

## **Substitute B 701**

Chapter 701: You Take the Lead, I'll Play Second Fiddle

Hayden Crawford glanced at Melody Ashworth casually and then curled his thin lips, "Don't be hasty. There's an important person who hasn't arrived at this wedding yet."

"Who?" Melody's heart tightened, fearing that this person Hayden mentioned would be detrimental to her.

At this moment, Corvus approached and reported in a low voice, "Master, the person has arrived."

Hayden looked at Melody, then gestured with his eyes, "Look, the person is here."

Melody followed his gaze, and her pupils contracted and enlarged instantly, forgetting to breathe in fear.

It was... Cherie!

Cherie had appeared at the wedding!

Shocked, Melody watched as Cherie stood over there. Cherie had been imprisoned by Consort Willow for some time. Although she received antidotes daily, her face was pale, and she looked very weak.

Seeing Cherie here, Melody's heart plummeted instantly, as if a large hand had reached out from the darkness, pushing her into an abyss.

How could Cherie be here?

The only possibility was that something had happened to her mother!

The hiding place of her mother and Cherie had been exposed, and she was now a sitting duck.

"Hayden, I... I'm suddenly feeling unwell. I'll head to the restroom," Melody wanted to slip away after realizing things were amiss.

But just as she turned around, two burly bodyguards in black blocked her, preventing her from leaving.

Melody immediately scolded them, "Move aside! Do you know who I am? I'm Mrs. Crawford. This is my wedding. You're being outrageous!"

But the two bodyguards in front of her didn't move an inch.

Knowing it was over, Melody still wanted to struggle; she didn't want to die. So she turned to look at Hayden, "Hayden, look, they're bullying me!"

Hayden looked at Melody with cold eyes, slowly curling his lips into a mocking smile, "Don't be so quick to leave. The show is just beginning, isn't it?"

What show?

Melody found the current Hayden terrifying. His unfathomable demeanor seemed as if he had dug a big hole for her to fall into, only to bury her alive afterward.

At this moment, Cherie, supported by Corvus, walked over. Cherie looked at Melody and exclaimed, "Melody Ashworth, where do you think you're going now?"

Melody Ashworth?

Those four words caused a commotion among the crowd, with everyone recognizing the former most honored princess of The State of Westria.

The ladies and celebrities were shocked to look at Melody and started muttering,

"Oh my gosh, is she really Princess Melody?"

"No way, Princess Melody doesn't have that face."

"Could it be... she had plastic surgery to look like Serena Sterling?"

Exposed on the spot, Melody quickly clenched her fist and pretended to be calm, "What nonsense are you talking about? What Melody Ashworth? I'm Serena Sterling!"

At this moment, Corvus stepped forward and directly tore off the human skin mask on Melody's face.

Corvus acted so swiftly that Melody was caught off guard. With a "rip" sound, her human skin mask was torn off, revealing her original beautiful face.

Ah!

Melody screamed and quickly covered her face with her hands.

But it was too late; everyone had seen it clearly, distinctly.

Oh my!

The crowd erupted,

"Oh my goodness, it really is Melody Ashworth!"

"Melody Ashworth wore a human skin mask to impersonate the bride! I've heard she has admired Mr. Crawford for a long time, but I didn't expect her to be so extreme!"

"That's not surprising. Melody Ashworth's reputation has already been ruined. Her brother, Kyle Ashworth, committed atrocities and was exiled. Her mother, Consort Willow, used the Bewitching Technique to drain our Crown Prince's health. Melody was recently involved in a sex scandal with a married man. She can't survive, so she assumed a new identity, trying to impersonate the bride to become Mrs. Crawford!"

"Bah! Fraudster!"

Melody was rejected and attacked by everyone, her face paling.

Just two months ago, she, her brother, and her mother were so glorious.

Her mother was favored in the harem, her brother controlled the royal guard and was named Crown Prince, and she was the most distinguished princess, flourishing.

But everything changed quickly. The person who changed their family's fate was... Serena Sterling!

Since Serena Sterling came to Westria from Alani, their family had become like rats crossing the street, chased by everyone.

At this moment, Cherie stepped forward, "Melody Ashworth, your mother has already fled, abandoning you. But believe me, she will quickly be caught, and you'll reunite as mother and daughter."

What?

Her mother fled?

Abandoned her?

What should she do?

Melody quickly looked up at Hayden, as if looking at a lifeline, "Hayden, you must save me. Although I impersonated Serena Sterling, it was because I love you; don't you remember? We were already together. Last night you were so passionate with me. I'm your woman now!"

Melody tightly grasped this point. No matter what, she was Hayden's woman now!

Hayden will surely show mercy on account of their past. Plus, it was so satisfying to disgust Serena Sterling. After all, she had slept with Serena's man.

Hayden looked down at Melody with a superior gaze and retorted, "What are you talking about? I don't understand?"

"..."

Melody stiffened; was he now denying after sleeping with her?

At this moment, a clear voice sounded nearby, "What are you all doing here?"

Melody looked up; Serena Sterling had arrived!

Serena had already regained her flawless, stunning face. Now she walked over calmly, her bright eyes landing on Melody's face.

Wow.

As Serena appeared, the crowd exclaimed,

"The bride is here, the real bride is here!"

Melody bit her tongue in anger. Every time she was about to succeed, Serena Sterling would revert her to her original form. She had already lost so much that she was starting to doubt her life.

But now that Serena is here, it's a perfect opportunity to disgust her.

Melody quickly pulled open her collar, revealing a large patch of white skin, now marked with many hickeys, clearly left from a night of passion.

"Hayden, look at these, what are they? These are marks of your love for me. Have you forgotten how happy we were last night? No matter what, I'm your woman now, you can't just abandon me."

"Serena Sterling, I beg you to spare me. We can serve Hayden together, you as the primary, me as secondary."

Chapter 702: Now It's Daddy and Me Protecting You

Melody Ashworth's words fell, leaving everyone shocked, their mouths agape,

"What, Mr. Crawford has already slept with Melody Ashworth, this..."

"This Melody Ashworth is really cunning; she used a human skin mask to impersonate Serena Sterling. Mr. Crawford slept with the wrong person..."

"What can be done? Although Mr. Crawford can be excused, if it were me, I wouldn't forgive."

Everyone turned to Serena, their eyes filled with sympathy.

Melody was very pleased with herself, pretending to be pitiful, "Serena, if you're narrow-minded and can't tolerate me, I'll not degrade myself. I can be maintained outside by Hayden, they say one night as a couple is worth a hundred days of grace. You wouldn't be so cruel to separate Hayden and me, right?"

Serena's stunning face showed no emotion; she only faintly curled her red lips, watching Melody's act.

At this moment, Hayden Crawford spoke, his voice deep and magnetic, "Melody Ashworth, I never touched you, so you'd better not try to splash dirty water on me."

What?

He's still not admitting it?

"Hayden, you..." Melody tried to speak.

But suddenly a voice rang out, "Assassin! There's an assassin!"

An assassin?

Everyone suddenly became panicked, someone bumped into Melody, causing her to scream and fall flat on the ground.

So painful.

Painful and embarrassed!

Melody looked at Hayden, her face pale, "Hayden, save me!"

At this time Corvus came over, "Master, the assassin has been captured!"

The assassin was brought in and knelt on the ground.

Everyone was astonished, frozen in place,

"Oh my God, why does this assassin look identical to Mr. Crawford?"

What does this mean?

The assassin looks identical to Hayden Crawford?

Melody knew what each word meant, but connected into a sentence, she didn't understand.

Melody looked up and saw the assassin, her whole body trembled, her face turning ghostly white.

This assassin really looked identical to Hayden Crawford.

There were actually two Hayden Crawfords.

