we not started yet?"

Seraphina was speaking while lying down and hadn't looked up.

"Young man" Julian, "..."

Julian was silent for a few seconds, then stood up and walked toward Seraphina.

Seraphina had a head of long, wavy hair, dyed the currently popular deep chestnut color. The curls lazily draped over her shoulders, cascading over her creamy skin, intensely drawing one's gaze.

Seraphina must have used some kind of skincare technique; her skin was youthful and firm, her smooth back creating an enticing curve toward her slim waist. Julian's eyes quickly took in the shapely outline of her bottom due to her laying posture, then swiftly withdrew his gaze—not daring to look any further down.

Seraphina sensed someone standing beside her. She lifted a hand to tuck a lock of hair behind her ear, "Young man, hurry up and give big sister a massage. Big sister has plenty of tips, and if you do well, you'll make a fortune."

Seeing her eagerness for the male masseuse's massage, Julian curved his thin lips into an amused arc and then extended his large hand, placing it gently on her tender shoulder, beginning to knead.

To be served like this by Julian Rathborne, Seraphina Linden was undoubtedly the first.

Chapter 580: You Hurt Me

When the man's large hand squeezed Seraphina Linden's shoulder, she frowned and let out a cry, "Ouch... Ouch... Little brother, go easy..."

Julian Rathborne had never given a woman a massage before, or anyone for that matter, so he applied too much pressure. Now, hearing her say it hurt, Julian Rathborne eased up.

At that, Seraphina Linden felt very comfortable, "That's right, just like that, very good... Hey, little brother, here's a tip for you. You're happy, I'm happy, everyone's happy."

Seraphina Linden reached out to the back and stuffed a wad of cash into Julian Rathborne's hand.

Receiving the tip, Julian Rathborne glanced down; Seraphina Linden was quite generous.

The skin under his palm was as smooth as silk, warm and soft like jade. Julian Rathborne tried to divert his attention, but his Adam's apple still moved up and down twice.

"Is this all the tip you're giving me?" Julian Rathborne said, curling his lips.

Hmm?

Seraphina Linden suddenly heard this voice beside her ear, half-laughing, half-serious, like a rare edition of Gallian red wine, deep and magnetic, incredibly pleasant to hear.

Seraphina Linden tutted twice in her heart. This Zephyr Gardens are indeed well-known; even the male technician's voice is so pleasant, it can accidentally make one's ears pregnant.

Seraphina Linden leisurely closed her eyes, "There's plenty more tips, but you have to show me your true skills with the massage."

"How do you want me to massage you, huh?" With that, Julian Rathborne's large hand slowly moved down...

Seraphina Linden suddenly opened her eyes, her body agile like a water snake, swiftly dodging his large hand and rolling into the bed, "Little brother, I didn't order this service..."

Seraphina Linden blinked her charming eyes at Julian Rathborne. Because she was lying flat, Julian Rathborne's handsome face instantly invaded her vision.

Her pupils suddenly contracted, "You..."

Julian Rathborne looked at her shocked expression and thought she had finally recognized him.

Then, Seraphina Linden exclaimed in shock, "I mean, I clearly ordered for the little brother, how did he suddenly become... an uncle? Uncle, who are you?"

Suddenly changed from little brother to uncle Julian Rathborne, "..."

Great, she hadn't recognized him at all, it seemed he was being self-deluded!

Julian Rathborne pursed his thin lips, a pair of dangerous phoenix eyes sharply fixated on Seraphina Linden's face, he snorted coldly, "Seraphina Linden, who do you think I am?"

Oh, this person knows her name, it seems he's familiar.

Seraphina Linden's charming eyes assessed Julian Rathborne up and down; his attire was nothing short of exquisite, clearly a noble and reserved successful gentleman. Seraphina Linden's eyes brightened, "Oh, I remember now, you're that..."

"Which one am I?"

"The one I bumped into earlier snuggling with a female technician, don't worry, we're all here for fun, I certainly won't tell anyone about your matters." Seraphina Linden earnestly promised.

"..." Julian Rathborne felt he was close to fainting from anger. His proud self-control broke swiftly in front of Seraphina Linden, his expression turned dark and stormy, his voice low and biting as he called her name, "Seraphina Linden!"

Seraphina Linden looked at him and slowly said, "Could you be... Serena's dad, Julian Rathborne?"

Julian Rathborne's face was dark, "You finally remembered?"

So it really is!

Seraphina Linden sat up. She was wearing just a wide bath towel, her wavy curly chestnut hair spread like silk, her charming eyes rolling over Julian Rathborne's body with the vitality of a young girl. Walking out with Serena Sterling, no one would think they were mother and daughter, they'd assume they were sisters instead.

"Serena's dad, what a coincidence, you came here... looking for me?"

Julian Rathborne, "What do you think?"

"Serena's dad, why are you looking for me? Didn't I say, we were just one-time friends with benefits? As qualified friends, after hooking up, shouldn't we disappear from each other's lives forever?" Seraphina Linden asked seriously.

Julian Rathborne was rendered speechless. Yes, why did he come looking for her, he must be crazy to seek out this heartless woman!

"I ask you, back then Yvonne Knight pretended to be you, with a big belly came to me, later I married her, did you know or not?"

Seraphina Linden thought for a moment, then nodded, "Back then Corbin Knight was my eldest disciple, I heard a bit about his daughter's matters."

Corbin Knight being Old Master Knight.

Julian Rathborne's handsome brows were covered with a layer of frost, he reached out and grabbed Seraphina Linden's slender arm, pulling her in front of him, eyes full of fury, "I married that woman who pretended to be you, and you just did nothing?"

Seraphina Linden quickly frowned, "Serena's dad, you're hurting me."

Julian Rathborne glanced down; he hadn't controlled his strength earlier, his long fingers imprinted red marks on her delicate arm.

Julian Rathborne grew angrier. A woman over forty still so delicate, couldn't be scolded or hit, even to touch was difficult.

Julian Rathborne quickly released her.

Seraphina Linden lifted her hand, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, exuding a bit of alluring charm. She looked at Julian Rathborne, slowly raised her delicate willow eyebrows, "I say, Serena's dad, could it be you have developed feelings from physical intimacy, you fell in love with me, you came to reminisce and hook up again?"

Julian Rathborne's expression turned uglier. Raised from childhood with an heir's education, he was innately pure and firm, surrounded by debutantes and noblewomen, never dealing with a woman like Seraphina Linden who put "hooking up" at the forefront.

He recalled the first time he heard the term "one-time friend with benefits," he even went online to look up what it meant.

Julian Rathborne gazed at Seraphina Linden, his voice stern, "Speak properly!"

Seraphina Linden tutted twice again. Unexpectedly, Mr. Rathborne was such a serious gentleman, no, accurately speaking, he should be an old-fashioned relic.

Seraphina Linden recalled back then, the influential Julian Rathborne in Aethelgard was famous for being aloof from women, seemingly uninterested in matters between men and women, that night he was still a... little virgin!

Seraphina Linden found him quite interesting, her charming eyes gave off a sly allure, she slowly extended her jade foot, stepping onto his trousers, "Could I have misunderstood your intent? You rushed in here with such a sour face, it seems like you're catching an affair. Have you been pining for me all these years?"

Julian Rathborne felt her jade foot climbing up his trousers boldly and directly. Countless women had tried to woo him, but she was the first to lure him this way.