

Substitute B 721

Chapter 721: Two Little Cuties Teach Daddy a Lesson

Little Pip has always been sneaky, and now he suddenly came back, sitting on the sofa and waving to Hayden Crawford, "Hello, Daddy~"

Seeing his own son, Hayden rushed over, raised his big hand, and affectionately patted Pip's little head, "Pip, you're back. Where's Stella?"

Pip and Stella have been staying in the villa these days, but a couple of days ago, Seraphina Linden took them to summer camp, and they just returned today.

Little Pip pointed upstairs with his gaze, "Mimi went upstairs."

"I'll go find Stella."

"Daddy, no need, Mimi will come down soon. She just went up to pack her... suitcase..."

Hayden quickly furrowed his brows, "Packing the suitcase? Why packing the suitcase?"

Little Pip shrugged, "Daddy, do you need me to remind you of the good deeds you've done?"

Hayden, "..."

At this time, a childish voice from upstairs said, "Please help me bring my suitcase down, I can't carry it, my brother and I are moving out, and we're never coming back!"

Hayden looked up, Stella had appeared, the maid brought her suitcase down, and she and Pip were indeed moving out.

Hayden had a headache, he had actually forgotten these three little passionate protectors of their mom!

"Stella, you're back. Daddy missed you so much, come here and give Daddy a hug." Hayden immediately displayed double his enthusiasm, spreading open arms to give Stella a big hug.

But Stella avoided him, stepping aside and looking up at him with her exquisite little face, pouting unhappily, "Uncle, who are you?"

"..." Hayden was completely caught off guard that his position as Daddy hadn't even warmed up, and now he was demoted back to being "Uncle"?

"Stella, what's wrong, are you moving out with your brother, don't you want to be with Daddy anymore?" Hayden could only try with his warm face, first pacifying his little treasure.

Stella crossed her arms and frowned, "There's already an auntie here with Uncle, she'll accompany him for fun. Uncle doesn't need us anymore, there's no place for us here, it'd be better if we leave early!"

"Stella, the adult world is very complicated, sometimes what you see might not be true, you just need to know that Daddy loves you, loves you all."

Stella looked at Hayden, angrily saying three words, "Big scumbag!"

"Big scumbag" Hayden, "..."

"Grandma's guess was right after all. When Grandma was sending us back, she foretold in the car that Uncle would say he loves Mommy, loves us, only a big scumbag would constantly talk about love, Uncle is a big scumbag!"

Three black lines appeared on Hayden's forehead, he quickly self-reflected, did he somehow offend this respected mother-in-law, what did he not do well, oh dear, what did he do wrong?

At this time, Little Pip came over, holding Stella's little hand, "Stella, let's go."

"Yes, okay brother." Stella nodded vigorously.

"Wait a minute! Pip, Stella, it's already late outside and dangerous, and there's no car to send you, even if you're going to leave, wait till tomorrow morning." Hayden desperately tried to retain them.

Little Pip waved his hand, "No need, Daddy, Grandpa is already waiting for us outside."

Hayden was shocked, what, his father-in-law also came?

Being a man himself, even his father-in-law did not stand by him at this crucial moment, and personally drove to pick up Pip and Stella, making him a loner?

"Then I'll go meet your Grandpa." Hayden wanted to go see Julian Rathborne.

"Daddy, Grandpa said he doesn't want to see you for now, so there's no need for you to go." Little Pip said.

"..."

"Oh right, Daddy, Grandpa also said, as a fully capable adult, you have enough ability to deal with those mistresses on your own, and you better do it quickly, because Grandpa knows a lot of young talents, each not worse than Daddy, maybe one day Grandpa will arrange a meeting and set Mommy up on a date, then we'll have a new Daddy!"

"..." Hayden's heart suffered a heavy blow, he felt like there was a fire in his backyard.

He hadn't done anything, the little kids deserted him, and his father-in-law and mother-in-law even wanted to undermine him.

Hayden realized this was the price of bullying Serena Sterling.

Fine, have it your way!

"Mimi, let's go." Little Pip finished what needed to be said, holding Stella's hand as they left.

"Pip..." Hayden still wanted to say something.

Little Pip turned around and politely waved his little hand at Hayden, "Daddy, goodbye or rather, Uncle goodbye!"

Little Pip and Stella's tiny figures quickly disappeared from sight.

"..." Hayden took a step back.

Corvus swiftly reached out to catch Hayden, concernedly asking, "Master, are you okay?"

Hayden struggled to stabilize himself, glancing at Corvus, "Are you watching a joke on me now?"

Corvus quickly shook his head, "Master, I wouldn't dare, it's just... I advised you earlier that Miss Summer isn't easy to deal with, and the consequences are severe, but you didn't listen, you can't blame others now..."

Hayden put his hands on his hips and closed his eyes, really now, even Corvus dared to lecture him!

"Big brother~" At this time a soft timid voice like a yellow warbler came from upstairs.

Hayden looked up, Caroline Sloan, supported by a nurse, came out, her frail shoulders covered in a coat, she really had a bit of the Lin sister's frail charm, now she stood there with big watery eyes looking at Hayden.

Hayden collected all his emotions, striding upstairs, "You have injuries, just lie in bed and rest more."

"Big brother, did I... cause trouble for you, Sister Summer doesn't seem to like me, she doesn't even allow me to call you big brother." Caroline Sloan looked at Hayden with a very aggrieved expression.

Corvus downstairs, "... Miss Summer, help, watch out for this white lotus!

Hayden's handsome features revealed no emotional waves, he slowly narrowed his deep eyes, "Do you remember what happened back then?"

"Of course I remember," Caroline Sloan earnestly recalled, "That year I traveled over hills and valleys to study abroad, on my way back I took a bus, but that day it snowed heavily, blocking the road, the bus just stopped there."

"I got off to collect some firewood to start a fire for warmth, and coincidentally met you, big brother, in the icy world."

Chapter 722: Bayside, Where the Story Begins

Caroline Sloan recounted while reminiscing, "At that time, big brother, you had already fainted in the icy snow. Your whole body was frozen stiff, and your breath was faint. I could only drag you to a nearby cave and make a fire to warm you up."

"But the temperature was too low, your lips turned purple from the cold, I could only... only take off my outer clothes and hold you tightly. We embraced each other for warmth in the snowy night. I whispered in your ear, constantly encouraging you, saying big brother, you must persevere."

Hayden Crawford listened quietly. When Yasmine Sterling found him many years ago with the jade pendant, he didn't have any suspicions, so he didn't ask her to recall the situation then. Now as Caroline recalls, every scene and word she speaks are true, exactly as he remembered.