Melody's mind exploded with confusion in the wind.

Two Hayden Crawfords, so... which Hayden Crawford did she sleep with?

Melody quickly realized what was happening, she seemed to have fallen into a trap.

The assassin looked at Melody, saying, "Melody, don't be afraid, I'll protect you; when I kill Hayden Crawford, I'll become the real Hayden Crawford, and everything he owns will be ours."

Melody felt like she had been pushed into an abyss, her hands and feet cold, trembling on the ground, "No, I don't know you, who are you?"

The assassin rushed over, hugging Melody, "Melody, what's wrong? Have you forgotten our big plan? You asked me to undergo surgery to look like Hayden Crawford and then plot against him, we have everything planned out."

The assassin tenderly cupped Melody's face, saying, "Melody, we were so happy last night, right? You are my woman!"

The crowd exploded in chaos, gasping,

"Oh my gosh, who could have thought Melody Ashworth was so malicious, she found a lover and schemed for all of this, this was her plan!"

"Melody Ashworth really is ridiculous, she just claimed she slept with Mr. Crawford, but actually slept with a cosmetic surgeon assassin."

"There's no saving Melody Ashworth; her family's genes are genuinely this wicked."

Melody understood completely, this was Hayden Crawford's plot; he found a double to sleep with her.

Hayden Crawford never touched her!

Melody was shocked; she fearfully looked up at the man before her, Hayden Crawford stood tall and impressive, brilliantly radiant, as he gazed at her with icy disdain in his handsome eyes, cold and piercing.

He really was indifferent to her.

"Hayden Crawford, do you... do you hate me this much?" Melody thought her affection for Hayden Crawford was genuine, but he betrayed her.

Hayden Crawford looked at Melody coldly, "Every time I see you... I feel disgusted."

"..."

Swish, swish, swish.

Melody felt like she was pierced by countless arrows.

"Someone, take her away." Hayden Crawford ordered coldly.

Two bodyguards in black swiftly came over and dragged Melody away.

...

Melody was locked in a dark, small room, sitting forlornly on the cold ground, unable to fathom how she had lost.

At this moment, the door to the room was pushed open, letting the outside light in, Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling entered.

"Serena Sterling, what are you here for, you've won, do you intend to flaunt your success before me, the loser?" Melody hated and despised Serena Sterling immensely, not wanting to see her.

Hayden Crawford personally pulled out a chair for Serena Sterling to sit in and then his deep gaze fell on Melody's face, "Haven't you figured out how you lost, and how we found Cherie?"

"Right, how did you find Cherie, my mother's hiding place was very secretive, you shouldn't have found it."

Hayden Crawford raised a heroic brow, "One person found it."

"Who?" Melody was very curious.

Suddenly, a childish yet cold voice rang out, "It was me."

Melody looked up to see young Caden Crawford walk in.

It was... this little kid?

No.

Impossible.

Melody shook her head; she absolutely refused to believe it.

Young Caden walked into the room, coldly and indifferently gazing at Melody sitting collapsed on the ground, "Did you forget when you took me once? If I didn't want you to catch me, you definitely couldn't; if you did, it was because I let you deliberately."

What?

Melody found it inconceivable; this was only a three-year-old child.

Young Caden continued, "That day at the amusement park, I deliberately strayed from the group, I knew long ago you were tailing me, so my papa and I played along, leading you out, then I tracked the signal between you and Consort Willow, successfully locating Consort Willow's hiding place."

"..."

Melody opened her mouth but didn't utter a word.

There was nothing for her to say.

It's said that this Crawford family's little Crown Prince is a highly intelligent little psycho; he's far from just a psycho, rather a little demon.

This time he and his papa, Hayden Crawford, teamed up, playing the game brilliantly.

The Crawford family's descendants, one more terrifying than the last.

Melody shivered all over, finally realizing what kind of people she had crossed.

At this moment, young Caden walked to Serena Sterling's side, "Mommy, you used to always protect me and papa, from now on, it's our turn to protect you."

Chapter 703: Putting on the Wedding Dress for Him (Part 1)

Serena Sterling didn't expect that the scene at the hotel was orchestrated by Caden and Hayden Crawford as a father-son duo, so she was quite surprised.

Now, listening to little Caden Crawford's cute yet serious voice telling her, "From now on, let me and Daddy protect you," Serena Sterling's delicate nose suddenly turned red.

She felt as though everything she had experienced in the ancient kingdom of Alani — all the confusion, hardship, helplessness, loneliness, the cycle of life and death... — had been healed.

Serena Sterling reached out to hug little Caden Crawford and nodded forcefully, "Okay, from now on Mommy will be protected by Caden."

Little Caden Crawford had a very calm personality and wasn't one to speak sweetly; he just extended his little hand to Serena Sterling's slender back and gently patted her.

He already knew how much suffering his mommy had endured to give birth to him because Daddy had shown him the videos on the USB drive.

He had grown up, and from now on, no one would be allowed to bully his mommy; little Caden Crawford thought this in his heart.

Watching the warm, loving scene between Serena Sterling and her son, Melody Ashworth was filled with bitter jealousy. Why, why is heaven so unfair? Hayden Crawford had already given all his love to Serena Sterling, so why did he also give Serena a son who was terrifyingly perceptive?

This was truly envy-inducing!

Melody Ashworth withdrew her gaze and looked at Hayden Crawford, "Have you known all along that I wasn't Serena Sterling?"

Serena Sterling also looked at Hayden Crawford. Honestly, she was curious about when Hayden had seen through the Bewitching Technique of the Merfolk Clan and recognized her.

Hayden Crawford pressed his thin lips together, "At first I didn't recognize who you were, but that didn't stop me from distancing myself from you. Although my eyes always saw Serena's exquisite face, my body rejected you; it didn't want to be close to you and even felt disgusted and repulsed."

"Serena turned into a little handmaiden, and the first time I saw her, my gaze stopped, as if there was something in the heavens attracting me, making me unable to move my gaze away. My body and heart were led step by step by that little handmaiden, and every time I saw her, I felt my heart flutter."

"That time at The Manor of the Ninth Spire, I heard her call, and that was when I recognized her."

Melody Ashworth was unwilling to concede, wanting to hear more, but now that she heard it, she regretted it. She shouldn't have listened, as it was self-humiliation.

What Bewitching Technique? This whole drama about the true and false Serena Sterling hadn't trapped Hayden Crawford at all, and she was still feeling complacent.

It was merely a one-person performance, like a clown.

At this moment, Serena Sterling stood up, led little Caden Crawford to Hayden's side, and her radiant eyes fell upon Melody Ashworth's pale face. She calmly said, "Melody Ashworth, the Bewitching Technique and the so-called curse of the Merfolk Clan are nothing more than a mirage. Your show of the true and false Serena Sterling serves as the best proof."

Melody Ashworth looked at the family of three standing before her now; Hayden Crawford was the first man to break the Bewitching Technique of the Merfolk Clan, shattering this mirage and illusion.

"Heh, Serena Sterling, you've won. Of course, now whatever you say is right. Just remember how confidently you promised a grand gamble with us. You bet everything that Hayden Crawford would win."

Hayden Crawford turned his gaze to Serena Sterling, and his heart softened, reaching out a large hand to hold her soft little hand, "Did you once make such a bet?"

Serena Sterling turned her head, her bright eyes smiling at him, "Yes, it was the biggest bet I've ever made."

"Were you ever afraid?"

Serena Sterling gently shook her head, "Never. I knew you would never let me lose."

The determined heart of Hayden Crawford softened like water, and he tightened his grip on her soft little hand, never wanting to let go.

