

## **Substitute B 711**

Chapter 711: Hayden Crawford Is Playing with Fire!

At this moment, a melodious ringtone sounded; it was a call from Serena Sterling.

Hayden Crawford immediately curled his thin lips, a faint sense of joy and affection spilling from his deep, narrow eyes. He answered the call, "Hello."

"Good morning, Mr. Crawford~" Serena's sweet voice came through.

"Morning. Why are you so eager to call me today?" Receiving her call this early made Hayden feel quite flattered.

"Mr. Crawford, I have something important. Your parents scheduled a divorce at the Civil Affairs Bureau today, and Aunt Yara is already in your dad's car."

Hayden's handsome brows knitted together, and he remained silent for a few seconds.

"Mr. Crawford, I don't think today is a good day, and the divorce is likely not going to happen. I feel a bit uneasy. Should I go over and take a look?"

Hayden pressed his thin lips together, "Alright, I'll drive over to pick you up later."

"Okay, sure." Serena hung up the phone.

Hayden put down the phone. At that moment, footsteps sounded from upstairs as the girl came down.

The girl's clothes from yesterday were soaked, and now she was wearing a white dress Hayden had someone prepare for her. She was slender and beautiful, like a fragile butterfly that invoked a protective instinct.

The girl walked down and entered the dining room. Her big watery eyes looked at Hayden, and her small hands timidly clutched the hem of her dress, "Thank you... sir, for rescuing me last night..."

The girl's voice was soft and melodious, like that of a sweet oriole.

Hayden sat in the dining chair without moving. He lifted his deep, narrow eyes to look at the girl, "What's your name?"

"I'm... Caroline Sloan..."

"Where did the jade pendant around your neck come from?"

Caroline quickly raised her hand, defensively clutching the jade pendant around her neck, "It... it was given to me by an older brother..."

Older brother...

Hayden recalled years ago in that icy and snowy place. He was about to reach his limit, but a voice kept talking in his ear — Older brother, you must hold on! Older brother? Older brother!

Caroline carefully watched Hayden's handsome face, seeming small and timid under his refined and powerful aura.

Hayden looked at Caroline, his handsome features showing no emotion at all, making it impossible to guess what he was thinking, "Where are you going now? I'll have the driver take you."

"No need, I'll take the bus home myself. Thank you, sir." Caroline gave Hayden a deep bow and then turned to leave.

"This is my contact information. If you have any difficulties in the future, you can call me." Hayden suddenly said.

Corvus came over at this moment and handed a note to Caroline, with Hayden's phone number on it.

Caroline hesitated for a moment before accepting the note. She glanced back at Hayden again, then turned and left.

Caroline left, and Corvus approached Hayden, "Master, you brought Caroline Sloan home and even gave her your contact information. If Miss Summer finds out about this, she won't let it go easily. When that happens... it might be hard to deal with."

Hayden's gaze once again fell on the financial newspaper in his hand, "Then make sure Serena doesn't find out about Caroline Sloan's existence, understand?"

"..." Corvus sincerely thought... Master, you're playing with fire, Miss Summer is not easy to fool!

...

After breakfast, Hayden stepped out of the villa's gate and got into the luxury Rolls Royce Phantom. Corvus drove in the front, and the luxury car sped smoothly on the road to pick up Serena Sterling.

Hayden opened WeChat to send Serena Sterling a message: soon at your downstairs.

Serena quickly replied: I'm already downstairs, waiting for you~

Seeing her soft and sticky "ya," Hayden could imagine her leaning on his shoulder, whispering to him. His prominent Adam's apple moved up and down twice. He typed in the input box: Since we're going to the Civil Affairs Bureau, let's seize the opportunity and get our marriage certificate.

He wanted to get the marriage certificate with her; this way, he could... legally sleep with her every night, and open his eyes to see her every morning.

Hayden wanted to send the message, but just then, a phone call suddenly came in.

Who called?

Hayden pressed the button to answer, and Caroline's timid and panicked voice immediately came from the other end, "Help me... Please help me..."

Caroline encountered danger and was now calling him for help.

Hayden showed no expression, his deep magnetic voice remained unwavering, "Where are you now?"

"I'm at... the Holiday Express Hotel..." Caroline cried in fear, her oriole-like voice sobbing softly, making one wish they could sprout wings and fly to her side to save the damsel in distress.

Hayden hung up the phone and looked up at Corvus in front, "Change direction, head to the Holiday Express Hotel immediately!"

Corvus didn't eavesdrop on purpose, but he had already heard Caroline calling for help to his master, and now his master was changing course to go rescue her.

Corvus, "..."

Alright then, as long as the master is happy.

Corvus turned the steering wheel, and the luxury Rolls Royce Phantom headed in another direction.

...

Serena had already gone downstairs and was waiting for Hayden.

But she waited and waited, and he never showed up.

Huh, he just sent a WeChat saying he'd be downstairs soon, where did he go now?

Really strange.

At this moment, her phone rang; Hayden was calling.

Serena quickly answered the call, "Hello, Mr. Crawford, where are you now? I haven't seen you."

"Serena, I'm sorry, something urgent came up. I can't come pick you up."

"Mr. Crawford, what's so urgent? Do you need my help?"

"No, it's a company matter."

Serena nodded, "Okay then, you go handle your business first. I'll go by myself, you can leave your parents' matters to me."

...

The main door of the Holiday Express Hotel was suddenly pushed open, a cold wind blew in, followed by a group of burly men in black who flooded in and surrounded the place.

The hotel owner rushed over hurriedly, even losing a slipper along the way, "Who... who are you people? We run a legitimate business here, haven't done anything wrong."

At this moment, a tall, handsome figure came into view, Hayden had arrived.

Hayden's deep, narrow eyes fell on the owner, giving him a cold glance, "Which room is Caroline Sloan in?"

Hayden's aura of authority without anger had already weakened the owner's legs, "In... in room 302, I'll... I'll take you there."

The owner quickly acted as a guide.

Chapter 712: Big Brother, You Came Too Late!

The budget hotel owner took Hayden Crawford to a door, stammering, "Car... Caroline Sloan is inside."

A bodyguard in black stepped forward and kicked open the door.

Inside the room, Caroline Sloan's hands and feet were tied with ropes, and a fat man wielding a whip was continuously hitting her, an evil and lewd smile on his face.

Caroline was already frail, weak and delicate, and it was clear that she had been whipped many times before Hayden Crawford arrived. Now, the blood seeped out, staining her white dress, looking shocking to the eye.

The brutal abuse hadn't stopped, as the fat man swung the whip again with a "snap," hitting her once more, cursing, "Caroline Sloan, tell me, where did you go last night? Did you cheat on me? You're such a cheap person, itching all over without a beating!"

At this moment, a thunderous sound of the kicked door came, causing the fat man's hand holding the whip to pause, "Who? Who dares disrupt my good deed!"

In the next second, the fat man stiffened because he saw a group of sturdy black-clad bodyguards by the door, and then the tall and handsome figure of Hayden Crawford came into view.

Hayden Crawford strode in with resolute steps, his deep and narrow eyes settling lightly on the fat man.

The fat man was quite notorious in the area, with no fear of heaven or earth, but he was somewhat knowledgeable. Now seeing such a scene, he knew things were bad. When he met Hayden Crawford's deep eyes like icy pools, his scalp tingled even more.

The fat man's aura immediately shrank, "You... who are you people? How can you trespass into someone else's room unauthorized..."

Before the fat man finished his words, two black-clad bodyguards stepped forward, snatched the whip from his hand, and directly subdued him.

"Ah, let me go! You... you are violating my human rights... what on earth do you want to do?" The fat man struggled.