"Later, you woke up, and you gave me a jade pendant, and also said... said you would come back to find me, you would definitely find me..."

"But, I waited for you for so many years, and you never came. And I always treasured the jade pendant you gave me, hanging it around my neck. My greatest wish is to reunite with big brother."

Caroline Sloan gazed at Hayden Crawford with watery eyes, hesitant and bashful, full of affection. Her eyes seemed to draw people in.

Hayden Crawford maintained a stoic expression as he spoke coolly, "Then you should stay here for the time being, recuperate first."

Besides this, he didn't say anything else.

Caroline Sloan felt a bit disappointed. Hayden Crawford is a very wise and alert man. Despite her combined soft and gentle approach, launching an offensive of sweet words, Hayden didn't take the bait at all. She couldn't fathom what he was truly thinking.

"Big brother, does sister Yasmine have a misunderstanding? I think... sister Yasmine doesn't like me very much..." Caroline Sloan said with grievance.

Mentioning Serena Sterling, a bit of tenderness overflowed from Hayden Crawford's handsome brow, "Just don't appear in front of her anymore. I will slowly coax her, I can definitely make her happy again."

Caroline Sloan stiffened.

"By the way, she really doesn't like you now, so don't upset her any further. And don't call me big brother anymore." With that, Hayden Crawford turned and left.

Caroline Sloan stood frozen on the spot, face pale. She had not expected, despite appearing with injuries and pretending to be frail and pitiable, to be met with such coldness and indifference from him.

How infuriating!

...

In the study.

Hayden Crawford sat on the office chair as Corvus handed over a sealed dossier envelope, "Master, here are all the detailed records of Caroline Sloan's life."

Hayden Crawford opened the envelope and quickly skimmed through it with downcast eyes.

"Master, are you suspicious of Caroline Sloan? According to these records, nothing is wrong with Caroline Sloan, everything she said is true."

Hayden Crawford set the documents aside; for now, it seems there is nothing wrong with Caroline Sloan, but he still felt something was off.

So much had happened with the Crawford family back then. His mother jumped into a great river from Jill's attic, disappearing, and at her funeral, he was traumatized and forcibly committed to a mental institution.

He stayed in the psychiatric hospital for two years, then upon leaving, encountered assassination attempts on his way to Bayside, being trapped in icy snow, nearly losing his life.

Everything happened too coincidentally, like a series of linked events trapping him and the fate of the entire Crawford family closely together.

This shroud of gloom over the Crawford family had been stifling for many years, making it hard to breathe.

Hayden Crawford always felt there was a powerful unseen hand orchestrating everything from the shadows.

Now every piece of evidence pointed to Caroline Sloan as the girl who saved him in the snow, yet a voice inside kept telling him no, it's definitely not her.

What does Caroline Sloan's appearance mean now?

Hayden Crawford formed a subtle and dangerous smile with his thin lips. Although he couldn't see clearly through the doubts now, the surrounding phantoms were starting to move, beginning to emerge. He didn't need to do anything but watch quietly.

Hayden Crawford lowered his gaze, focusing on a photograph. The photo depicted the place where he had been trapped, the place where he met that girl.

Hayden Crawford suddenly narrowed his deep-set eyes, picked up the photograph, and examined it carefully.

"Master, what's wrong?" Corvus asked softly.

Hayden Crawford slowly spoke, "I don't know why, but looking at this place now feels familiar, as if I had returned there before."

"Master, please try to remember."

Hayden Crawford closed his eyes for a moment, then shook his head, "I can't remember, just that this place gives me a very familiar feeling, as if... there are old memories of mine there."

Actually, the place in the photograph was the countryside where Serena Sterling grew up, just a long distance away, not the same location. Four years ago, when Hayden Crawford was critically ill, Serena Sterling had taken him there.

Unfortunately, Hayden Crawford had been taken there with his eyes closed by Serena Sterling and taken out the same way by Jude Crawford.

That place held his and Serena Sterling's sweetest memories.

Corvus said, "Master, this place is also Bayside. Coincidentally, both you and that girl and you and Miss Serena met in Bayside. Bayside is the place where everything started."

Hayden Crawford was reminded of his first encounter with Serena Sterling on the train to Bayside, when he was again being pursued. Although it was later found to be a business adversary, identical to the first attack, claimed to be Crawford's business enemies, he always felt something was strange.

The first time he met that girl, and the second time he met Serena Sterling, the wheel of fate kept turning as if things were arranged by destiny. Bayside was where all stories began.

Hayden Crawfords pulled open the bottom drawer and put the photograph inside, "It's best not to tell Serena about the girl's matter, she would overthink it."

In Bayside—and he had mentioned before that Yasmine Sterling saved him back then, which made her jealous—it was undeniable, that girl was a soft spot in his heart, but now his heart wholly belongs to her.

If Serena Sterling finds out that just after sending off Yasmine Sterling, Caroline Sloan came, she would certainly be jealous.

Women can be very scary when they are jealous. Without doing anything, he would already face universal condemnation, a stern rebuke from the little darlings and his parents-in-law, and he didn't want the matter to escalate further.

"Understood, Master."

...

Serena Sterling returned to her apartment, Cherie said, "Dylan Gardner's whereabouts have been discovered."

Chapter 723: Beauty Is Original Sin

Serena raised her bright eyes, "Where is Dylan Gardner now?"

"Back when Iris Crawford had her incident, Dylan Gardner was devastated. He left City of Aethelgard and spent some time in a daze outside, and later, by chance, went to the mountains and started teaching there. He's been teaching for thirty years now."

Serena couldn't help but sigh with emotion. Dylan Gardner, the graceful young man from the Garner family, and the esteemed heiress of the Crawford family were once a perfect match. However, their long-standing friendship couldn't withstand the allure of Isabelle Willow that captivated the entire capital. Dylan Gardner abandoned his wife and child, creating a tragedy with his own hands.

He must have been in pain, so much so that he never wished to return to Aethelgard. The once outstanding gentleman of the Garner family left behind all his splendor to become a humble teacher in the mountains, spending thirty whole years there. I wonder, has he found redemption?

"Cherie, start preparing. I need to fly to the mountains tomorrow to find Dylan Gardner."

"Princess, let me go instead."

Serena shook her head, "You won't be able to bring Dylan Gardner back; only I can do it."

With that, Serena gently furrowed her brows and softly instructed, "Cherie, this trip to the mountains is necessary for me, but I can't help but feel uneasy about leaving here. I have a very bad premonition, like a storm is about to sweep through the entire Crawford family."

"Princess, are you saying...?"