Serena Sterling looked again at Melody Ashworth, "Back then, the ancestors of Westria and Alani were lovers who had been in love. Unfortunately, our ancestor of Alani was too dazzling and gradually overshadowed the ancestor of Westria. From then on, the heart of the ancestor of Westria began to drift away."

"Our ancestor of Alani was so strong, capable of almost anything, but unfortunately, she didn't know how to tame and handle men. Therefore, the direct reason for the demise of that relationship was not the Bewitching Technique of the Merfolk Clan but the human heart. When the heart left and scattered, only when our ancestor of Alani lay dying could she perhaps understand that the greatest tragedy in love is planning a beautiful future while he has already turned and walked away."

Melody Ashworth blankly looked at Serena Sterling; she had once seen the portrait of the ancestor of Alani in a painting, and now, gradually, Serena Sterling's exquisite face overlapped with that of the ancestor of Alani.

However, Serena Sterling was craftier, softer, and wiser than the ancestor of Alani.

Men are the greatest weapon in this world; women should understand how to command men, letting them fight for you on the battlefield, expand the territory.

Suddenly, Melody Ashworth felt a bit of respect for Serena Sterling.

"Serena, shall we go?" Hayden Crawford said.

Serena Sterling nodded, "Alright."

The family of three turned around, disappearing from sight.

...

On the way out, Serena Sterling looked at Hayden Crawford, "Now that Melody Ashworth has been captured, but Consort Willow is still on the run. I suspect she's definitely fled to the Merfolk Clan. That's good; the Merfolk Clan has been hidden for a century. It's time for them to resurface."

Hayden Crawford gazed at Serena, his handsome eyes filled with tenderness and love. He squeezed her little hand, "Serena, the wedding is still ongoing. Don't you have anything else to say to me at this wedding?"

Say what?

Serena suddenly realized, "Oh right, now that Melody Ashworth has been caught, this wedding is considered a great success; it's time to end it."

What she thought of was ending the wedding.

Hayden Crawford, "..."

Looking at Hayden Crawford's increasingly difficult expression, Serena hesitated, "Did I say something wrong?"

Hayden Crawford immediately let go of her little hand, "What did you say wrong, what should you say, go and figure it out yourself."

Having said that, he strode off.

Looking at his upright back, Serena, "..."

This man has too many mood swings, right? Where did she offend him?

Just then, little Caden beside her exclaimed in admiration, "Wow, Mommy, look quickly, that wedding dress is so beautiful."

Wedding dress?

Serena promptly raised her head and immediately saw a fiery red wedding dress in the display window ahead.

The fiery red gown and headdress, the extremely intense color, made one's pupils shrink involuntarily.

Serena paused, isn't this the wedding dress she saw at the Fringe Pavilion, the ancient wedding dress of Westria's and Alani's ancestors!

Chapter 704: Dressing Her in Bridal Attire (Part 2)

How did this ancient wedding dress end up here?

That day, she heard from Master Mani at the Tassel Hall that this ancient wedding dress simply couldn't be made. Yet here it is now.

The fiery red phoenix crown and robes are even more stunning and dazzling than what could be seen in the design sketch, with the gold silk threads hand-embroidered shining and flowing in the sunlight, breathtakingly beautiful.

"Mommy," little Caden Crawford tugged at Serena Sterling's skirt, "Mommy, hurry and put on that wedding dress."

Serena pointed at herself, "Me?"

That's not right. Serena guessed that this ancient wedding dress was meant for Melody Ashworth, but unfortunately, Melody lacked the strength and couldn't reach the part where she'd wear this dress.

"Yes," little Caden nodded vigorously, "neither Mommy nor I have taken any photos, and Mommy will surely look beautiful in this wedding dress. I want to take pictures with my beautiful Mommy!"

Little Caden's big eyes were filled with pleading and anticipation, and everyone knew Serena never refused the children's requests. But... putting on such an ancient wedding dress without any reason feels kind of strange...

Before Serena could think it through, little Caden already pulled her small hand and ran inside, "Mommy, hurry and change."

"..." Serena could only go inside and put on this ancient wedding dress.

...

Once she was dressed, there were already top-notch makeup artists waiting in the room.

"Miss Sterling, this way please, I'll do your hair and makeup now," the makeup artist said with a gentle smile.

Hair and makeup?

Could this also be a necessary step for taking photos with Caden?

"Oh, okay." Serena sat before the dressing table.

Half an hour later, everything was done, and Serena stood up looking around, "Where's Caden, why can't I see Caden?"

The little one who was supposed to take pictures with her seemed to have disappeared?

"Miss Sterling, are you looking for young Master Crawford? This way, please." A servant led Serena to a door.

Serena asked in confusion, "Is Caden inside?"

"Yes, Miss Sterling, young Master Crawford is waiting inside for you along with young Master Pip and Princess Stella; they're all waiting for you."

What?

Pip and Stella are here too?

What's going on?

Serena felt she was lost in the clouds, as if everyone was hiding something from her.

"Miss Sterling, don't worry, I'll open the door now, just step outside, everyone outside is someone you love most."

Saying this, the servant gently pushed open the White Jade Door in front of her.

The bright light quickly flooded in, and Serena looked up, her clear eyes suddenly narrowing because this White Jade Door leads to a wedding aisle, and at the end of the red carpet stood a tall and handsome figure, Hayden Crawford.

Beside Hayden were three little ones, Caden, Pip, and Stella, all her children.

Caden and Pip were wearing white shirts with ties, Stella in a beautiful princess dress; the three little cherubs seemed to have walked straight out of a painting.

All the guests lined both sides, their gazes instantly focused on her, filled with admiration and envy.

Serena's long eyelashes trembled, leaving her stunned.

"Mommy~" The three little ones in front smiled happily at Serena.

At this moment, someone walked over, it was... Julian Rathborne.

Julian came, Jude Crawford came, Serena even saw Seraphina Linden and Isabelle Willow below the stage, her closest and most beloved people in life were all here today.

Julian walked to Serena's side and extended his strong arm, "Serena, let Dad take you there; Hayden is waiting for you over there, he's been waiting for you for a long time."

He's been waiting for you for a long time.

Serena instantly understood what was happening, today is real, this is Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling's wedding, this is their wedding!

He didn't say a word to her, even colluding with the kids to lure her onto the stage.

This section of the red carpet was meant to be walked with her father, who would then place her hand into his palm.

Serena suddenly remembered, they haven't had their wedding, he hasn't given her a wedding.

Back when she married him as a substitute in Bayside, she sat alone in the car heading to Orchid Court.

How could she have known what path that was, or where it led?

Serena's pale eyes suddenly became red; her clear gaze shifted from Julian's handsome face to her mommy, Seraphina Linden, and Aunt Isabelle.

Seraphina's eyes were red too. Seeing Serena's questioning gaze, she nodded with a bright smile.

Isabelle's eyes were red as well, looking affectionately at Serena; she loved the same man deeply, having long seen Serena as her own daughter.

Serena's clear eyes returned to the front, resting on Hayden's handsome face.

Hayden stood there with their three children, waiting for her, his deep eyes overflowing with tenderness and love.

Serena gently curled her lips into a smile, raising her small hand to hold Julian's arm.

Julian led her, step by step down the red carpet towards Hayden.

The Louis Estate now resembled a crystal palace, magnificent, like a world in a fairy tale.

This grand wedding was a gathering of distinguished guests, everyone remained quiet, all eyes on tonight's bride, Serena Sterling.

The sound of "The Wedding March" played in her ears, everything just perfect.

In the center of the crowd, Hayden watched Serena walk towards him, his gaze tightly locked on her. She wore the fiery red wedding dress, her skin fair and smooth as jade, her slim waist gracefully held, exuding a breathtaking beauty like a celestial maiden gently landing in his heart.