Hayden Crawford stepped forward with long strides, coming to Caroline Sloan's side.

Caroline Sloan was already beaten till her breath was wandering, she weakly raised her head, her big, watery eyes pitifully looking at Hayden Crawford, "Sir... thank you..."

Corvus stepped forward, loosened the ropes, and Caroline Sloan's weak body directly fell towards Hayden Crawford.

Hayden Crawford extended a strong arm, catching Caroline Sloan's frail body.

Caroline Sloan fell in Hayden Crawford's arms, tears streaming down her face, she stared blankly at Hayden Crawford, "Why do I... feel you're so familiar, what's... your name, why do you always appear when I'm desperate..."

At this moment, the fat man cursed, "Caroline Sloan, I'm still here, and you are flirting with another man right in front of me, do you think I'm dead?"

"This gentleman, Caroline Sloan is my wife, we have a marriage certificate, we are legally married, you'd better not interfere with other people's family affairs."

Hayden Crawford furrowed his handsome brow.

At this moment, Corvus spoke, "Shut up! This gentleman is Mr. Crawford!"

Mr. Crawford?

Caroline Sloan shivered all over at hearing those words, she looked at Hayden Crawford's handsome face, murmuring absentmindedly, "Hayden... Hayden..."

She slowly lifted her small hand, held the jade pendant around her neck, her fingertips lingering on the word "Crawford" on it, "Are you... my... big brother?"

Hayden Crawford looked at Caroline Sloan's face covered in tears, remained silent for a few seconds, then nodded, "Yes, I am."

Caroline Sloan's pupils shrank, she was shocked, bewildered, but also filled with massive joy and sorrow, "Big... big brother, you finally came... you said... said you'd come to get me, but I've waited for you all these years, yet you didn't appear... you're late, you came so late..."

Hayden Crawford didn't reveal any emotional fluctuations, but he took off his coat, draped it over Caroline Sloan's frail shoulders, and then picked her up horizontally.

Hayden Crawford left with Caroline Sloan.

"Hey, where are you taking my wife, she's my wife!" The fat man yelled out behind.

Hayden Crawford carrying Caroline Sloan out, Caroline kept crying, her emotions very intense, pressing her tearful face against Hayden Crawford's chest, soon soaking the front of his clothes with tears.

Corvus respectfully pulled open the rear door of the Rolls-Royce luxury car, Hayden Crawford entered with Caroline Sloan, and the luxury car quickly sped away.

At this time, someone standing at the roadside took this scene all in.

That person was Iris Crawford, who had just flown to Westria.

Iris Crawford had previously funded a girl from a mountainous area, who was particularly obedient and motivated, she liked her very much and had once brought her to stay with the Crawford family for a while.

But that girl's fate was poor, wandering around. She recently heard that the girl was sold by her family to a thug who liked domestic violence; worried, she came to check.

That girl is... Caroline Sloan.

Iris Crawford stood outside, had seen Hayden Crawford carrying Caroline Sloan out just now, she never expected to see Hayden Crawford here.

For these three years, she had intermittently learned some things about Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling from the Crawford's matriarch. She knew Serena Sterling had given birth to triplets for Hayden Crawford.

Iris Crawford really liked Serena Sterling very much; this is the girl she most adored, intelligent, pure and unique, without comparison. She once wanted to pair Serena Sterling with Zane Crawford, but later events made her abandon the thought.

Now, Iris Crawford stood here in shock watching Hayden Crawford's intimate manner with Caroline Sloan, genuinely puzzled about how these two got entangled together?

Does Serena Sterling know about this?

Iris Crawford quickly took out her phone; with a "click," she captured the scene of Hayden Crawford carrying Caroline Sloan.

Iris Crawford was quite indignant, having suffered personal grievances because of Isabelle Willow, rolling down stairs during nine months of pregnancy, resulting in her child being forcibly separated from her womb, and making her infertile. She understood all too well the hardships a girl endures to bear children for a man, especially triplets, felt deeply for Serena Sterling.

Now seeing Hayden Crawford entangled with Caroline Sloan, even though Caroline Sloan was a student she funded and favored, she couldn't tolerate it.

She felt Hayden Crawford had betrayed Serena Sterling!

Iris Crawford wanted to send the photo to Serena Sterling, but just then, a melodious phone ring sounded, a call was coming in.

It was Zelda Willow calling.

Iris Crawford had long since stopped recognizing Isabelle Willow as her sister-in-law, only acknowledging Zelda Willow, also having cherished Zane Crawford for many years.

Iris Crawford pressed the key to answer, "Hello, sister-in-law."

Chapter 713: You're Blushing

Zelda Willow's voice quickly came through, "Hey, Iris, there's something I need to tell you, Isabelle Willow is back!"

Isabelle Willow is back!

This sentence exploded in Iris Crawford's ears, her whole body felt electrified. She never imagined that Isabelle Willow, who was thought to have perished in the ocean and disappeared for more than twenty years, would actually return.

Isabelle Willow, she was simply her nightmare, the Crawford family's nightmare.

It was a long while before Iris Crawford found her voice, "Where is she now?"

"Today she went with your brother to get the divorce certificate, but Iris, your brother has been captivated by Isabelle Willow for so many years. I'm afraid they might rekindle their relationship, so please help me keep an eye on things. I will fly over soon."

"Okay." Iris Crawford nodded and then hung up the phone.

Putting her phone away, Iris Crawford returned to her car, pressed down on the gas pedal, and headed straight for the civil affairs bureau to find Isabelle Willow.

She just wanted to ask Isabelle Willow how she had the nerve to come back.

The Crawford family, a noble family in Aethelgard, had a pair of children born to the matriarch. Originally, the Crawford family was thriving, warm, and harmonious, but since her brother Jude Crawford married Isabelle Willow, the family grew cold, scattered, her life was ruined, Mrs. Crawford shed so many tears, Jude Crawford's thirty years of life vanished in the blink of an eye.

Sometimes Iris Crawford often wondered why someone like Isabelle Willow appeared in this world, how great it would be if she hadn't!

Everyone, suffered and agonized because of her.

...

Isabelle Willow exited the villa gates, and from a distance, she saw a luxury car on the lawn. Now, next to the car stood a steady and tall figure; Jude Crawford had arrived, waiting for her, with one hand in his pocket, holding a cigarette casually between two fingers.

The smoke blurred his deep and defined features; his expression was unclear, only the taut 'chuan'-shaped furrow of his brows could be vaguely seen.

Isabelle Willow slowly stopped, unable to take another step forward, it seemed as if mountains and rivers separated them.

Once, regarding the top business aristocrat in Aethelgard, there were rumors that one meeting with Jude Crawford could lead to a lifetime of mistakes.

Back then, she didn't understand the meaning of those words, but now she knew firsthand what they meant, and in many years to come, Isabelle Willow deeply grasped their significance.

Seemingly sensing her gaze, Jude Crawford lifted his head amidst the smoke, his profound eyes immediately landing on her.

Isabelle Willow could only lift her foot and walk over.

Jude Crawford threw the half-smoked cigarette on the ground and extinguished it with his polished black shoes. He looked at her, "You're here?"

"Yes," Isabelle Willow nodded, "Let's go."

She intended to open the back car door and sit in the back.

But suddenly, Jude Crawford's deep voice came to her ear, "Sit in the front."

Isabelle Willow looked up at him; the front passenger seat is generally reserved for one's wife, given their current relationship, it was not suitable.

However, Jude Crawford had already turned and gotten into the driver's seat, casually saying, "I'm not your driver."

One sentence blocked countless words, and Isabelle Willow could only sit in the front passenger seat.

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The luxury car sped down the road, the cabin was very quiet, Isabelle Willow didn't speak, and Jude Crawford focused on driving.