"Principal Iris's mental state is not good. I'm worried that while I'm away, something might happen. I'm leaving a golden pill here. Cherie, make sure to find Principal Iris tomorrow and have her take it in advance. I'll hurry back with Dylan Gardner as soon as possible."

Cherie accepted the golden pill but quickly protested indignantly, "Princess, Mr. Crawford picked up a pitiful little 'white lotus' from the roadside and lied to you. It's unforgivable. But here you are, still running around for the Crawford family. Princess, I'm really upset for you!"

Serena curled her lips into a smile, "Cherie, Mr. Crawford is not the kind of person you think he is. Don't worry. Nothing will happen between him and that 'white lotus.' Although he hasn't told me, I'm guessing he has his reasons for keeping her."

Saying this, Serena looked out the window. Outside, a fine drizzle was falling again, and the early autumn chill slowly seeped in, bringing a sense of coldness. "I always feel that it's a turbulent time, the thirty-year feud of the Crawford family is brewing again, and this time no one can escape."

"Mr. Crawford and I have been through so much together, we've weathered many storms. In the long road of life ahead, we'll encounter many more thorns and obstacles. But as I've said, even if the years are wasted, I'll drink three thousand rounds with him, never to speak of parting sorrows. Therefore, I trust him."

Cherie was deeply moved. In her heart, the princess had always been the best princess in the world.

At this moment, Serena turned back, "Cherie, bring me my phone. I want to call Aunt Yara."

"Yes." Cherie quickly handed over the phone.

Serena dialed Isabelle Willow's number. Today was supposed to be the day Isabelle Willow and Jude Crawford went to finalize their divorce, but Iris Crawford suddenly disrupted everything. Isabelle Willow was taken away by Jude Crawford and hasn't returned yet.

It's already late outside. Could it be that Aunt Yara is staying overnight at Jude Crawford's place again?

The phone rang again and again on the other end, but no one answered. Soon, a cold mechanical voice came through: "Sorry, the number you dialed is temporarily unavailable."

Aunt Yara is not answering.

What is Aunt Yara doing right now?

Serena gently furrowed her brows.

"Princess, Aunt Yara was taken away by Jude Crawford. Jude Crawford has protected Aunt Yara for so many years, with him there, Aunt Yara will be fine." Cherie comforted her.

Serena shook her head, "Cherie, if you say that Jude Crawford has protected Aunt Yara for so many years, deeply rooted in love, then why did Aunt Yara still jump down from Jill's room?"

"This..."

"Because Jude Crawford doesn't understand love, doesn't know how to love, and Aunt Yara didn't teach him how to love. They were wrong from the very beginning."

Cherie listened, confused. She didn't understand.

Serena didn't expect Cherie to understand either. This time when she went to find Dylan Gardner, she was worried not only about Iris Crawford but also about Isabelle Willow.

Now that Isabelle Willow wasn't answering her phone, Serena couldn't contact her.

Serena thought for a moment, then opened a WeChat group. The group name was "Happy Family," and she was the group owner. The members included little Caden Crawford, little Pip, and little Stella.

Serena sent a message: "Darlings, mommy needs to go on a long trip tomorrow, and I have tasks for you."

Little Caden Crawford replied with two words: "Hmm?"

Little Pip sent an emoji with a face full of question marks.

Little Stella's tender voice piped up, "Mommy, please tell us."

Serena replied, "Caden, during the days mommy isn't around, Auntie Iris is in your care. She really loves you, so you need to take good care of her."

Little Caden Crawford: "OK."

Serena continued, "Pip, your grandmother raised you since you were little. She's the one who loves you the most, so if anything unexpected happens, protect your grandmother."

Little Pip sent back a 'strong man nodding' emoji.

Little Stella got anxious, "Mommy, mommy, both brothers have tasks. What's my task?"

Serena: "Stella, you just need to take good care of yourself."

Little Stella: "Hmph, not happy. Mommy's underestimating me!"

Serena smiled, "Darlings, this is mommy's first long trip. When I'm gone, the family here is in your hands. You must guard it well and wait for my return!"

...

Isabelle Willow was taken away by Jude Crawford, the luxury car speeding down the road.

The quiet and sumptuous car cabin felt intensely oppressive. Isabelle Willow glanced sideways at the man beside her. Jude Crawford's large hand rested on the steering wheel, and his deep, handsome face showed no emotion, just a heavy brow, revealing a cold aloofness.

Isabelle Willow knew that Jude Crawford was not as cold-blooded as he appeared on the surface. He cared deeply for his sister, Iris Crawford. Wasn't he also in pain when Iris Crawford had her incident back then?

"What did Iris tell you?" Isabelle Willow broke the silence.

Jude Crawford glanced out the window, expressionless, "Can't you guess what Iris told me? Why ask the obvious?"

Isabelle Willow's face turned pale, "Jude Crawford, no matter how many times I explain to you, you never believe me. I have nothing to do with Dylan Gardner. Before that night, I hadn't even spoken to him..."

"What are you trying to say?" Jude Crawford abruptly interrupted her. His scarlet thin lips curled into a scornful, indifferent arc, "Are you trying to say you're innocent, that Dylan Gardner's feelings for you are his business, and that being beautiful is your original sin?"

Chapter 724: Blowing Smoke on Her Little Face

Isabelle Willow curled her fingers, and at that moment, Jude Crawford's sharp and cold voice came through, "Why are you silent, Isabelle Willow? I hate it when you're silent. I can give you a chance to explain, so tell me what happened with that surveillance footage from all those years ago. Why did you actively seek out Dylan Gardner, why did you enter Iris's room, and why did you end up rolling around with Dylan Gardner?"

These questions were not the first time Jude Crawford had asked, and Isabelle Willow was still as speechless as before because she couldn't explain.

Back then, she didn't know what had happened. It was Iris Crawford's birthday, and Jude Crawford had brought her back to the Crawford family mansion for dinner. Midway, she started feeling unwell, and afterwards, she had no idea what happened. When she awoke, she was already in bed, entangled with Dylan Gardner.

She had seen that surveillance footage too. Watching herself in the footage going to find Dylan Gardner and then voluntarily walking into Iris Crawford's room, she was shocked and speechless. She had no recollection of these events.

But the person in the footage was indeed herself; she had done all those things.

She wasn't familiar with Dylan Gardner at all. Before this, she only knew he was her brother-in-law, and she had never spoken privately with him.

This incident was very peculiar. Isabelle Willow had once explained it, but her explanation seemed pale and ridiculous in the face of evidence.

No one believed her.