Hayden recalled their first encounter on the train in Bayside, when she was just nineteen. Her features hadn't fully developed, far from the exceptional beauty she is now.

In the blink of an eye, she transformed from the girl who captivated his heart into his woman, the mother of his children.

Trekking across mountains and waters, from far away lands, she came step by step to his side.

Today, she wore the wedding dress for him, today, she dressed her hair for him.

This moment, her stunning beauty, is forever etched in his heart.

Hayden strode forward towards her, his steps steady and strong, stopping in front of her.

Serena also stopped.

Julian extended his hand to pass Serena's soft hand to Hayden, "Hayden, didn't expect you to ultimately take away my Serena with both the pot and the flower, I don't have any demands for you, just love her well for the rest of your life."

This was a father's advice, love her well for the rest of your life.

Hayden took Serena's soft hand, nodding solemnly, "Father-in-law, I will."

### Chapter 705: Dressing Him in Wedding Attire (Part 3)

Having received Hayden Crawford's promise, Julian Rathborne stepped down from the stage.

Hayden Crawford looked at Serena Sterling. Their eyes met, and he lifted the corners of his thin lips, his voice deep and charming, "Serena, you came?"

The tenderness in Serena's eyes quickly welled up into a swirling vortex. She nodded, "Yes, I came. You did this on purpose, didn't you?"

Hayden grabbed both of her small hands, "Yes, today there isn't a so-called fake wedding, the wedding is real. This wedding is between you and me. Serena, I still owe you a wedding."

This scheming man, he really planned everything step by step, layers upon layers. He had planned this for Melody Ashworth, and also roped her into it.

"But... didn't you say you couldn't forgive me?"

"Serena, I know everything now."

He knows?

Knows what?

"I know, I know everything. I know about those three years, Serena, I'm sorry, I was late. When you needed me most, I wasn't by you or the children's side."

His low voice was filled with lingering affection and heartache, causing Serena's eyelashes to tremble. She didn't know he had figured it all out.

Actually, she was very strong and could pretend not to be hurt or afraid. In the end, even when giving birth, she could face the solitude and danger alone.

But now, hearing his voice filled with such tender blame, her heart softened, and the feelings of grievance, tenderness, and helplessness suddenly spread.

Before meeting this man, Hayden Crawford, Serena thought she could handle jerks and face deceitful people. But since meeting him, she became timid, soft, and reliant.

The embrace he offered was overwhelming, making her want only to lie in his arms.

Hayden Crawford looked at her tear-stained eyes, reddened nose, and lips, appearing so pitiful.

Hayden slowly knelt down on one knee, took out a ring from his pocket, "Serena, should I propose to you now?"

"I had prepared a speech beforehand, but now I've forgotten it. It's my first proposal, and I'm a little nervous, so I hope you can forgive me."

"Serena, four years ago in Bayside, during our first meeting on the train, I fell for you at first sight. If you ask me what I like about you, I adore your wit and playfulness, your unmatched beauty. Before meeting you, I never thought of what kind of girl I would like. But after meeting you, I realized you fulfilled all my imaginations. Whatever you have, I cherish."

"Because I adore you, I don't want to be apart from you. Because of my admiration, I want to bond with you. Because I cherish you, I want to promise a lifetime to you today. In the future, as long as the heavens endure, we won't part. You are irreplaceable in my life's flow of time. I will hold your hand tightly and lead you to the ends of the earth."

Crystal tears rolled down like broken beads, uncontrollably.

Her slender, soft shoulders trembled, and Serena couldn't stop crying. Mr. Crawford proposed to her.

So moving, so romantic.

The only person in the world who could make Hayden Crawford kneel, probably was her.

The entire wedding venue was silent. Everyone heard Hayden Crawford speak enchanting whispers to Serena with his magnetic voice, making almost one's ears pregnant, promising a lifetime of marriage.

Those high-society women had tear-stained eyes; it was someone else's wedding, but they cried like stray dogs.

"Get married! Get married! Get married!" Someone started cheering, and then everyone joined in clapping and cheering.

The moonlight tonight was beautiful. Serena, amidst her teary gaze, lifted her red lips and slowly handed her small hand to him, "Mr. Crawford, even if the world swirls in chaos and hearts are sinister, I will accompany you in laughter for countless times, never speaking of parting sorrow."

She accepted.

This was also her promise to him.

Hayden Crawford gently placed the ring on her ring finger.

But then Seraphina Linden's voice suddenly came, "Yara! Yara!"

Hayden's actions paused. Serena quickly turned her head. Isabelle Willow was just with Seraphina Linden, but now Isabelle was nowhere to be seen.

"Mommy, what happened, where did Aunt Yara go?" Serena immediately went offstage.

"Isabelle was just here. I was watching your proposal, and during a moment of inattention, she disappeared." Seraphina said.

At this moment, Jude Crawford strode over, his deep and sharp eyes swept across the room, "No need to look, someone must have taken her away under the guise of the proposal."

Isabelle Willow was nowhere to be found.

No one expected this sudden twist during this century wedding, forcing it into a halt.

Hayden looked at Corvus, "First, evacuate the guests. Caden, Pip, who took your grandma away? I'll leave it to you to find out."

Pip made an "OK" sign, "Don't worry, Daddy. This person actually dared to kidnap Grandma right under our noses. They're really bold. We'll teach them a good lesson."

...

Everyone reached the VIP room. This was the first time little Caden Crawford and Pip worked together. The two genetically talented little ones quickly tracked down a black van.

"Daddy, Mommy, we found it. It's this van that took Grandma away."

Serena looked at the license plate of the van, then frowned slightly, "The King of Nine Peaks! This is a van from The Manor of the Ninth Spire. Axel Ashworth secretly took Aunt Yara."

"Axel Ashworth?" Hayden contemplated the name; his eyes took on a dangerous, ink-like hue, "Why would he secretly take my mom away?"

Hayden may not understand, but Serena already guessed. She walked to the polished floor-to-ceiling window, raised her long lashes to look at the distant sky. It seems Axel discovered something about Aunt Yara, and Hayden's identity couldn't remain hidden.

She always wanted to protect Hayden's familial mystery, but it was still uncovered.

Westria and Alani, separated by a vast sea of blood feud, where would she and Hayden go?

The wedding, which was abruptly interrupted, seemed like a bad omen.

At this moment, Hayden walked over and looked at Serena, "Serena, what's wrong? Do you know something or, are you hiding something from me?"

Serena knew this couldn't be hidden any longer. She glanced at Hayden, then at Jude Crawford.

Jude stood aside, his deep eyes fixed on her.

Serena softly said, "Mr. Crawford, do you know who Aunt Yara is? Aunt Yara isn't the Willow family's daughter, she is the long-lost princess of Westria."

Chapter 706: Only the Princess of Alani, Serena Sterling, Is Forbidden

What?

Regarding Isabelle Willow's true identity, neither Jude Crawford nor Hayden Crawford were aware, and now Serena Sterling tells them that Isabelle Willow is the long-lost princess of Westria.

Jude Crawford immediately pressed his thin lips, the fifty-year-old man's deep demeanor showing no emotions, making it hard to discern his thoughts.

Hayden Crawford furrowed his handsome sword-like brows, "Serena, are you serious?"

Serena Sterling's bright eyes gazed at Hayden Crawford and nodded, "It's true, Mr. Crawford, not only does royal Westrian blood flow through your veins, but your blood is the noble blood of Westria for a hundred years, possessing the noble blood that embodies the true dragon of Westria, destined to reign over the world in the future."

With these words, the entire room fell silent, clearly indicating that the situation had developed beyond normal expectations.

At this moment, Jude Crawford spoke softly, "Hayden, first go to The Manor of the Ninth Spire and bring your mother back."

...