Getting closer to the civil affairs bureau, Isabelle Willow spoke up, "Did you bring your ID, household registration?"

Jude Crawford didn't look at her, just nodded and hummed, "Yes."

"Did you bring the marriage certificate as well?"

This time Jude Crawford moved, arching his sword-like brows and turning his head to look at her cold features, "Do you need the marriage certificate for a divorce as well?"

"Yes, you didn't... forget it, did you? I remember... our marriage certificate was kept by you, you put it away."

Jude Crawford faintly curled his thin lips, seemingly amused, "Your memory is quite good."

"..." Isabelle Willow couldn't believe he said this without ulterior motives, every action he took, every word he said was meticulously calculated, no one could outplay him.

Isabelle Willow didn't want to pay attention to him, so she turned to look outside the window.

At this time, his deep magnetic voice came to her ear, with a hint of laughter, "Are you angry?"

"No."

Isabelle Willow had just denied it when his large hand reached over, pinched her cool cheek, "Don't be angry, okay?"

He patiently coaxed her in a low voice, overflowing with tenderness, Isabelle Willow's face turned red; he was still the same as many years ago, liked to pinch her cheek, liked to say inappropriate things to make her angry, then come to comfort her.

"Don't touch me." Isabelle Willow struggled, pushing away his large hand.

Jude Crawford did not force her; he withdrew his hand but remarked at the blush on her cheeks, "You're blushing."

Isabelle Willow lifted her head, looking at the polished car window, the reflection showing her blushing face at this moment.

"It's been so many years, how can you still blush so easily, like a little girl." Jude Crawford seemed to be teasing her.

Isabelle Willow didn't engage with his topic, but earlier, his rough fingertip had pinched her cheek, the sensation remaining, identical to the spring dream she had one night.

"You didn't bring the marriage certificate, then we can't get the divorce certificate today," she said.

Jude Crawford frowned, seeming to contemplate, "That's really a shame, I've thrown our marriage certificate away, it's gone in the trash."

What?

Isabelle Willow turned her head, shocked as she looked at him, "You threw away the marriage certificate, when did you do that?"

"I don't remember, it was a long time ago, probably after you gave birth to Hayden, some time you refused to let me into the room, I angrily threw the marriage certificate away. I thought, anyway, a wife is just an accessory, she can't scold or be touched, you made me angry, so I threw the certificate away."

"..." Isabelle Willow was speechless, "What now?"

"How about we go to the civil affairs bureau and get a new marriage certificate first?" Jude Crawford kindly suggested.

Isabelle Willow was dumbfounded, they had arranged to go to the civil affairs bureau for a divorce today, but things took a dramatic turn, the divorce certificate turned into a wedding certificate?

Isabelle Willow couldn't help but suspect that all this was part of Jude Crawford's calculation, he always strategized, capable of planning everything.

Isabelle Willow hadn't said anything yet when suddenly a car emerged ahead, directly blocking their path.

"Jude Crawford, watch out!" Isabelle Willow instinctively cried out.

The car came out too suddenly, Jude Crawford reacted quickly, he turned the steering wheel left, "Boom," a dull crash sounded, his forehead directly hit the windshield, but the car stopped.

"Jude Crawford, are you okay, you're injured!" Isabelle Willow leaned over quickly, raising her hand to support his hit forehead, "Does it hurt?"

#### Chapter 714: She Is Your Calamity

Jude Crawford looked up and met Isabelle Willow's clear apricot eyes. Now she was furrowing her willow-leaf eyebrows, looking at him with anxiety and concern.

Isabelle Willow quickly realized she had overreacted, her hand still on his forehead. She swiftly withdrew her hand.

At this moment, the driver's door of the car in front opened, and Iris Crawford stepped out.

It was Iris Crawford.

Isabelle Willow hadn't seen Iris Crawford for many years. Now, through the windshield, she could clearly see Iris Crawford's gaze fixed on her, full of hatred.

If not for the enormous hatred, Iris Crawford wouldn't have driven so crazily to force their car to a stop.

Isabelle Willow reached out, intending to open the passenger car door.

But then Jude Crawford's deep voice sounded, "I'll go down, you stay in the car."

Isabelle Willow turned to look at Jude Crawford, "Your sister is here for me. I'll go down to meet her."

Jude Crawford's thin lips curved slightly, his voice turning a bit colder, "What's the point of meeting? To provoke her?"

Isabelle Willow's fingers curled as she heard the sharp sarcasm in his words, and she lowered her fluttering lashes.

At this moment, Jude Crawford opened the driver's door and got out. He even locked the luxury car, afraid she might get out; he locked her inside directly.

Outside, Jude Crawford approached Iris Crawford, his face steady. The fifty-something business tycoon could easily exude a few traces of displeasure and authoritative power. He looked at Iris Crawford and reprimanded her in a low voice, "Iris Crawford, are you out of your mind? Is the road yours?"

Iris Crawford glanced at Isabelle Willow in the car, then back at Jude Crawford, "Brother, let Isabelle Willow get out of the car, I have something to say to her!"

Jude Crawford showed no expression, merely lifted his thin lips indifferently, "If you have something to say, say it to me."

"Brother!" Iris Crawford cried out emotionally, "It's been so many years, yet you haven't changed at all. You always protect her like this, keeping her shielded behind you, protecting her thoroughly, making the world's storms pass over her and come to you!"

Iris Crawford had seen Isabelle Willow, and even after more than twenty years, Isabelle Willow hadn't changed a bit.

The once renowned cold and talented woman, her exquisite beauty and captivating talent hadn't withered one bit, and what troubled Iris Crawford the most was that Isabelle Willow was still the same maiden.

A woman in her forties or fifties living like a young girl, both Seraphina Linden and Isabelle Willow were like this, but they were completely different.

Seraphina Linden was naturally playful, lively, and innocent, making herself live like a young girl, whereas Isabelle Willow was pampered by a man, nurtured by Jude Crawford!

Over thirty years ago, Isabelle Willow married Jude Crawford. Jude Crawford built high walls, and with great care, preserved her in luxury. During those years, no matter the storms, even if the world turned upside down, he would always reach out to shelter her, protecting her tightly behind him.

All these years, Isabelle Willow has always been herself, dedicated only to design, sketching and drawing with a pen, with Jude Crawford always by her side, holding an umbrella, shielding her from everything.

So even now, Isabelle Willow's brows and eyes are still as pristine and clean, untouched by worldly matters. She married Jude Crawford at 19, and even now, she remains pure and shy, blushing at a few words from a man.

Iris Crawford truly didn't understand how Isabelle Willow could live like this, why she could live like this?

Is the difference in women's lives really just a Jude Crawford?

She never met a man like Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford looked at Iris Crawford's intense manner and furrowed his brows, "Calm your emotions first, and think about what you want to say to me. The way you are now, we have no reason to communicate, so I won't waste my time. I'm leaving."

Jude Crawford turned to leave.

But Iris Crawford quickly ran over to block Jude Crawford; she saw the wound on Jude Crawford's forehead, it had bumped into the windshield, hadn't bled, but swelled into a large bump.

"Brother, you're hurt, you turned the wheel to the left, didn't you? Look, just look, you couldn't bear to let Isabelle Willow suffer even a little bit of harm, you'd rather turn the wheel to the left and hurt yourself!"

"Brother, wake up, Isabelle Willow doesn't love you at all, not even a little. You took her by force; all she thinks about is that first love of hers. You can imprison her, but she still climbed into my husband's bed, cuckolding you!"

Jude Crawford quietly listened to her finish her accusations. His face showed no expression, but his deep-set narrow eyes were as dark as a night sky, thick and unfathomable, "Finished?"