That day, Iris had an accident; a nine-month-old baby was cut out from her belly. Isabelle Willow and Jude Crawford were standing in the corridor, watching the bruised baby being carried out, while inside, Iris screamed in utter agony. From that day on, a dark cloud loomed over the Crawford family, and there was a permanent scar between her and Jude Crawford.

Isabelle Willow was deeply pained and guilty towards Iris Crawford and that child back then.

"Where are we going now?" Isabelle Willow changed the subject.

Jude Crawford did not mention Iris again, knowing this topic would only drive them to a dead end. He lifted his thin lips, "Back to my place."

Back to his place?

Isabelle Willow promptly refused, "We certainly can't get a divorce certificate today. Just take me home first, okay?"

"I have a forehead injury. Let's go to my place first and you can take care of it," Jude Crawford stated firmly and unapologetically.

Speaking of his forehead injury, Isabelle Willow's heart suddenly softened. Earlier, under emergency circumstances, he had turned the steering wheel to the left and injured himself to protect her.

Actually, she knew he loved her.

She knew from the start his love was overwhelming.

It's just unfortunate, she couldn't afford his love.

"Alright, but after treating your wound, I'm going back," Isabelle Willow compromised, considering his forehead had a large bump.

At this point, Jude Crawford turned his head, glancing at her with amusement, "Why are you panicking, afraid I'll keep you overnight? It's not like we haven't shared a bed before."

What was he saying?

In their youth, he liked to talk recklessly like this. The first prince of the business world in Aethelgard, shedding his prestigious suit, became fearsomely unpredictable, like a flood unleashed. Back then, he was at the peak of his youth, first experiencing desires, always making her blush furiously.

It's been so many years now, he's a fifty-year-old middle-aged man, yet still so... mischievous!

Truly becoming more mischievous with age!

Isabelle Willow simply turned her head to look outside the window, ignoring him.

...

Back at the villa, Jude Crawford went into the study while Isabelle Willow found a small medicine box and went to the study to find him.

Just as she reached the study door, Jude Crawford's deep and sinister voice came through, "What kind of mess is this financial report? Take it back and redo it!"

He was losing his temper inside.

Isabelle Willow glanced through the crack in the door, seeing documents flying over the handmade wool carpet. Riley Sutton bowed low, his eyebrows and eyes respectfully picking up the documents one by one.

Jude Crawford sat in the office chair, wearing a dark grey shirt, holding a cigar between his distinct fingers. Through the swirling smoke, she vaguely saw his eyebrows furrowed tightly like a 'J' character, his entire demeanor was cold and displeased, and the heavy presence of intimidation made people afraid to meet his gaze.

Isabelle Willow knew he was in a bad mood, unhappy. Now he was venting inside, and Riley Sutton, who had worked with him for many years, was usually competent and rarely reprimanded.

Should she go in?

No.

Isabelle Willow decided not to go in because she was familiar with the way he vented his anger. Every time he got angry, he would use her as an outlet!

This time, because of Iris's matter, he was deeply repressed.

Isabelle Willow turned to leave.

But the next moment, Jude Crawford's deep, commanding voice came from inside, "Where do you think you're going? Get in here!"

He had already noticed her and asked her to... come in.

"..." Isabelle Willow stopped her steps, and at this moment, the study door opened, Riley Sutton walked out holding the documents, "Ma'am, Sir asked you to go in."

Isabelle Willow wanted to say she had already heard him!

She hesitated for a moment, then lifted her foot and walked into the study.

Riley Sutton stood outside and closed the study door, turning to go downstairs. Just then he encountered a maid who was about to take coffee upstairs, and he spoke out immediately, "No need to deliver the coffee. From now on, do not disturb Sir and Ma'am upstairs, no matter what urgent matter arises, understand?"

The maid nodded, "Yes."

Riley Sutton glanced up at the closed study door. Having worked with his master for so many years, he was intimately familiar with some of his master's aspects and habits, ingrained into his bones.

For instance, whenever Sir got angry, he would seek out Ma'am.

Initially, he would call Ma'am into his study. They'd stay inside for a long time, and then Ma'am would be carried out in Sir's arms, covered with Sir's coat...

Later, Ma'am understood and refused to go to his study anymore, so Sir would directly find the bedroom, kick the door shut, and curse, little thing, dares to defy, huh!

...

In the study, Isabelle Willow stepped forward, placing the small medicine box on the desk, raising her pair of clear almond eyes to look at him, "Put out the cigarette first, so I can treat your wound."

Jude Crawford extended his large hand and grabbed her wrist.

Isabelle Willow was startled, and at that moment he pulled hard, causing her to directly fall onto his solid thigh.

His thighs were strong and muscular, and when she fell onto them, she felt a sharp pain. Just as she tried to struggle, Jude Crawford lowered his head and directly blew a mouthful of smoke onto her face, maliciously and recklessly.

Gah, gah.

Isabelle Willow immediately choked, coughing twice, her clear almond eyes reddened and moist from the smoke, "Jude Crawford, what are you doing?"

Jude Crawford looked at her, faintly curling his thin lips, "What do you think I'm doing? Can't you see I'm in a bad mood? When I'm in a bad mood, I don't want to treat any wounds but rather... do something with you."

Chapter 725: Carrying Her into the Bedroom

His words were enough to stir up many memories, Isabelle Willow's icy face quickly turned a light red, "Jude Crawford, please have some respect!"

Jude Crawford took another languid drag of his cigar, "Are you sure you want to talk to me about respect while sitting on my lap, hmm?"

"..." It's not like she wanted to sit on his lap; he pulled her over.

Isabelle Willow struggled hard, "Let go of me!"

Jude Crawford's large hand grasped her slender waist, "Why are you blushing? I still remember when we first got married, someone secretly logged into the browser and asked... would doing it too much as a couple lead to death..."

Isabelle Willow's eyelashes trembled, she didn't expect him to bring this up again.

Back when they first married, he kept her up every night, she'd barely get out of bed in the morning while he went to work looking radiant.

Later, a lot happened between them, and he became increasingly moody, often lashing out, and when he was in a bad mood, he wouldn't let her off the hook.

Once, she secretly took out the laptop and typed "would doing it too much as a couple lead to death," only to be caught red-handed by him, and he's been teasing her about it for years.

Back then, the times in Jill's room were indulgent; aside from designing jewelry, she was showered with his affection. Iris wasn't wrong in saying she was treasured at age 19 in Jill's room, untouched by the world, still with clear cool eyes and just as enchanting as ever.

"I don't want to talk about this, let me go first." Isabelle Willow struggled uneasily in his embrace.