Everyone went to The Manor of the Ninth Spire, which had long been prepared, and the butler inside respectfully welcomed everyone.

In the living room, Isabelle Willow was sitting on the sofa drinking tea, accompanied by Axel Ashworth, who showed respectful gestures with his brow and eyes.

"Mom." Hayden Crawford walked in.

Isabelle Willow quickly stood up, "Hayden, you're here."

Hayden Crawford took Isabelle Willow's hand, protecting his mother behind him, and raised his deep and narrow eyes to look at Axel Ashworth, "The King of Nine Peaks, why did you secretly bring my mother here? You should explain this properly to me."

Axel Ashworth waved his hand with a smile, "Mr. Crawford, please don't misunderstand, I just invited aunt to have a cup of tea."

"Aunt?"

"Yes, surely Mr. Crawford doesn't know, your mother is my father's sister, and is none other than the distinguished princess of Westria, of course, I must call her aunt. Speaking of which, Mr. Crawford and I are actually brothers, and I must address Mr. Crawford as elder brother." Saying this, Axel Ashworth took out a DNA paternity test document.

Serena Sterling looked at the DNA paternity test document, with a light smile, "It seems the King of Nine Peaks truly works swiftly."

Axel Ashworth had started suspecting Serena Sterling ever since the death of the old nurse, and it turned out his suspicion was well-founded, Serena Sterling had long known Hayden Crawford's background but had kept it hidden.

"No matter how fast I am, I cannot be faster than the Princess of Alani." Axel Ashworth said with a meaningful tone.

Serena Sterling raised her delicate willow brows and did not continue the topic, "Then we won't disturb the King of Nine Peaks any longer, and we will take Aunt Willow back."

"Aunt," Axel Ashworth quickly called out to Isabelle Willow, "you are our Westrian princess, why not stay in my Manor of the Ninth Spire for now, you can move to the royal princess residence of Westria another day."

Isabelle Willow halted, looking at Axel Ashworth, she wanted to speak, but before she could, there was a low, magnetic voice already reaching her ear first, "We appreciate the King of Nine Peaks' kindness, but besides being the Westrian princess, Willow is also my wife, now I want to take her home."

Isabelle Willow looked up, her gaze landing on Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford wore a simple black shirt and black trousers, a fifty-year-old man with abundant life experience and a commanding presence from his time steering the business world, his words were irrefutable.

Jude Crawford strode forward, came to her side, then extended his big hand to hold hers, ready to take her home.

Axel Ashworth looked at Jude Crawford, nodded, "Alright then, let's listen to uncle."

Jude Crawford took Isabelle Willow's hand and directly led her away.

Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling were also planning to leave, at which point Axel Ashworth spoke, "Mr. Crawford, please stay, I have some words to say to you."

Hayden Crawford paused.

Serena Sterling was not surprised; now that Axel Ashworth had learned of Hayden Crawford's background, he surely had things to discuss with Hayden Crawford, and to guard against her.

"Then you two have your talk, I'll head out first." Serena Sterling smiled.

Hayden Crawford nodded and whispered, "Wait for me outside, we'll go home together."

"Okay." Serena Sterling left.

...

Serena Sterling left, and Hayden Crawford looked at Axel Ashworth, "The King of Nine Peaks, what do you want to talk to me about?"

"If I'm not mistaken, the Princess of Alani should have already told you your heritage beforehand, Mr. Crawford, your blood possesses the noble blood, and you are the true ruler of Westria."

"So what?"

"Doesn't Mr. Crawford wish to ascend to the supreme position and reign over the world?"

Hayden Crawford shook his head, "Never thought about it, and don't want to."

Axel Ashworth stood beside Hayden Crawford, he slowly opened a scroll painting, which depicted the entire map of The State of Westria, "Mr. Crawford, please look, the development of Westria hasn't been good over the years, especially in the past twenty years under my father's rule where several large families have successively rebelled, with the people suffering, displaced, many years ago a wandering monk prophesied that the true ruler of Westria is about to emerge and he will end this chaotic world, leading us to peace and prosperity."

Hayden Crawford looked at the splendid landscape in front of him and remained silent for a long time.

"Mr. Crawford, there's one more thing, there's a national feud between Westria and Alani. Back then, Alani's ancestors dyed the rivers with blood, and the waters there still aren't washed clean, so Mr. Crawford could have many women, a harem of beauties, but Serena Sterling, the Princess of Alani, cannot, it is absolutely impossible for you in this lifetime."

Listening to these words, Hayden Crawford's thin lips curled into a mocking and cold arc, "If I can't, can you?"

Axel Ashworth was momentarily stunned.

Hayden Crawford strode off.

At this time Rosalind Newman came out and whispered, "The King of Nine Peaks, do you think Hayden Crawford will ascend to the throne?"

Axel Ashworth nodded with certainty, "He will, because the noble blood flows in his veins, and Westria is his destiny."

"The King of Nine Peaks, are you...with the Princess of Alani?" Rosalind Newman hesitated to say, since what happened at The Manor of the Ninth Spire last time was still vivid.

Axel Ashworth, after many years on the battlefield, trivial Bewitching Techniques should not be enough to move him, truly what moves people...might only be that person.

Axel Ashworth pressed his lips, "Don't mention this topic again in the future."

Rosalind Newman watched Axel Ashworth's departing figure, she sighed inwardly, Westria and Alani are too deeply connected, back then Westria's ancestors let Alani's ancestors die with hatred on the bloody day, leaving a prophecy when Alani's ancestor died, that a century later Alani will have a girl who will be breathtaking.

This girl is Serena Sterling, and the princes of the Westrian royal family have lost their hearts to her, falling deeply in love with her.

Unfortunately, there's this deep vendetta separating them, where will Alani's girl place her love?

Chapter 707: Hayden Crawford Brings a Girl Back to the Villa

Jude Crawford walked out of The Manor of the Ninth Spire with Isabelle Willow, her hand still in Jude Crawford's palm, she quickly moved and withdrew her hand.

Jude Crawford stopped and looked at her, "What's wrong?"

Isabelle Willow wore a floral qipao today, covered by a knit cardigan, looking elegant and gentle as she stood in the wind. The evening breeze stirred her long hair at her cheeks, and as her hair wrapped around her face,

she reached up to tuck a few strands behind her ear. She looked at Jude Crawford, "It's nothing, thank you for today. I won't be going back with you."

Jude Crawford fixed his gaze on her, half-smiling, "I am not joking with you, Isabelle Willow, you are still my wife."

"..." Isabelle Willow recalled when she jumped off the high platform of Jill's room back then, it's been twenty years, and they never actually divorced.

"Then let's find some time to go to the civil affairs bureau and get divorced. Anyway... we've been separated for so many years, the marriage is already invalid." Isabelle Willow replied.

Jude Crawford pressed his thin lips and said nothing.

At this point, Seraphina Linden walked over, "Yara, let's go."

"Okay." Isabelle Willow got into the car with Seraphina Linden.

Serena Sterling also came out of The Manor of the Ninth Spire, "Mommy, Aunt Yara, you go ahead first, I'll wait here for Mr. Crawford."

"Serena, we must go back." Seraphina Linden said seriously.

Serena Sterling noticed the anomaly on Seraphina Linden's face, her expression serious and stern, "Mommy, what's wrong?"

Seraphina Linden whispered, "Serena, the Governess has arrived!"

The Governess?

Upon hearing the Governess had arrived, Serena Sterling's heart skipped a beat. In Alani, every princess was raised by a respected Governess. This Governess, with strict discipline, acted almost as an Empress Dowager, earning the respect and affection of the whole Alani.

Seraphina Linden was raised by this Governess, as Serena Sterling was lost to the outside world from childhood, the Governess continued her tenure.