"Not finished! Brother, it was Isabelle Willow who killed my child. My baby was nine months old, a boy, and when he was delivered, he was so big, but his body was bruised, lifeless, his body slowly stiffened, I couldn't save him, I just couldn't!"

"Brother, all these years, every night I dream of my dead child, I dream of him running to me, crying, 'Mommy save me!'"

"I can't have children anymore, I don't even have the basic rights of a woman, I can't be a mommy, I will never have my own children, and even so, why did Isabelle Willow have to come back, why did she have to appear before me again, how can you all be so cruel to me, what did I do so wrong!"

Iris Crawford's emotions completely collapsed, her eyes turning red as she shouted and screamed at Jude Crawford.

After all, it was his own sister, saying it didn't hurt would be a lie. Jude Crawford reached out a big hand to hold Iris Crawford's trembling shoulders, "Iris Crawford, calm down first."

"Brother, how can I calm down, I am your own sister, blood is thicker than water, but you've been captivated by Isabelle Willow, back then when my child died, you still protected her completely, she is your damn downfall, Jude!"

The sibling's feelings, after all, were hurt that time, a rift appeared. Jude Crawford pursed his thin lips. At this moment, a clear and melodious voice suddenly came from his ear, "Principal Yara, what a coincidence, what are you doing here?"

Jude Crawford looked up; Serena Sterling had arrived.

Iris Crawford also saw Serena Sterling. Today, Serena Sterling wore a chiffon dress, poised like a water lily, gracefully standing there, her bright and lively eyes gazing at her, with a gentle and warm smile.

Iris Crawford's collapsed and intense emotions slowly calmed down, she haphazardly wiped the tears from her face, then forced a smile, "Serena, what brings you here?"

Iris Crawford's fondness for Serena Sterling was genuine.

## Chapter 715: Let Yourself Go

Serena walked forward, reaching out her small hand to take Iris Crawford's arm. Iris's entire body was now stiff, her skin cold, devoid of warmth. Serena smiled gently and said, "Principal Iris, I heard you came, so I came to see you. It's been more than three years since we last met, and I haven't seen you for a long time."

Iris Crawford sensed Serena's warm and soft body temperature. Her eyes twinkled playfully at her, conveying an endless warmth.

Iris's stiff body gradually relaxed. She raised her hand to tidy her disheveled hair by her cheek, and returned to her usual cold and noble appearance of the eldest daughter of the Crawford family, the strong-willed and coldly beautiful female principal, "Serena, it has indeed been many years since we last met."

Serena looked at Jude Crawford, "Uncle Jude, since Principal Iris and I haven't seen each other for a long time and have things to talk about, you should leave first."

Iris could see that Serena was resolving the situation for Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow, but she was unable to refuse this warm and delicate girl, so she could only let Jude go for now.

"Brother, we'll talk next time."

Jude Crawford took a look at Serena and then at Iris, then turned around and got into the luxury car, which sped away with Isabelle Willow.

After the two left, Iris patted Serena's small hand, "Serena, I let them go, that should please you."

Serena turned back to hold Iris's cold hand, "Principal Iris, I admit I wanted you to let them go, but I also hope you can let yourself go."

Iris's eyes suddenly turned red, she shook her head with sorrow and confusion, "For so many years, I've lived in pain. I've thought about... letting myself go, but I don't know how to let go, and no one has taught or helped me on how to let go."

Serena is also a mom now. Two years ago, she narrowly survived to give birth to Caden, Pip, and Stella, so she deeply understands the harm and pain Iris suffered back then, a pain that can't heal throughout one's life.

But, the events from more than thirty years ago hold too many uncertainties. Serena knows Aunt Yara very well, and Aunt Yara was definitely not that kind of person!

"Principal Iris, I can help you now, but you must open your heart and tell me everything you knew and saw back then, in great detail. Can you do that?"

Serena knows that everything from over thirty years ago is like a nightmare for Iris, a past she cannot bear to recall. Now she has to peel away the scars in Iris's heart layer by layer, making her relive the pain. She's unsure if Iris is willing to go through that.

However, she needs to hear it from Iris because she was the most direct witness back then.

The key point is that Iris experienced a significant psychological trauma and suffers from severe psychological disorders!

Just now, in front of Jude Crawford, her emotions were drastically out of control, which is the best proof, but throughout these years, Iris still hasn't accepted any psychological counseling, indicating she hid this from everyone.

Mrs. Crawford, Jude Crawford, Isabelle Willow... they all do not know.

This situation is terrible. In the years while Isabelle was away, Iris could pretend to live like a normal person, but now that Isabelle is back, it's a trigger. She's afraid that Iris's psychological trauma will continue to escalate and eventually... something unexpected might happen.

If anything happens to Iris, the Crawford family will truly become cold.

So Serena wants to take this opportunity to open up Iris's heart and have her tell everything, gradually healing the scars in her heart, and personally unraveling the mysteries that have shrouded the Crawford family for over thirty years, lifting the gloom from everyone's hearts.

Iris's face was pale, white as a sheet of paper. If it were anyone else, she wouldn't be willing to cooperate, especially regarding the past, regarding... Clyde Gardner, she wouldn't want to mention even a word.

But the person in front of her was Serena, and now Serena's warm body heat continuously comforts her cold skin. Her clear eyes were full of strength, with a light that constantly calms and encourages her.

Iris wondered if she should give herself a chance?

Iris closed her eyes briefly, then said, "Serena, let's talk in the car."

...

The two of them got into the car, and the silent cabin isolated them from the chaotic world outside. Iris was filled with exhaustion and slowly said,

"Back then, Clyde Gardner and I grew up as childhood sweethearts. He was the noble son of the Garner family in Aethelgard, and I was the heiress of the Crawford family. Our families had arranged our marriage very early on."

"We were both very outstanding from a young age, competing for the top spot from elementary to university. He treated me very well, and I loved him deeply. I knew early on that I would marry him in the future and become Mrs. Gardner."

"Later, we got married. Clyde and I were the first to marry. In the first year of our marriage, we were inseparable, deeply in love, and I quickly got pregnant with our baby. I thought... we would always be happy and joyful like this, but... but..."

Iris choked up, the word "but" stuck in her throat, causing even breathing to hurt, "But... my brother married Isabelle Willow, and all my happiness, my life, seemed to stop with Isabelle Willow's appearance that year."

"I still remember the first time I saw Isabelle Willow, over thirty years ago. The entire Aethelgard was saying that having daughters was better than having sons, as the Willow daughters were famed throughout the capital. My first encounter with Isabelle was not seeing her in person, but seeing the jewelry she designed on a top-tier runway. Her jewelry, once showcased, amazed everyone, including me. Her designs were ethereal, innovative, and freely unique, absolutely unprecedented. I was deeply shocked and kept wondering what kind of girl could design such jewelry."

"Later one day, my brother returned to the Crawford family and told our mom, 'Mom, I've fallen in love with a girl. It's serious, I want to marry her.' In the grand wedding that shocked Aethelgard, I saw Isabelle Willow being ushered into the bridal chamber from the crowd. The 19-year-old Isabelle was cool and dazzling, like a fairy untouched by earthly matters."

"That was when I learned that she was Isabelle Willow and that my brother's beloved girl was Isabelle Willow."

"I really liked Isabelle Willow. I once sneaked into Jill's room to see Isabelle several times, and once, I unintentionally spied on my brother and Isabelle getting intimate in the study."

"At that time, Isabelle had attempted to escape on the eve of her wedding but was captured back. Her first love had his right leg broken and was in the hospital needing massive medical expenses. My brother used this as leverage to threaten Isabelle. That day in the study, my brother was smoking, and there was a stack of files scattered on the desk. He tapped his thigh, gesturing for Isabelle to sit on it."