Jude Crawford domineeringly trapped her, but she squirmed uncomfortably in his arms; their bodies brushed against each other, and his gaze quickly darkened.

At this moment, Isabelle Willow felt like she bumped into something, that sensation... it felt like a burning stick, is this...

Isabelle Willow looked at him in confusion.

Jude Crawford knew if this continues, he'll be exposed. In her eyes, he's not capable anymore, how could he have a physical reaction?

Thinking for the long term, Jude Crawford immediately let her go, pushing her away, "Weren't you going to treat my wound? Hurry up."

Isabelle Willow stood up, not knowing how she had offended him again, but he seemed angry again.

Isabelle Willow opened the small medicine box, then took a disinfectant swab to treat the large lump on his forehead, "Does it hurt?"

She asked softly.

Jude Crawford was sitting now, she was standing, leaning down focused on treating his wound, and Jude Crawford felt her pose... just rightly presented her full bosom in front of him.

Her figure outlined by the cheongsam was more voluptuous than in her youth.

Isabelle Willow stopped her hand when he didn't respond, "What's wrong with you..."

The next second, Isabelle Willow's words were cut short because she saw that Jude Crawford was staring at her chest.

Him!

Isabelle Willow angrily smashed the swab onto his deep, handsome face, "Jude Crawford, you... you rogue!"

Jude Crawford didn't dodge, allowing the swab to hit his face then fall, he even raised his gaze, looking at her innocently and calmly, "How am I a rogue? You've brought it right in front of me, if I don't look, wouldn't that be disrespecting you?"

"You..."

"However," Jude Crawford arched his sword-like eyebrows, exuding mature charm, "your figure has become even better."

Isabelle Willow's face turned pale with anger, "Handle your wound yourself, I'm done, I'm going back."

She turned and walked away.

Jude Crawford watched her departing silhouette and leisurely finished his cigar before getting up and heading to the bathroom to take a shower.

...

Isabelle Willow quickly descended the stairs, intending to go home. Coming to Jude Crawford's place was a mistake she wouldn't repeat.

At this moment, Butler Thorne came over, "Madam, are you leaving? Please wait a moment, a car will be here shortly to take you home."

"No need, I'll call a cab myself."

"Madam, you can't get a cab around here."

"...Alright, thank you then."

Isabelle Willow sat on the living room sofa, Butler Thorne brought over a cup of tea, "Madam, have some tea."

Isabelle Willow felt a bit thirsty, so she drank a little tea.

Soon, a wave of drowsiness hit her, her eyelids grew heavy, and she felt like sleeping.

Isabelle Willow collapsed onto the soft sofa and fell asleep.

She had a very long dream.

She dreamt she was asleep, and Butler Thorne beside her said, "Sir, madam is asleep."

Jude Crawford arrived.

Jude Crawford had already bathed in the study and was wearing black-striped silk pajamas when he stepped in, looking even younger and handsome enveloped in the crisp cool air.

Jude Crawford came over, lifting her horizontally to the upstairs, opened the master bedroom, and placed her on the soft large bed.

He raised his hand, his defined fingers reaching the cheongsam buttons and started undressing her.

Isabelle Willow felt the dream start again; last time, it was like this, especially vivid. She tried to move uneasily but her body was weak and powerless, only to be bullied by him.

Jude Crawford said nothing while undressing her; he was deft at it, showing that he had been emotionally unstable, just like in his youth, he wanted to find comfort on her, seeking his own ease.

Soon, he bowed, thin lips covered her earlobe and began kissing, maliciously saying, "Complimenting your figure makes you unhappy, it's clearly just better."

...

Outside the villa gate, a luxury car slowly parked on the lawn, and someone stepped out—Zelda Willow.

Zelda Willow had arrived, rushed overnight from the City of Aethelgard.

Zelda Willow took good care of herself; she had her hair up, wore delicate minimal makeup, and confidently walked in high heels across the lawn to the villa entrance, then rang the doorbell.

Soon, the villa door opened. Zelda Willow thought it was Jude Crawford, her face blossomed into a charming smile, "Jude..."

But her smile froze directly because it wasn't Jude Crawford, it was Butler Thorne.

Butler Thorne looked at Zelda Willow, "Mrs. Zelda, why are you here?"

"Am I not allowed to come? Jude has been in Westria for quite a while, as his wife I obviously should come to accompany him; where is Jude? I want to go in and find him." Zelda Willow tried to enter.

"Mrs. Zelda, you can't go in." Butler Thorne stopped Zelda Willow, blocking her from the door.

Zelda Willow's expression changed, "Butler Thorne, how dare you, I am Mrs. Crawford, your lady, how dare you block me?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Zelda, you can't come in. Sir is very busy right now and won't be seeing you."

Zelda Willow seemed to have guessed something, she looked inside, "Is... Isabelle Willow inside?"

Chapter 726: She Loved Him So, So Much

Butler Thorne, "Since Mrs. Willow has already guessed, just head back, don't humiliate yourself."

Zelda Willow knew that Isabelle Willow had returned, but she didn't know that Isabelle had already gotten together with Jude Crawford so quickly. Now that it was so dark, with Isabelle spending the night here, Zelda wasn't foolish enough to think they were just having tea and chatting.

What were they doing in there now?

Zelda was boiling with rage. The thought of them possibly having a great time in bed together made her heart twist in torment. "What do you mean I'm bringing embarrassment upon myself? I'm Mrs. Crawford! Isabelle Willow dares to seduce my husband, she's nothing but a shameless homewrecker. Butler Thorne, step aside and let me in!"

Zelda was ready to barge in and start a fight.

"Mrs. Willow, I respectfully call you Mrs., but do you really consider yourself as such?" Butler Thorne said.

Zelda froze, what?

Butler Thorne had worked for the Crawford family for decades, and he carried a certain dignity. He looked at Zelda with detachment, "Mrs. Willow, sir and madam have not yet divorced. This shameless mistress you speak of sounds very much like... you're scolding yourself."

Zelda's face turned deathly pale. The fact that she and Jude Crawford hadn't gotten a marriage certificate was a thorn in her heart. Without a certificate, her status was unrecognized, so the term "homewrecker" was biting and ironic, as if she were insulting herself.

Jude Crawford had not divorced Isabelle Willow, and as of now, Isabelle was still Mrs. Crawford, while she was merely a substitute.

Now that the rightful owner had returned, she, as a substitute, was to be kicked aside and revert to her original state.

Zelda felt a deep sense of crisis, but she was wise enough to know that causing a scene now would gain her nothing, and Jude Crawford would ensure she suffered the repercussions!