The Governess was very fond of Seraphina Linden and Serena Sterling, treating them as her own, though her sternness was genuine.

Serena Sterling did not expect the Governess to arrive so quickly, moreover, the Governess despised Westria, and particularly its monarch.

Back then when Alani fell, the long river was stained with blood, and now all the aged Governesses of Alani are survivors of that bloody apocalypse, their parents died in that battle, and the fires of hatred against Westria have been burning in their hearts ever since.

Serena Sterling furrowed her elegant brows, knowing the Governess would not easily make an appearance, unless...there was something very important.

Serena Sterling felt a sense of foreboding, and nodded, "Mommy, Aunt Yara, let's go back then."

The three women got in the car, and the luxury car sped away.

Isabelle Willow sat in the back seat of the luxury car, even as the car drove away, she could still feel Jude Crawford's gaze fixed on her, closely following her.

"Yara... Yara!" Seraphina Linden called out several times.

Isabelle Willow snapped back to reality, she looked at Seraphina Linden, "Seraphina, what's wrong?"

Seraphina Linden looked at Isabelle Willow doubtfully, "Yara, you seem odd to me, is there something you're hiding from me? It seems after you returned from Jude Crawford last time you started acting strange, oh, I get it, that night, did Jude Crawford...bully you?"

Seraphina Linden blinked her watery eyes and ambiguously nudged Isabelle Willow with her arm.

Isabelle Willow quickly shook her head, "No, I slept in the guest room, he in the master bedroom, when I woke up in the morning, he was gone, Seraphina, don't have such thoughts!"

"That's really strange, that carnivorous wolf Jude Crawford actually turned vegetarian." Seraphina Linden murmured curiously.

Isabelle Willow didn't say another word, she merely raised her hand to tuck a lock of hair at her cheek behind her ear.

Seraphina Linden noticed the small earlobe of Isabelle Willow had dyed with a slight blush, seeming unnatural.

Seraphina Linden grew more puzzled, she was certain Isabelle Willow was hiding something from her.

...

Hayden Crawford stepped out from The Manor of the Ninth Spire, Serena Sterling was already gone.

"Master, Miss Sterling left first just now, she seems to have some tricky issue to handle, so she did not wait for you." Corvus approached respectfully and said.

He had hurried out only to find she had already left, the heartless little thing!

Hayden Crawford, "Let's go as well."

"Yes, Master." Corvus respectfully opened the rear door, Hayden Crawford entered the car.

The Rolls-Royce business car sped down the road, soon, it unexpectedly began to rain.

"Master, it's raining." Corvus said.

Hayden Crawford looked up, through the gleaming glass window, seeing outside, it really was raining, and a downpour at that.

Suddenly, amidst the rain, a person rushed in, directly colliding with the Rolls-Royce business car.

The sharp sound of brakes screeched, Corvus quickly hit the brakes, "Master, it seems we've hit someone."

Hayden Crawford pursed his thin lips, "Get down and check."

Corvus quickly got out of the car, only to see a slender figure lying in front of the car, it was a girl, her forehead bleeding from the impact, already unconscious on the ground.

"Miss... Miss..." Corvus called out several times, but the girl on the ground did not respond.

At this point, Hayden Crawford also got out of the car, looking at the unconscious girl on the ground, lowly said, "Hurry and get her to the hospital."

"Yes." Corvus promptly lifted the girl horizontally from the ground.

At this moment, a jade pendant hanging from the girl's neck fell out, Hayden Crawford glanced at it, his deep pupils shrunk sharply.

This jade pendant was very familiar, it had a letter "Crawford" carved on it.

Hayden Crawford quickly recognized this as his belonging.

If he remembered correctly, he once gave this jade pendant to Yasmine Sterling.

Over ten years ago, he first went to Bayside, almost losing his life in that icy snowy land, a girl rescued him, on that night of swirling snow, the girl embraced him, warming him with her body heat, providing him with endless warmth and the strength to survive, the girl became a softness in his heart.

But later, Yasmine Sterling sought him out with that jade pendant.

Now, this jade pendant unexpectedly appears on this girl's body.

"Hold on a moment." Hayden Crawford suddenly spoke.

Corvus stopped, "Master, what is it?"

Hayden Crawford reached out and picked up the jade pendant, this jade pendant was genuine, without a doubt, he wouldn't mistake his own possession.

Could it be, back then Yasmine Sterling brought a fake jade pendant to find him?

The one who truly saved him back then wasn't Yasmine Sterling, but rather this girl before him.

In any case, this suddenly appearing girl was a mystery.

"Bring her back to the villa first, and call a private doctor over." Hayden Crawford changed his orders.

Chapter 708: It Was This Girl Who Saved Him Back Then

Corvus was taken aback. The master wants to bring this unconscious girl back to the villa?

This...

Hayden Crawford added, "Don't let Miss Sterling know about this matter for now, understand?"

Corvus wiped away cold sweat, "Yes, Master."

...

Hayden Crawford brought the girl back to the villa, and a private doctor came, "Mr. Crawford, the patient is not in serious condition and should wake up soon. She has been long-term abused, combined with malnutrition, and then she fainted after being hit by a car, so she passed out. She just needs to rest more."

Corvus saw the private doctor off.

Hayden Crawford stood tall beside the bed, looking at the girl on the bed. The girl appeared to be very delicate, but her oval face was exquisite and beautiful, with a hint of Lin Daiyu-like fragility, naturally pitiful and evoking a protective instinct in men.

At this moment, the girl on the bed moved and opened her eyes.

The girl didn't know where she was; she looked around in confusion.

"You're awake?" Hayden started.

The girl was startled and quickly raised her head to see Hayden Crawford.

"Who, who are you?" The girl, like a startled bird, quickly sat up in bed, retreating continuously, wrapping herself tightly in the quilt, looking at Hayden Crawford with vigilance, "Don't come near me!"

Hayden Crawford's handsome features showed no emotion. He let his deep and narrow eyes fall on the jade pendant; then he asked in a low voice, "Who gave you that jade pendant?"

Jade pendant...

Upon hearing these words, the girl quickly reached out and tightly grasped the jade pendant hanging around her neck, "This is my jade pendant; it has nothing to do with you. No one can touch my jade pendant!"

The girl seemed very concerned about the jade pendant, guarding it cautiously and carefully, deeply afraid someone would take it away from her.

It was evident that this jade pendant was very important to her.

Hayden Crawford did not pursue the topic further, "Then you should rest well."

After saying that, he turned and left.

...

In the study, Hayden Crawford sat at the desk reading documents. At this moment, Corvus came in, "Master, I just checked, Yasmine Sterling passed away in prison a few days ago."

Yasmine Sterling is dead?

"After being locked up, Yasmine Sterling was extremely agitated, quickly became mentally unstable, then contracted an illness. She survived four years, but a few days ago she couldn't hold on and died in there."

Hayden Crawford signed his name at the bottom of the document, without lifting his head, he lightly parted his lips, "Did she say anything before she died?"

"Before Yasmine Sterling died, she was cursing...cursing Miss Sterling and you. Reportedly, her curses were very unpleasant and she was even cursing...saying you two couldn't be together in this lifetime...she cursed for four days and nights, reportedly everyone inside heard..." Corvus stammered.

Hayden Crawford never believed in curses, "What else?"

"Also, before she died, she said something, and it happened to be recorded. The video is here." Corvus opened the laptop.

Hayden Crawford paused his pen and looked at the footage, Yasmine Sterling appeared in the camera, with four years of torture disfiguring her. She lay on the cold, dirty ground, her eyes still as vicious as before, now deeply sunken, making her appear even more terrifying.

Yasmine Sterling was already gasping, dying, but her hatred hadn't diminished in the slightest, "Serena Sterling, I hate you, it's... it's you who ruined my life. Do you think you can be happy and together with Hayden Crawford? Don't dream about it."