#### Chapter 716: Serving Me Is Your Duty

That day, Jude Crawford wore a custom-made white shirt and black trousers. He was still in his youthful prime, unbearably handsome. Sitting on the office chair, he held a cigarette between his two slender fingers, and with a hand adorned with a scarlet flame, he pointed at Isabelle Willow, "Come over, sit on my lap."

Isabelle Willow was only barely 19 at the time, nurtured in seclusion. She raised her eyes to look at him, her small hands clutching her skirt, unwilling to move over.

"If you don't come over, then get out. But I will also have Chase Sullivan thrown out of the hospital!" Jude Crawford smoked a cigarette as he threatened.

Isabelle Willow trembled then and could only step over with her thin legs.

Jude Crawford, Aethelgard's first eminent businessman, had just returned from the company. A pile of documents was scattered on the desk; his tie loosened and hung carelessly around his neck, exuding a few traces of a wicked charm in the business elite aura. That mature man's scent was overwhelmingly attractive, yet it also made the 19-year-old Isabelle Willow too afraid to get close or to touch.

Jude Crawford clamped the cigarette between his thin lips, then reached out and pulled her onto his lap with one swift motion.

When Isabelle Willow stumbled and sat down, she was sideways with her legs closed. Before she could react, she heard his lowered voice from above, "Sit on my lap, do you understand?"

Isabelle Willow's lashes fluttered in surprise, gazing at him in a daze.

The clear and pure appearance of the girl was unparalleled in the man's eyes, especially since she was such a cold and exceptional talent. Jude Crawford's eyes were burning hot.

By then, they had already experienced the wedding night. Isabelle Willow saw his passionate and fierce desire reflected from the jumping flames in his narrow eyes. It was familiar to her, prompting her to struggle immediately.

But Jude Crawford grasped her soft waist with his large hands, directly changing her position into straddling his sturdy thighs.

Iris Crawford was just outside the door watching. She initially intended to see Isabelle Willow but ended up witnessing her brother's intimate moment with her sister-in-law...

This was in the study.

Iris Crawford, who had married first and was already well-versed in the matters between a couple, now seeing this scene, she could guess what her brother intended to do.

In Iris Crawford's impression, her brother had always been an extraordinary individual, untouched by women with a kind of abstinence. Sometimes she even thought her brother's standards were too high, and he might not find a woman he favored, or perhaps he wasn't interested in such matters of romance between men and women.

But she was wrong.

Witnessing her brother's current state totally upended Iris Crawford's understanding of him over the past decade. She was blushing red, felt she ought to leave quickly, but yet was too curious to look away.

People were very curious about the married life between Aethelgard's first businessman Jude Crawford and the capital's most celebrated cold talent, Isabelle Willow.

Isabelle Willow refused to sit there in such a manner. She pressed against him with her small hands and spoke in a soft, gentle voice, "Jude Crawford, let me go!"

Jude Crawford domineeringly restrained her, making her unable to move. He curled his thin lips teasingly, "Not listening again, are you?"

Isabelle Willow stopped struggling, "Chase, he..."

"Kiss me." Jude Crawford interrupted her directly.

Isabelle Willow's lashes quivered violently; constrained by his threat, she could only lean in and give a light peck on his thin lips.

Jude Crawford cupped the back of her head, immediately turning the tables.

Iris Crawford was just outside the door at the time, hearing the soft, involuntary sounds of Isabelle Willow. That coerced, tender, unrestrained sound made even Iris melt completely.

When Isabelle Willow was nearly out of breath, Jude Crawford released her, his hoarse voice carrying a hint of coaxing, "Undo my belt."

Isabelle Willow began to struggle desperately.

Jude Crawford easily controlled her; their noses nearly touching as he gazed at her cold and stunning little face. He spoke low to her, half-threatening, half-soothing, as if coaxing a girl in the palm of his hand, "I told you last time if you want to discuss Chase's matters, you must first appease me, undo my belt. You squirming in my embrace has already made me uncomfortable."

Isabelle Willow's face turned crimson, desperately avoiding his breath.

"Blushing again? No worries, you'll get used to it over time. You're my Mrs. Crawford, tending to me is your duty."

Iris Crawford almost had to cover her ears; she never imagined her noble and elegant brother would actually...

Soon, the sound of a metal buckle being undone echoed in her ears. Iris Crawford could no longer bear to watch what was happening inside and turned to leave.

But just as she moved, those inside heard the noise.

"Who?"

Jude Crawford's low, hoarse voice immediately called out, tinged with sternness.

Iris Crawford glanced back, her eyes meeting Jude Crawford's piercing gaze through the gap in the door; his eyes were filled with a craving redness.

Ah! Somebody's here, Isabelle Willow gasped, terrified, instinctively burrowing into Jude Crawford's embrace. Jude Crawford quickly reached out to shelter her, hiding any hint of her exposure from sight.

"Bro... Brother, it's me..." Iris Crawford forced a smile.

Jude Crawford's handsome face was cold. Holding Isabelle Willow with one arm, he picked up a file from the desk with the other and hurled it at her, "Get out! Or I'll cut you up!"

Iris Crawford was so scared that she turned and ran.

Iris Crawford could still vividly recall every scene from that time. She gave a slight smile with her red lips, "I'd never seen my brother like that before; it was from that day on I truly realized that my brother was genuinely fond of Isabelle Willow."

"Back then... Clyde Gardner had come to pick me up twice. I was so foolish, too foolish to see that his gaze was already wandering. He had stood several times downstairs, looking up towards the shut main bedroom door."

"Soon, I was nine months pregnant, and the baby was very healthy. I listened to his heartbeat every day; he was so mischievous, kicking my belly every morning upon waking. I bought new clothes for the baby, arranged the nursery, and even knitted two sweaters for the baby by hand; it was my first time learning to knit. Every day I anticipated, hoping my baby would come into this world healthy and safe."

"But accidents are inevitable; nothing can be avoided."

Serena Sterling felt a chill in her heart, knowing the main event was about to begin.

Iris Crawford fell back into memories, "That day... was my birthday. We all returned to the Crawford family mansion; my brother also brought Isabelle Willow back for dinner to celebrate my birthday. Clyde Gardner was there too, along with my mom, all of my loved ones. I was so happy."

"After dinner, Isabelle Willow suddenly said she felt a bit unwell and went upstairs to rest. It wasn't long before I noticed my husband, Clyde Gardner, was missing too; the two of them disappeared together."

Chapter 717: Childhood Sweethearts Can't Compare to Her Glance

"At the time, none of us were suspicious, and I certainly didn't think twice, until... we heard a scream from upstairs, ah!"

"The scream startled us, and we quickly went upstairs, arriving at... my room. I was the first to push open the door, and I saw... a scene I will never forget in my life: Isabelle Willow and Clyde Gardner were rolling on my bed, their clothes half undone, in complete disarray."

"Afterwards... I can't remember what happened next, because my mind exploded with a loud boom. I remember running out quickly, and in my daze, I missed a step on the stairs and tumbled down. My baby... was gone!"

Tears fell from Iris Crawford's eyes in large drops, and she broke down, unable to speak further.

Serena Sterling quickly reached out and hugged Iris Crawford's trembling shoulders, gently patting her, "Iris Principal, it's all in the past."

"No..." Iris Crawford shook her head, "It won't be over... I still have nightmares every night. I lie on a cold operating table, and my baby... is ripped out of my belly... My baby's body stiffened, turning black and cold..."

Serena Sterling felt deep heartache for Iris Crawford; the loss of a child is a pain that no mother can bear. Any comforting words now seemed pale. She could only pat Iris Crawford's back, silently accompanying her, giving her strength.