Jude was an intensely deep and terrifying man, and ordinarily, Zelda would never dare to think of scheming against him, but she had a sage behind the scenes advising her!

"Mrs. Willow, take care of yourself." At this moment, Butler Thorne closed the villa's door.

Zelda fumed, digging her nails into her palms. For years, Butler Thorne's attitude towards her was ever indifferent, but his respect for Isabelle Willow was evident, clearly seeing her as the rightful mistress.

Of course, Butler Thorne couldn't be blamed, since Jude Crawford lavished all his affection on Isabelle Willow.

Back when so much happened within the Crawford family, Isabelle Willow remained unequivocally favored, and Madame Crawford acknowledged Isabelle as her daughter-in-law in her heart.

Isabelle Willow!

Isabelle Willow!

Zelda never hated someone so much before. She wished for nothing more than Isabelle Willow to vanish from this world.

Zelda turned and got into the car, instructing the driver up front, "Drive to Iris's place."

She was going to see Iris Crawford.

That mysterious benefactor from years ago schemed hand-in-glove with her, setting a series of traps, and it all started with Iris Crawford.

Iris Crawford was truly such a useful pawn and always listened to her, so she intended to make good use of this now.

...

Zelda soon arrived at Iris Crawford's place. Iris hadn't gone to bed yet; she looked pale and frail, "Sister-in-law, what brings you here?"

"Iris, I just went to look for your brother but he turned me away. He's with Isabelle now, she's even staying over with him." Zelda held Iris's hand, her face full of grievance.

Iris paused, then let out a disdainful snort, "Sister-in-law, is that really so surprising? My brother has always been infatuated with Isabelle Willow's beauty. They've been apart for so many years; it's only natural things would ignite quickly upon their reunion."

"Iris, what should we do now? Isabelle has enchanted your brother, as if he's under her spell. We must find a way to stop them!" Zelda wanted to push Iris forward.

Normally, Iris would have rushed ahead, but now she paused for a few seconds, then withdrew her hand from Zelda's grasp.

Zelda was stunned, sensing something off with Iris, "Iris, what's wrong? Have you forgotten the harm Isabelle caused you? It was all her doing that ruined your life, your child, and the whole Crawford family. She's superfluous. If only she disappeared from this world, now she's even harming your brother!"

"Isabelle Willow did hurt me, but she won't harm my brother, because she... loves him very much." Iris suddenly said.

Zelda was frozen on the spot, shocked, "Iris, what are you saying?"

Iris stood by the floor-to-ceiling window, wrapping her arms around herself as if feeling cold. She looked at Zelda's shocked expression and faintly curled her lips, "Isabelle Willow loves my brother deeply. I only realized it later. Back then, my brother forcibly possessed her and locked her in Jill's room for his pleasure. For the sake of her first love, she submitted to my brother over and over. I thought she didn't love him at all, not even a bit, until that day..."

"That day I found her and said many things, I told Isabelle Willow, as long as you're around, my brother won't be alright. If you stay here, he'll definitely die. It's all your fault; you're nothing but a sinner, just let my brother go. If you just disappeared from this world..."

Iris recalled the scene from that day, her eyes somewhat vacant, she sounded like she was talking to herself, "I said many venomous things to her. I remember her face was pale then, but she didn't say a word, just turned and left."

"I thought she wouldn't leave my brother, but soon I heard she brought her first love, Chase Sullivan, into Jill's room to have an affair and was caught by my brother. Not long after, I heard Isabelle was pregnant. My brother always believed the child in her womb was Chase's. No matter how he tormented Isabelle, she never spoke a word."

"Later..." Iris hugged herself tighter, trying to keep warm, "Later my brother wanted to get rid of the child in Isabelle's womb, but she couldn't bear it. She gritted her teeth and held on until premature labor. I didn't go that day, but I heard... I heard she took a knife herself and cut open her abdomen to get that baby out... but the baby didn't make it. It was a girl..."

Iris gazed at the bleak autumn scene outside the window, speaking in a daze, "When I heard of this, I was truly shocked. I never imagined the cold-hearted Isabelle Willow to have such a brave and resolute core. It wasn't that she didn't love; her love grew wildly in silence, flourishing like summer flowers, vibrant and splendid."

Chapter 727: He Slapped Her Hard

Listening to Iris Crawford's words, Zelda Willow was even more shocked. She had no idea what Iris was talking about.

Zelda caught the key words—what did she mean by saying that if Isabelle Willow was here, Jude Crawford would not be well; what did she mean by saying if Isabelle Willow was here, Jude Crawford would definitely die; what had happened to Jude Crawford?

Back then, the emotional journey of Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow's marriage was full of thorns and hardships. On their wedding night, Isabelle Willow eloped with Chase Sullivan but was brought back by Jude Crawford. Later, an incident with Iris Crawford left the Crawford family severely weakened. Then, Isabelle Willow was caught by Jude Crawford bringing Chase Sullivan into Jill's room, which truly brought the marriage of Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow to an end.

That time was incredibly dark and oppressive; no one dared to breathe loudly. Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow completely broke off and fell into a cold war.

Jude Crawford hadn't returned to Jill's room for a long time, and since his marriage, his life had been very clean and simple, with the same routine every day, going to the company and returning to Jill's room, rarely going on business trips. But he hadn't been back to Jill's room for a long while, often drinking to excess.

Isabelle Willow soon became pregnant again, expecting a second child, who Jude Crawford believed to be an illegitimate child.

One day, she seized the moment, found the drunken Jude Crawford in a bar, and managed to climb into Jude Crawford's bed, enjoying his favor.

Of course, her belly cooperated and soon she was pregnant, expecting a son, Zane Crawford.

The biggest beneficiary of that event was undoubtedly her.

She and Isabelle Willow became pregnant one after the other; the time during her pregnancy was perhaps the happiest and most triumphant period for her.

Because Isabelle Willow lost favor, while she gained it.

She naturally did not let go of such a great opportunity. She told Jude Crawford that Yara had made such a big mistake, and she was not comfortable letting Yara raise Hayden again. After all, she was Hayden's true aunt. Jude, why not let Hayden call me Mommy?

Even she felt overstepping when she made this request, knowing how much Jude Crawford resented Isabelle Willow yet adored their eldest son, Hayden Crawford.

But to her surprise, Jude Crawford agreed.

Only then did she truly realize how much Jude Crawford hated the illegitimate child that Isabelle Willow bore, so much that he took Hayden Crawford away from Isabelle Willow.

Later, Hayden Crawford was sent over, entrusted to her care.

Hayden was just a few years old at the time but wise beyond his years. He didn't like her, only wanted his mommy. Once, Hayden bit her, and in her anger, during Jude Crawford's business trip, she punished Hayden by making him kneel outside.