As she spoke, a strange smile appeared on Yasmine Sterling's lips, "I have a secret, which I won't tell anyone, hahaha, Hayden Crawford, you... you recognized the wrong person, you deserve it hahaha!"

With laughter, Yasmine Sterling closed her eyes and died.

The footage ended.

Corvus questioned puzzledly, "Master, Yasmine Sterling never revealed this secret even at death. What is this secret, what does it mean you recognized the wrong person?"

Hayden Crawford's eyes were like ink dispersed thickly, deep and boundless. This suggests that Yasmine Sterling's secret must be that she deceived him with a fake jade pendant, in fact, he recognized the wrong person, and the one who saved him in the icy wilderness was someone else.

This someone else is the girl.

"You may leave now."

"Yes, Master." Corvus withdrew.

Hayden Crawford stood up, approached the polished floor-to-ceiling window, he looked at the dazzling lights outside and then pulled out his phone to scroll through Serena Sterling's WeChat, sending a message back, even if not contacting me, at least message me to talk, show me how busy you are.

He sent Serena Sterling a WeChat message.

...

At this moment, Serena Sterling had already returned to the villa, where Granny Keeper waited for her in the living room.

"Granny, why didn't you inform me when you came?" Serena Sterling affectionately held Granny's hands.

Granny Keeper was childless and dedicated her entire life to Alani and the princess, hence she was deeply cherished. This Granny Keeper was over sixty but vigorous, her brows and eyes reflected grand demeanor.

Granny held Serena Sterling's hands, looking at her up and down with affection and nodded approvingly, "Yes, Princess, you have been taking care of yourself lately. I was worried day and night about you in The State of Westria, afraid you'd become thin; moreover, the hearts of Westrians are treacherous, with our blood feud against them, Granny couldn't relax about you."

From Granny's words, Serena Sterling felt Granny's hatred towards Westria. She smiled, "Granny, I am doing well here, and mother is also here."

"Don't mention your mother, she is the most mischievous and unrewarding among the princesses of Alani, sneaking out to play, neglecting duties, like wearing the queen's crown without working, it frustrates me!"

Serena Sterling, "... If Mother heard these words, would she feel ashamed?"

The answer is, no.

Of course not.

Because Mother has heard these admonishments eighty thousand times!

Soon Granny's tone shifted, she sat Serena Sterling down on the sofa, "Your mother's greatest contribution was giving birth to you. Serena, you are all of Alani's hope. We have been eagerly anticipating, finally bringing forward the girl from our ancestral prophecy of Alani!"

Serena Sterling curved her lips into a smile, she could feel the weighty grip of Granny's palm, here was the hope for Alani's revival.

"Granny, I will dedicate myself wholeheartedly." Serena Sterling vowed earnestly.

Granny nodded with satisfaction, she composed herself with seriousness, "Serena, I came because I heard the true lord with blood of children in The State of Westria has emerged after a hundred years, is it true, who is he?"

Serena Sterling hadn't spoken yet when Granny's eyes quickly revealed a dense killing intent.

Chapter 709: Guarding a City for a Lifetime

"Serena, you must find out who this person is as soon as possible. This time, we need to take the initiative and eliminate this person completely!" Grandma said with murderous intent.

Serena Sterling's heart sank to the bottom. Her ominous premonition had come true; this time, Grandma came from Alani for Hayden Crawford. Grandma had her sights set on Hayden!

"Grandma," Serena started, hesitatingly, "you haven't met this person. He is the only person in Westria in a hundred years to have the blood of a child. Perhaps, perhaps he's different from the previous lords of Westria. He's wise, intelligent..."

Grandma interrupted Serena's words directly, "Then we should act first even more. If we wait for this person to ascend to the throne, we'll miss the greatest opportunity. It's like raising a tiger to invite disaster, and the consequences are endless."

Serena didn't know what to say.

Grandma looked at Serena suspiciously, "Serena, what's wrong with you? Have you forgotten the blood feud between Westria and Alani?"

"Grandma, I haven't forgotten. I will... find out who this person is as soon as possible."

"That's good." Grandma reached out and ruffled Serena's long hair. "By the way, Serena, have you found Pip and Stella's dad?"

Serena nodded, "Yes, I have found him."

"Then arrange to meet up with him for a meal another day. I need to thoroughly assess him. The prince consort of our Alani Ancient Kingdom isn't such an easy role to take on. Moreover, your succession ceremony has been in preparation all along, waiting for you to complete this mission, draw out the Sky Sword, and revive Alani. We will then return to the Alani Ancient Kingdom, and you will become the thirteenth queen."

Serena lowered her long lashes, already foreseeing that the path with Hayden would be difficult to walk.

...

Grandma didn't stay here but left by car. Serena returned to her room, and just then her phone chimed with a message.

Upon opening it, she saw it was from Hayden Crawford.

Leaving without sending me a message, just how busy are you, tell me.

This was a message filled with resentment yet irresistibly domineering. Serena's red lips curved up, and a bright smile overflowed her clear eyes.

Her slender white fingers tapped the keyboard, and she replied: Hayden, I'm giving you a chance to pick up chicks here, perhaps you'll meet a little mermaid on your way home tonight.

Hayden's reply came quickly: Why would I want to pick up a fish? I want to pick you up.

Alright then, Serena felt a sweet sensation in her heart. Her Mr. Crawford truly knew how to sweet-talk.

At this moment, there was a "knock knock" at the door, and the room door was pushed open. Seraphina Linden entered with a cup of hot milk, "Serena, bring this cup of hot milk to your Aunt Yara. I think she's been acting strange since she returned from Jude Crawford's place. I bet that old fox made a move on her."

"No way..."

"Why not? When it comes to scheming, no one beats Jude Crawford. Moreover, Jude Crawford is particularly fond of women. Your Aunt Yara is like a little white rabbit before him, wouldn't even know if she got taken advantage of."

Serena's mind wandered to the deep and restrained figure of Jude Crawford. She coughed awkwardly, "Mom, stop talking like that, Uncle Jude isn't fond of women."

Seraphina gave Serena a look as if to say, what do you know? "Serena, whether Jude Crawford is fond of women, just ask your Aunt Yara."

"..." She wasn't going to ask!

She and Hayden had almost gotten married; that would be her father-in-law and mother-in-law. How could a daughter-in-law ask her in-laws about their private affairs in the bedroom?

Serena quickly took the hot milk, "Mom, I'll go now."

...

Serena arrived at the door next to her, then raised her hand to knock, "knock knock."

Soon, Isabelle Willow's clear voice came from inside, "Come in."

Serena pushed the door open and entered. Isabelle Willow had already bathed and now sat at her desk, holding a pencil, drawing and writing on a design draft. She seemed to be doing jewelry design.

Serena enjoyed being alone with Isabelle Willow, who was a person of elegance and gentleness, exuding talent and charm from her scholarly demeanor, like a pearl attracting people, making them want to approach and get closer.

Serena thought, thirty years ago, the first distinguished gentleman of Aethelgard's business world, Jude Crawford, liked this type of girl: cool and breathtaking, beauty and talent side by side. Jude Crawford fell in love and remained devoted for half his life.

Suddenly, Serena had some goodwill for Jude Crawford, considering Isabelle Willow as his first love.

In the blink of thirty years, Jude Crawford transitioned from a youthful brilliance to a man in his most stable middle age, yet the one whom he kept chasing was still this girl named Isabelle Willow in front of him.

Who could surpass Jude Crawford in devotion?

To love the echo of a name for a lifetime, to guard a city.

"Aunt Yara, you can do the design later, have this cup of hot milk first." Serena walked over and handed over the hot milk.