Iris Crawford cried until she was exhausted, and her emotions slowly calmed down. She looked up at Serena Sterling, "Serena, so I will never forgive Isabelle Willow in my life, and you should stay away from her. She's not a good person at all!"

Serena Sterling's eyes were bright and clear, "Iris Principal, what happened back then was very strange, wasn't it? If Aunt Willow wanted to have an affair with Clyde Gardner, why choose the time and place at the Crawford family's mansion during your birthday party? Isn't that like gathering everyone and deliberately letting them catch her in the act?"

"Hmph! That's because my brother kept Isabelle Willow locked in Jill's room. She had no chance of an affair, and my birthday just happened to give her the opportunity."

"Alright, even if this makes sense, there's another possibility that Aunt Willow was framed by someone."

Iris Crawford sneered, "Serena, do you think we didn't investigate? At that time, we pulled the surveillance footage from the Crawford family mansion. After dinner, Isabelle Willow sought out Clyde Gardner and invited him into a room for a chat. Then Isabelle Willow entered the room first. Clyde Gardner couldn't resist the temptation and followed her in. They ignited instantly and rolled into a heap. These were things Clyde Gardner himself confirmed, along with the surveillance. We have both witnesses and evidence. Serena, do you still want to say that Isabelle Willow was framed?"

Serena Sterling quickly furrowed her brows. Indeed, the Crawford family was full of exceptional people. When such a big thing happened, the Crawford matriarch, the sharp housekeeper Jude Crawford, would definitely have investigated right away.

With surveillance footage and Clyde Gardner's testimony, these two solid pieces of evidence made it difficult for Aunt Willow to clear her name.

The matter was far trickier than she had initially thought.

Saying more now would only upset Iris Crawford, so Serena Sterling changed the subject, "Iris Principal, what kind of feelings did your ex-husband Clyde Gardner actually have for Aunt Willow?"

"Ha," Iris Crawford laughed, full of desolation, "Later... I opened his locked drawer, and it was full of portraits of Isabelle Willow. Back then, on that top jewelry catwalk show, it wasn't just me who was dazzled by Isabelle Willow's design, it was him too."

"Our years of emotions ultimately couldn't compare to a single glance from Isabelle Willow. He transferred his affections and fell in love with Isabelle Willow."

"When I lost the baby, I was in utter despair and filed for divorce from him. He was too ashamed and signed the divorce papers, then left the City of Aethelgard. He has been gone for decades, and I have never seen him again. Of course, I don't want to see him either."

Serena Sterling quickly revisited the entire incident in her mind, not missing any clues. Right now, her priority was still to find Clyde Gardner.

"Iris Principal, if you trust me, let me investigate this matter."

"Serena, after I've told you all this, do you still think Isabelle Willow is a good person? She..."

Serena Sterling held Iris Crawford's icy hand, "Iris Principal, if Aunt Willow is not a good person, then let me take this opportunity to uncover her true face. Is that not better?"

Iris Crawford was stunned.

Serena Sterling continued, her clear voice resonant and forceful, "If Aunt Willow is indeed a good person, that suggests there was something else going on back then. Iris Principal, do you want your baby to die in vain? Don't you want to find out who the real culprit was?"

Iris Crawford was dazed and, after a long time, showed deep fatigue, as if all the energy had drained from her body, "Alright, I'll listen to Serena."

Serena Sterling tightened her grip on Iris Crawford's hand. She always felt that there was a big hand behind the events of that year, pushing everything forward.

Since then, many things had happened between Jude Crawford and Aunt Willow. It seemed like these events were all connected, as if long ago, when no one noticed, someone had extended their hand into the Crawford family.

Or, perhaps, there has always been a pair of eyes watching over the Crawford family in the darkness.

Who is the mysterious mastermind, and what is their real purpose?

Serena Sterling felt surrounded by mysteries for a moment, as if she sensed something but couldn't grasp it.

In Serena Sterling's bright and clear eyes, sharp fragments of light slowly emerged, shining brilliantly. She never feared difficulty or danger; all mysteries would be unraveled, and everyone in the Crawford family would be freed from this suffering.

She could do it.

"Iris Principal, you look very tired. Let me drive you home to rest. From today, I'll visit you every day. Share with me the people you meet and any happy things with me."

Serena Sterling suspected that the mysterious mastermind had opened a gap through Iris Crawford, with everything starting from Iris Crawford, so she suspected that the mysterious mastermind would still target Iris Crawford.

Iris Crawford nodded, "Okay, Serena, having you to talk with is the best. By the way, Serena, I have something to tell you!"

Iris Crawford suddenly spoke with seriousness.

Serena Sterling curled her lips, "Iris Principal, go ahead. I'm listening."

"It's about Hayden Crawford, Serena, you need to be mentally prepared."

Seeing Iris Crawford's serious expression, Serena Sterling also put away her smile, "Iris Principal, what happened to Mr. Crawford? Did something happen to him?"

Chapter 718: Faded, Feelings Inevitably Fade

Looking at the anxious and concerned expression on Serena Sterling's face, Iris Crawford felt angry. She always believed Hayden Crawford didn't deserve someone as good as Serena Sterling.

"Serena, Hayden Crawford is fine, you don't need to worry. He's doing great now and even played the hero rescuing the damsel in distress. Look at this!"

Iris Crawford handed her phone with the photo to Serena Sterling.

Serena Sterling immediately saw Hayden Crawford, holding a girl in his arms. The girl was wrapped in his coat, her face buried in his chest, looking very intimate with him.

Over the years, Hayden Crawford had been surrounded by many rumors, Melody Ashworth had just been dealt with, and these flirty girls were always around him. He might go along with them occasionally, but his distance from those women was always apparent. However, this girl was different.

Serena Sterling had the legendary sharp sixth sense that women have, and she could instantly see Hayden Crawford's special regard for this girl.

Who is this girl?

She recalled that Hayden Crawford was supposed to drive over to pick her up, but he suddenly called saying something had come up at the company.

Now the truth was clear; he didn't go to the company at all but was with this girl.

He actually lied.

For so many years, it was indeed the first time Serena Sterling saw Hayden Crawford lie. He lied about being with a girl to her.

"Serena, before I came, I saw Hayden Crawford outside a budget hotel. This girl is called Caroline Sloan, she comes from a very poor family. She's married, but her husband is heavily prone to domestic violence. I heard

her husband booked a room specifically at the budget hotel to whip her. Later, you saw Hayden Crawford go and rescue her heroically. I saw him carrying Caroline Sloan away," Iris Crawford truthfully informed her.

Serena Sterling paused for a few seconds, then said, "Iris, thank you for telling me this. Let me send you home first, and then I'll go find Hayden Crawford. The most feared thing among lovers is a crisis of trust. Instead of guessing myself, I'd better ask and clarify."

Iris Crawford, looking at the composed and wise demeanor of Serena Sterling, also smiled slightly, "Serena, don't be afraid. If Hayden Crawford really betrays you, just kick him aside; there are plenty of men who like you, all waiting in line."

Serena Sterling was amused.

...

Serena Sterling first sent Iris Crawford home, and then she directly arrived at Hayden Crawford's villa.

The maid opened the villa door. Serena Sterling walked in. At this point, Corvus rushed over, "Miss Serena, why are you here all of a sudden? Why didn't you say something before coming?"

Serena Sterling chuckled, "I'm just here for a surprise attack, to see if your master is picking any wildflowers on the roadside when I'm not around?"

"..." Corvus felt guilty, his gaze flickered.

Serena Sterling caught all of Corvus's nervousness but said nothing, "Where's Hayden Crawford, upstairs?"