That night, it poured with rain, and the thin Hayden stubbornly knelt all night in the rain, without ever bowing his head. By the next day, he was down with a high fever of 42 degrees.

The fever did not abate, and the unconscious Hayden was calling for his mommy...

Perhaps, it was the bond between mother and child. That day, Isabelle Willow rushed over to take Hayden Crawford away.

However, she did not allow it.

While the two sides confronted each other, Jude Crawford returned.

At that moment, Isabelle Willow, with eyes red-rimmed, looked at Jude Crawford, "Jude Crawford, give Hayden back to me!"

Jude Crawford coldly and heartlessly refused her, "Go back!"

Isabelle Willow broke down, clenching her fists, "Jude Crawford, I'll say it again, give Hayden back to me!"

"A thousand repetitions wouldn't change it. You will never see Hayden again!"

Isabelle Willow trembled all over. At this moment, a sharp knife suddenly appeared in her hand, and she pressed the tip against her neck.

Jude Crawford's eyes dangerously narrowed, his handsome face instantly turning cold enough to drip ice.

Before Isabelle Willow could make another move, Jude Crawford had already swiftly approached her, snatching the knife from her hand.

He lifted his hand and slapped Isabelle Willow hard across the face.

That day, with a "slap," Jude Crawford struck Isabelle Willow.

The crisp sound of the slap echoed through the entire villa, shocking and oppressing everyone present. Over so many years, it was the first time this man had been so enraged.

He was the Crown Prince of the Crawford family, noble blood coursing through his veins. No Crawford man had ever laid a hand on a woman, and for him, even less so.

Cold-blooded by nature, a son of the heavens, no woman had ever approached him before. He never needed to use his hands to deal with anyone.

But he raised his hand against Isabelle Willow.

At that time, Isabelle Willow was already pregnant. Instead of gaining weight, she had grown thin and gaunt throughout her pregnancy, like a kite barely hanging on, ready to fall at any moment.

With Jude Crawford's slap, Isabelle Willow fell awkwardly onto the carpet.

The atmosphere was silent for a few seconds. Jude Crawford stepped over, stopped beside Isabelle Willow, crouched down, and gripped her small face tightly with his well-defined hand. He asked her in a sharp, fierce

tone, "Tell me where the knife came from—what were you planning to do with it? Don't tell me you no longer want to live."

With her small face caught firmly in his palm, Isabelle Willow felt pain distorting her features, shivering all over from the pain.

In Isabelle Willow's eyes at that moment, this man was like death coming from the depths of hell, pushing her into an abyss.

Yara's cold and aloof almond eyes watched him, just stared, reminiscent of her infatuated gaze in the crowd years ago, under the plum tree where he placed the warm cat ears on her head—all the indescribable longing and secret love had turned into deep-seated pain and despair.

She looked at him, tears falling like big drops, flooding her face with tears.

But not a single word did she speak.

Jude Crawford stared at her, "Isabelle Willow, you better not let anything happen to you, or do you understand that Hayden will be ruined by you? Now, tell me—do you dare pick up a knife again?"

Son Hayden Crawford was Isabelle Willow's last softness and obsession. She felt the touch of a nerve, and all her pain turned into deep fear. She nodded, shaking her head repeatedly, "I won't... I won't do it again..."

She said she didn't dare anymore.

Jude Crawford's handsome eyelids moved. Suddenly, he stretched out a strong and powerful arm, pulling Isabelle Willow directly into his arms. He held her tightly, as if he wanted to melt her into his bones, gently kissing her sleek hair, then repeatedly kissing her flushed cheek, "Does it hurt? Did that hit hurt you?"

Isabelle Willow's small hands hung by her sides, as he held her like a broken doll. Her beautiful eyes in that moment lost all focus, becoming blank and hollow.

Jude Crawford furrowed his brows, murmuring in a hoarse voice by her white earlobe, "Be obedient from now on; be good, and I won't hit you..."

At that time, she just stood there watching Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow on the carpet. During the struggle for the knife, Jude Crawford's hand had gotten a deep cut, with warm blood gushing out, but he remained oblivious.

Chapter 728: Disobedient Again?

After that night, Jude Crawford moved back to Jill's room.

Zelda Willow was extremely depressed, she never expected that by trying to win over Hayden Crawford, she would cause Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow to successfully break the ice, and Isabelle would regain Jude's favor, bringing Jude back to her side.

At that time, Isabelle's pregnancy was progressing, making things inconvenient for her, but Jude Crawford stayed in her room every night.

However, Zelda knew the rift between them was too big to mend, like an unbridgeable chasm. Jude could not forgive Isabelle's betrayal and the bastard child in her belly, while Isabelle watched as her belly grew day by day. She and Jude had had a fleeting romance, even if it was only for one night, but she was pregnant with Jude Crawford's child. The fact that both sisters were serving one man was like a thorn deeply embedded in Isabelle's heart, causing her both pain and suffering.

Zelda saw Isabelle again when she was already nine months pregnant. That day she came to Jill's room, standing just outside the master bedroom door.

Inside the master bedroom, Isabelle was sitting in a wicker chair. A few months passed without seeing her, she had become too thin, but her belly was large and pointed. People said a pointed belly meant a son, but word later came from Jude Crawford's side that it was a daughter, much to her surprise.

At that time, Isabelle was wearing a white dress, her face still breathtakingly beautiful but her mental condition was quite poor, sallow, with those almond eyes looking beautiful yet empty, devoid of life.

The doctor was examining her, and Jude Crawford was standing beside her. Soon the doctor spoke softly, "Mr. Crawford, the baby in Madam's belly is very healthy. Judging by the fetal movement and ultrasound, it has a calm and quiet temperament, likely inheriting Madam's character to be either a talented man or woman, but..."

The doctor cautiously glanced at Jude's expression before continuing, "Madam's body is very weak. Recently... have you... been sharing intimacy again? Madam is already nine months pregnant, and marital relations are quite taxing. It would be better for Mr. Crawford to care more for Madam's health and exert more restraint."

The doctor withdrew.

At that moment, she stood at the door and heard this, feeling intensely jealous, digging her nails into her palm. From the doctor's words, she could discern that Jude Crawford had frequently been intimate with Isabelle, without restraint.

Yet she had only been with Jude once. Ever since Jude moved back to Jill's room, he hadn't visited her at all.

After the doctor left, the master bedroom became quiet. Jude Crawford sat on the sofa, starting to review documents, while Isabelle took out her design drafts. Neither spoke.