Isabelle Willow put down her pencil and took the hot milk, "Serena, you're just in time. There's something I want to ask you."

Serena's heart skipped a beat, remembering her mom saying that Aunt Yara had been acting strangely. Could Aunt Yara be about to reveal something?

Serena blinked her long lashes at Isabelle Willow, her bright eyes showing a hint of playful curiosity, "Aunt Yara, ask away. I'll tell you everything I know, with no reservations."

"Actually, it's nothing..." Isabelle Willow's almond-shaped eyes showed a bit of awkwardness, "A few days ago, I had a dream, and that dream was too real..."

"What dream?"

"It was... it was..."

Isabelle Willow stood up, unable to continue speaking.

That night, she went to Jude Crawford's villa. It suddenly rained outside, soaking her clothes, so she went upstairs to shower and change, but somehow, she fell asleep there.

She had a long, long dream.

The dream was hard to speak of.

She dreamt that her room door opened, Jude Crawford came in, got on her bed, and asked in a low voice: you are so naughty, how should I punish you?

He reached out, untied her nightgown's belt, and then, well, they... made love.

Even now, the scene from the dream still clearly floated in her mind, his hand feeling like gritty sand on her skin...

Isabelle Willow quickly closed her eyes, trying to shake off the image from her mind, but her face had already turned an unnatural shade of red.

She had thought the dream was real but woke up the next morning to find the sheets untouched beside her. Jude Crawford was gone, and they hadn't met.

Isabelle Willow didn't know why she had such a dream, dreaming of being with him...

Chapter 710: Getting the Divorce Certificate with Him

Isabelle Willow recalled the new marriage night with Jude Crawford more than thirty years ago.

On that wedding night, he forcibly brought her and Chase Sullivan back from the dock, threatening her with Chase to get her into their bridal chamber.

As soon as she entered, he followed, closing the door with a firm gesture, and looked at her coldly with a superior gaze, saying, "Go in and clean yourself up."

She stood still, not moving.

He strode over, grabbing her slender wrist and dragged her into the bathroom, where he turned on the shower, and cold water quickly poured down from above, drenching her like a drowned rat.

She struggled a little, and with a "snap," he dropped the shower, then pushed her against the wall, starting to rip her clothes off.

At that time, she was still young, not as strong as him, and as her clothes were torn, all her dignity was stripped away. His eyes were bloodshot, staring at her as he said another sentence, "You're so naughty, how should I punish you?"

He violated her.

Isabelle Willow felt that the dream was too real; his domineering and cruel words, and his forceful plunder like a violent storm terrified her, making her want to escape.

But in the dream, just like before, she couldn't escape his confinement and cage, being caught and thrown back onto the bed again and again.

Over the years, Isabelle Willow hadn't thought of him, thinking she had forgotten. But now, she realized Jude Crawford had left a deep imprint on her body and soul that couldn't be washed away.

So just now, at The Manor of the Ninth Spire, when she saw him and her hand was held by him, she felt so uncomfortable.

Looking at his expression, everything seemed normal, totally unlike someone who had been with her. That should have been just her own dream.

Thinking that she actually had such a dream, Isabelle Willow felt a bit frustrated. She turned to Serena Sterling, "It was just...a nightmare, Serena. I haven't been sleeping well lately, often dreaming. Could you do some acupuncture to help me out?"

That's how it is.

Serena Sterling thought she was going to learn something new, her little heart was beating wildly, "Okay, Aunt Yara, come over, let me check your pulse."

Isabelle Willow walked over, offering her wrist.

Serena Sterling checked her pulse and soon gently furrowed her delicate brows, "Aunt Yara, your pulse is a bit weak. Have you been too fatigued recently?"

"No," Isabelle Willow shook her head, "I haven't been going out much lately, just sitting here drawing and designing."

Besides that one night, she couldn't remember how Jude Crawford tormented her in her dreams. Anyway, it was so long ago, and when she woke up in the morning, her whole body ached, but upon checking, there were no marks on her. Her delicate skin, when she was young, would always be marked up when he stayed in her room, and it couldn't be hidden.

Isabelle Willow thought perhaps this dream was too long, so she felt sore all over when she woke up, and there was another crucial point, which was... Jude Crawford was no longer capable.

Now Serena said her pulse was weak, probably because she was tired too, Isabelle Willow didn't even understand herself.

"Aunt Yara, your pulse is weak. Let me give you an acupuncture treatment and prescribe some medicine for you to take. You'll get better soon."

"Okay, thank you, Serena~"

Serena Sterling gave Isabelle Willow a needle and then left. Isabelle Willow tidied up her design drafts when a melodic ringtone rang, and she received a call.

Isabelle Willow pressed the button to answer, and a familiar voice quickly came through, "Sister, you finally came back."

It was... Zelda Willow, who hadn't been seen in many years.

Far away in Aethelgard, Zelda Willow had quickly received the news that Isabelle Willow had returned, so she called that night.

Isabelle Willow's clear almond eyes remained calm, "Are you looking for me for something?"

"Actually, it's nothing big, but since you're back, you should find some time to finalize the divorce with Jude, right? Or... are you still attached to him and hoping to reunite?"

"Sister, you have such a big heart. Jude himself caused your daughter's death. Back then, even having a cesarean couldn't save the daughter. It seems Jude ordered someone to throw her into the trash, right? So pitiful. After all this, you can still stay with him?"

Isabelle Willow knew Zelda Willow was deliberately provoking her; she wouldn't fall for it, but over the years, thinking of her daughter still felt like stabbing pain.

She admitted she was hurt.

"I will divorce Jude Crawford. Don't call me again," Isabelle Willow directly hung up the phone.

After hanging up, Isabelle Willow thought for a while, then found Jude Crawford's number and dialed it.

The phone rang once before it was picked up in an unhurried manner, and Jude Crawford's unique deep voice slowly came through, "Hello."

"It's me. Are you free tomorrow? Let's finalize the divorce papers."

On the other end, Jude Crawford remained silent.

Isabelle Willow clutched the phone tightly, as she had always feared his silence before because he would get quite angry after falling silent, which was very dangerous.

Time seemed to stretch endlessly, and then Jude Crawford spoke, "Alright, I'm free tomorrow."

Isabelle Willow released her tightly clenched fingers, "Okay, then let's meet at eight o'clock in the morning outside the Civil Affairs Bureau."

"I'll pick you up."

"No need..."

"I'm just informing you, not asking for your opinion."

"Beep beep," Jude Crawford directly hung up the call.

Isabelle Willow, "..."

...

The next morning.

Serena Sterling and Isabelle Willow were having breakfast together in the dining room, "Aunt Yara, do you have any plans today?"

"I have to go and finalize the divorce with Jude Crawford today," said Isabelle Willow.

Serena Sterling paused, and just then, a melodic ringtone sounded, it was Jude Crawford calling Isabelle Willow.

Isabelle Willow pressed the button to answer, and Jude Crawford's low magnetic voice came through the receiver, slowly reaching her ears, "Come out, I'm outside."

He had already come to pick her up.

Isabelle Willow hung up the phone, picked up her bag, and waved goodbye to Serena Sterling, "Serena, I'm going out first."

"Aunt Yara, do you need me to accompany you?" Serena Sterling felt something was strange, Jude Crawford had been looking for Aunt Yara for so many years; how could he let go so easily?

"No need," Isabelle Willow left.

Serena Sterling still felt uneasy; she took out her phone and dialed Hayden Crawford's number.

Now, Hayden Crawford was in the dining room of his villa, dressed in a bespoke white shirt and black trousers. The brilliant morning light filtered through the polished floor-to-ceiling windows, casting on his handsome features, as he held an expensive watch on his wrist and a business finance newspaper, looking down to read.