Saying this, she lifted her leg to head upstairs to find Hayden Crawford.

"Miss Serena," Corvus quickly blocked her, "Miss Serena, why don't you sit down first, I'll go report to the master."

Serena Sterling stopped, straightened her delicate back, and gazed at Corvus with bright eyes, saying two words, "Move aside!"

Corvus's scalp tingled; Serena Sterling was not an ordinary woman. She was an Alani girl, her aura was no less imposing than their master's, how could he dare to stop her?

Corvus obediently stepped aside, silently crying master, you see, I told you you'd end up getting burnt if you play with fire. You're done for!

Serena Sterling ascended the staircase and directly reached out to push open the guest room door. Inside, there was a strong smell of disinfectant, many doctors and nurses were in white coats, treating Caroline Sloan's wounds.

Caroline Sloan had changed into a white dress, lying softly and timidly on the bed. As the wound was touched by disinfectant, she gasped in pain, her large eyes watery and red, truly looking pitifully helpless.

Hayden Crawford stood tall and handsome on one side, watching the doctors tend to Caroline Sloan's wounds.

Just then, the door to the room opened, Hayden Crawford turned his head, quickly spotting Serena Sterling standing by the door.

"Serena, why are you here?" Hayden Crawford swiftly strode over and held Serena Sterling's soft little hand.

There was a smile on Serena Sterling's stunning face, and she blinked her feather-light lashes, "I heard you brought back a girl, so I'm here to take a look."

Hayden Crawford raised his head, a sharp glance swept over to Corvus behind him.

Corvus broke into a cold sweat, thinking master, I had nothing to do with this!

Serena Sterling's bright eyes moved from Hayden Crawford's handsome face to Caroline Sloan's, only to see Caroline also lift her big watery red eyes, looking pitifully fragile at her.

Serena Sterling walked to the bedside, looking down at Caroline Sloan, then smiled gracefully at Hayden Crawford, "Who is she, Mr. Crawford?"

Hayden Crawford found Serena Sterling's smile particularly dazzling tonight. He squeezed her soft little hand, "Her name is Caroline Sloan."

"Big Brother, I..." Caroline Sloan softly and timidly spoke up.

Serena Sterling didn't even look at her but interrupted her, "Big Brother? Mr. Crawford, how come I didn't know when Aunt Yara gave you a sister? Is she your biological sister or a love sister?"

Hayden Crawford quickly pursed his thin lips, extending his strong arm to hug Serena Sterling's slender waist, his voice lowered, whispering at her ear to coax her, "Serena, don't make a fuss. Who is my love sister you still don't know? She's just Caroline Sloan. That day it rained, my car hit her, so I brought her back."

Since Serena Sterling came in, she hadn't directly addressed Caroline Sloan; she had only been speaking with Hayden Crawford, with the imposing air of a legitimate main wife suppressing Caroline Sloan, the pitifully delicate flower. What a strong show of authority.

Sitting on the bed, Caroline Sloan was already pale as a sheet without a trace of blood; Serena Sterling perfectly embodied the phrase that in front of me, you don't even get a chance to interject!

By the door, Corvus had to give Serena Sterling a thumbs up, thinking Miss Serena coming forward surely makes a difference.

Serena Sterling pushed Hayden Crawford aside as if suddenly remembering Caroline Sloan, instructing, "Corvus, bring me a chair."

"Okay!" Corvus swiftly stepped forward, placing a chair, "Please have a seat, Miss Serena."

Serena Sterling sat down next to the bed, her bright eyes staring fixedly at Caroline Sloan.

Corvus intended to step aside, but then he felt his master's gaze coming over intensely, laden with resentment.

Hayden Crawford looked at Corvus's hands that just brought the chair, now even the chair Serena wouldn't let him move anymore, with things getting cold, the affection eventually waned.

#### Chapter 719: In Name Only

Serena sat quietly on the chair, with an intelligent and composed demeanor tinged with a sense of superiority, just watching Caroline, without speaking.

Caroline curled her fingers, feeling as if Serena's bright almond-shaped eyes had already seen through her, making her unable to meet their gaze.

"Serena... sister Serena, don't get me wrong, I and big brother..." Caroline timidly began.

Serena quickly raised an exquisite willow leaf eyebrow, interrupting her amusingly, "Hmm? Big brother?"

Caroline paused.

Serena curled her red lips, "Miss Sloan, you keep saying not to misunderstand, but can you call him big brother just like that? You shouldn't be pretending to be deaf and mute, right? Did you not hear what I said to Mr. Crawford just now? Mr. Crawford clearly stated, he doesn't have a sister like you!"

As she spoke, Serena looked up at Hayden beside her for confirmation, "Isn't that right, Mr. Crawford?"

Hayden stood tall beside Serena, his deep narrow eyes fixed on her, and he raised a hand to gently ruffle her innocent long hair, nodding indulgently, "Hmm."

Caroline's face turned paler, and it was clear Serena was giving her a warning and humiliation, but Hayden pampered Serena, indulging her in this act of humiliation.

Now, Corvus stood respectfully behind Serena. Although Serena and Hayden were not yet married, everyone in the Crawford family considered Serena as the mistress, the next matriarch of the family.

Caroline's feathered eyelashes trembled, and tears welled in her watery big eyes, making her appear pitiful as she softly corrected herself, "Sister Serena, my relationship with Mr. Crawford isn't what you think. I have a troubled life, coming from a poor mountainous region, with several brothers at home. To support them in their studies, my parents sold me to a local thug, Hugo Woods, forcing us to marry, but, but..."

Caroline quickly glanced at Hayden, embodying the shyness of a young girl poised between speaking and silence, "I and Hugo haven't... consummated, we're married in name only, I'm still pure to this day."

Behind, Corvus felt rather disgusted, as really no one here cared whether Caroline was pure or not, but she deliberately brought it up for Hayden to hear.

Any man would be moved by this story, a self-sacrificing sister saving her brothers, so loyal, stirring men's protective instincts, making them want to protect her for life.

Hayden's handsome face showed no sign of emotion, and he didn't even look up at Caroline, acting as if he didn't hear her story.

At this point, "Clap, clap, clap," Serena extended her hand, quite graciously applauding Caroline's story.

Serena's bright almond eyes were filled with amusement, "Miss Sloan, do continue with your monologue, I'm still listening."

"..." Caroline could already hear the casual tone in Serena's words, and with curled fingers, she had no choice but to continue, "Hugo, seeing my defiance, resorted to violence against me. He's particularly fond of domestic abuse, not only punching and kicking me but also whipping me, leaving me with scars and wounds."

Caroline was a perfect storyteller; when speaking emotionally, she swiftly drew her reddened nostrils, shedding a few tears for her pitiable situation.

At this point, if Hayden or Corvus had passed her a few tissues, it would be perfect, but unfortunately, Hayden stood expressionless by Serena's side, while Corvus looked at Caroline with disgust, Ew, so filthy!

Caroline waited for a moment, but could only silently raise her hand to wipe away the tears off her face, continuing, "A few days ago, it rained heavily, and I was hit by Mr. Crawford's car, so he brought me here. I stayed here for a night, and when I left the next morning, Mr. Crawford left me his phone number, telling me to contact him if I face any difficulties."

"When I returned, I ran into Hugo. Hugo, finding me gone overnight, took me to a budget hotel and began to abuse me again. In desperation, I called Mr. Crawford, and he saved me."

"What happened next, sister Serena, you also know. So sister Serena, don't misunderstand, please don't argue with Mr. Crawford because of me."

Caroline perfectly ended her story, looking pitifully at Serena, her eyes filled with pleading.

Serena quietly listened to the story, then tilted her small head, "You finished? Since you're done, I've a few questions I'm curious about and want to ask you."

Caroline didn't expect Serena to suddenly question her, she nodded, "Alright, sister Serena, ask away."

"Miss Sloan, besides Mr. Crawford's phone number, do you know there's also a phone number called 110?"

Pfft~

Behind them, Corvus couldn't hold back, let out a laugh, and quickly covered his mouth, Damn it, hold it in!

Caroline completely froze.

Serena laughed, "Miss Sloan, even coming from a mountainous area, legal education should have taught you to contact the police when in trouble, especially to report domestic abuse and such criminal behavior. You only have a passing acquaintance with Mr. Crawford, so what made you, when facing domestic threat, abandon the police and resolutely choose to call Mr. Crawford?"

As she spoke, Serena playfully and cunningly blinked her feathery lashes, "Strangely, I even feel that this domestic abuse gave you the chance to call Mr. Crawford."

Caroline indeed froze, totally unprepared for Serena's words.

But Serena's words were far from over, as she looked at Caroline, continuing to laugh, "Miss Sloan, you just shared your tragic life story, I truly sympathize with you. However, knowing Hugo is a thug, you chose to marry him, took his money, but then act chaste, flaunting your purity. Miss Sloan, one shouldn't act so shameless; it's quite annoying."

Caroline's head buzzed as she quickly responded, "Sister Serena, it's not like that, I didn't willingly marry him, it's my parents..."

"So, they tied you up and took you to the civil administration?" Serena directly interrupted her.

"This..."

"Since not, it means you chose to yield to fate, everyone must face the consequences of their choices. Since you married Hugo, and if marriage is just a legal transaction, then Hugo paid the fee, why suddenly refuse to sell, flaunting your cheap chastity seal? Don't blame Hugo for whipping you, you've chosen this path, being beaten is your own doing!"

Chapter 720: Has He Lost His Charm?

Just now, when Serena Sterling said she had a few questions to ask, Caroline Sloan prepared herself mentally, but she had no idea Serena's mind was so sharp and meticulous, she had already found the loopholes in Caroline's story.

It was long heard that Serena Sterling was sharp-tongued, anyone who argues with her ends up being trampled underfoot ruthlessly, and this time Caroline has truly experienced it.

Serena Sterling, never fails to impress!

Caroline kept her pitiful and fragile appearance, her slender body even trembled slightly, as if she was hurt by Serena, and could fall at any moment, "Sister Serena, how... how can you say that about me?"

Tears fell from Caroline's eyes again.

Serena's bright eyes shone with a cold glint, "Sister Sloan, you are truly contradictory, you could swear to defend your chastity under the toxic whip in your marriage, yet don't have the courage to refuse the marriage fate gave you. We can let bygones be bygones, but I just want to know what your plans are from now on?"

"You and Hugo Woods are still married, even though you know he's suspicious, always thinking you're cheating on him, also knowing he's into domestic violence, yet you called Mr. Crawford to be your knight in shining armor, you surely... don't plan to stay with Hugo, right?"

"That makes sense too, our Mr. Crawford is handsome, wealthy, mature and charming, countless women want to throw themselves at him, yet you are clinging to him, living in his villa, asking him to help you with Hugo, and then maybe even crawl into his bed, as a Cinderella turning into a phoenix, it's like you've got the script for an epic life turnaround."

"Sister Sloan, am I right?"

Each word from Serena was light, not heavy, yet every word was like a pearl, sharp as a knife, carving deeply into Caroline's heart.

Caroline couldn't say a single word. In the first skirmish with Serena, she suffered a crushing defeat, left with nothing.

Caroline quickly squeezed out tears, even let them fill her little face as fast as possible, "Sister Serena, I know you don't like me, although I come from a poor family, I still have dignity, you don't have to humiliate and trample on me like this... Sister Serena surely doesn't welcome me to stay here, I'll leave now... even dying on the streets would be better than being humiliated here..."

As she said so, Caroline lifted the quilt intending to get out of bed, but her wounds were real, and such a sudden movement caused the freshly treated wound to split open, and fresh blood immediately oozed out.

"Miss Sloan, you can't get out of bed now, you need to rest in bed!" The doctor and nurse stopped Caroline.

Hiss.

The pain from her wounds made Caroline wince repeatedly, but the slender her bit her lip with courage and stubbornness, truly pitiful, "Let me leave... I'll go now..."

Just then Serena stood up, looking down faintly at Caroline from above, "Sister Sloan, you stay, or I'll leave, otherwise... you probably won't die on the street, Mr. Crawford will have to carry you back from there."

After saying this, Serena turned around and left.

...

Serena left the villa, arriving at the lawn where her luxury car was already waiting, Cherie was waiting by the car.

At this moment, Hayden Crawford chased after her, stretching out his large hand to clasp her slender wrist tightly, "Serena, don't leave."

Serena stopped, raising her exquisite little face to look at him, "Mr. Crawford, I didn't expect you to pick up a Lin sister."

"Serena, are you angry? I admit, it was wrong of me to lie, I was afraid you'd have wild thoughts." Hayden Crawford explained.

Serena's red lips curved into a faint arc, but the smile did not reach her eyes, "Who exactly is Caroline Sloan?"

"She..."

"Mr. Crawford, if you're going to talk, speak the truth. If not, say nothing. We've known each other all these years, been through so much together. Whether I'll have wild thoughts about other women depends on your attitude. You just said you were afraid I'd have wild thoughts, which indicates to me that Caroline Sloan is somehow different to you."

Hayden immediately pursed his thin lips, raising his hand to gently stroke Serena's exquisite cheek with his rough fingers, "Serena, sometimes I truly wish you weren't so clever."

Serena didn't speak.

Hayden held her slender waist, his voice lowered, soft and tender, "Serena, I swear I have no thoughts for that Caroline Sloan, but she is indeed different to me. I need to keep her by my side to investigate something."

What that thing was, Serena didn't ask, because if he wanted to tell her, he would have already.

Hayden Crawford was a mature and wise man, she had already noticed Caroline's little sly schemes, how could he not know?

To some extent, Serena still trusted Hayden Crawford.

Serena placed her hand on his firm chest, wanting to push him away, "Alright, go take care of your business, I won't interfere, let me go, I'm heading back."

Seeing her indifferent attitude, Hayden forcefully imprisoned her in his embrace, not letting her leave, "Don't go back, have dinner with me."

"I haven't joined you, and you won't go hungry."

Hayden laughed, he leaned in and forcefully kissed her cheek, "Serena, now I've got a Lin sister by my side, and you don't even have any sense of crisis, why aren't you throwing a fit, making a scene? I fear you don't care about me anymore, not even willing to have dinner with me, aren't you worried you'll give the Lin sister a chance!"

Thinking about it, it's been several days since she spent time with him, and a sense of resentment swelled in Hayden's chest. He truly felt what it's like to be neglected.

Being together for a long time makes the newness fade, she doesn't even like to cling to him!

Is it that he has lost his charm?

Serena looked at Hayden, playfully fluttering her lashes, "Mr. Crawford, stop joking, you've already become a master at discerning cunning women, you've seen the little tricks those Lin sisters play. If you really want to give them a chance, I can't stop you. Come back to me after you deal with these women, or you don't need to come anymore."

With that, Serena forcefully pushed him away, then turned and left.

Hayden stood alone, watching Serena's graceful and gorgeous figure as the evening wind fluttered the hem of her skirt, enhancing her beauty and style, like a painting.

Cherie opened the rear door, and the luxury car sped away with Serena, disappearing from his sight.

Hayden put his hands in his pockets, not immediately returning to the villa, he waited a while before turning back.

As soon as he entered the living room, Hayden halted his steps, because he saw a little one in there, little Pip had returned.