At that time, Jude was no longer working in the study, he had moved his office to the room to be with Isabelle, perhaps due to an incident where Isabelle carried a knife, making him uneasy. All in all, he stayed with her constantly.

Soon a maid came in and brought several delicate candies, "Madam, since becoming pregnant, you've favored sour foods. Today, I've made some candies with lemon and plum; please try one, madam."

In Jill's room, everywhere was soft and delicate. After becoming pregnant with the second child, Isabelle's appetite was particularly poor, so Jude had found the best chef to create different meals daily to coax her to eat.

Isabelle reached out and picked a lollipop, licking it a few times.

Actually, she always thought Isabelle was pregnant with a son not just from the appearance of her belly, but also because Isabelle loved sour foods.

After the maid left, Jude Crawford lifted his eyes at some point, his gaze falling on Isabelle.

Soon he put down the documents in his hand, stood up, and walked over to Isabelle.

He looked down at her, "Is the lollipop delicious?"

Isabelle lifted her gaze, looking at him.

Jude Crawford reached out, pinching her delicate chin with two slender fingers, then casually curled his thin lips, "Would you like to try a different lollipop?"

Isabelle didn't understand initially. A few seconds later, her pupils shrank, and she quickly turned her small face away.

But Jude pinched her small face, turning her back, "Disobedient again? You've been saying you're unwell these days, and I've been restraining from touching you. Don't get defiant here."

Isabelle tried to push him away.

Jude quietly said, "Don't want the baby in your belly, right?"

Isabelle froze, successfully threatened by him, turning from resistance to obedience...

Isabelle always thought her submission would ensure the safe birth of her child, but she underestimated the danger posed by Jude Crawford. From the beginning to the end, he never once considered keeping the child; the child had to die.

...

Zelda awoke from distant memories, she thought she had uncovered all the truths of the past, but now she was confused, feeling Iris Crawford had hidden something from her.

"Iris, what exactly are you saying, I don't understand. Jude... what do you mean by when Yara is here, he'll die?" Zelda asked.

Iris turned and looked at Zelda, "Sister-in-law, I'm sorry, I can't tell you about this matter."

"Why? Iris, do you still regard me as an outsider? You can tell Yara, but not me?" Zelda intentionally showed a hurt expression.

Zelda realized she was wrong, thinking after that incident, Iris Crawford fully regarded her as a sister-in-law, but that wasn't the case.

Iris's face was pale, but she looked calmly at Zelda, slowly curling her lips, "Sister-in-law, do you think... that night of the big wedding, you schemed Isabelle and Chase to elope, I don't know? You tricked my brother!"

What?

Zelda was struck as if by lightning; she never expected Iris to know about this, "Iris, I... I don't understand what you're saying?"

"Sister-in-law, no need to pretend in front of me. I studied medicine. Years ago, in the hospital, I accidentally saw Isabelle's mother, who was always monitored by your Willow family to manipulate Isabelle, wasn't she?"

"At the time, I overheard you talking with your father, saying you were dissatisfied. Why should Isabelle's child of a lowly woman be favored by my brother and marry into the Crawford family as a young mistress? You too admired my brother and wanted to replace Isabelle to marry in, so you and your father plotted to kidnap Chase, tossing him in the ship's hold, then arranged for Isabelle to go, creating the illusion of eloping in front of my brother."

These words fell, terrifying Zelda out of her wits. She seriously examined Iris for the first time, realizing she never understood Iris at all.

She thought Iris was just a proud young lady, easy to deceive and use, but she forgot, Iris was also part of the Crawford family!

No Crawford family member is easy to fool!

Chapter 729: All These Years, He Couldn't Forget Her

When it comes to deception, it's always the Crawford family deceiving others.

Turns out, Iris Crawford knew everything!

But she didn't reveal it.

"Iris, you..." Zelda Willow looked at Iris fearfully. If Iris Crawford told Jude Crawford about this, she and the entire Willow family would be doomed, utterly destroyed.

"Sister-in-law, don't worry, I haven't told my brother about this before, and I won't tell him in the future, because Isabelle Willow doesn't deserve it, she doesn't deserve my brother's love!"

"However, for so many years I've turned a blind eye to you mostly because of Zane. I really like Zane, this nephew of mine. This is your greatest contribution to the Crawford family. Even if it's for Zane's sake, I'll protect you and your maiden family, as long as you keep quiet and don't cause trouble."

Iris truly valued her nephew, Zane Crawford. Zane was never close to Zelda Willow, and Jude Crawford was indifferent to Zane because Zelda wasn't favored. So, Zane was only close to his aunt.

During a long period when Iris was trapped in grief, it was Zane who stayed by her side.

Iris remembered one time when she had a nightmare about her deceased son. She woke up drenched in cold sweat in the dark, alone, and the overwhelming grief and pain made her break down. She sat on the bed, hugging herself, and wept.

That was when the door creaked open, and little Zane ran over barefoot, climbed onto her bed, hugged her with his small arms, and gently patted her back, saying in his childish voice, "Auntie, why are you crying? Is Auntie hurt? Zane will blow it away so it won't hurt..."

Little Zane's gentle pats comforted her, providing warmth and companionship in that cold night.

After that, Iris took Zane with her wherever she went.

In fact, Iris realized what kind of person Zelda Willow was when she overheard her conversation with her daughter in the hospital that day. Compared to the brilliant and stunning Isabelle Willow, Zelda didn't even qualify to be a mere backdrop.

Isabelle's son, Hayden Crawford, was extraordinarily intelligent from a young age, resembling Jude Crawford the most and perfectly inheriting the Crawford family's business acumen.

Initially, Iris didn't think highly of Zane because he was Zelda's son, but Zane surprised her.

Zane's IQ was close to Hayden's. He was never interested in business, having a talent for medicine. At eighteen, he became renowned across Aethelgard, becoming the city's top-gold surgeon, exceptionally brilliant.

Since Iris couldn't have children, she regarded Zane as her own son and was immensely proud of him.

Zane's personality was peculiar as well. He didn't resemble his father, Jude Crawford, or his mother, Zelda, but rather Isabelle Willow, sharing her aloof yet graceful demeanor.

Over the years, Iris knew about the affairs between Isabelle Willow and Chase Sullivan, but she never spoke about them. She deeply hated Isabelle.

Zelda Willow was cold all over, shocked as she realized Iris never truly respected her. Instead, Iris was the first to see through her true nature.

Zelda gradually calmed down, thinking about her son, Zane Crawford. Three years ago, Serena Sterling risked her life to send Zane away from Aethelgard, a place full of trouble. Today's Zane is a top-tier golden hand surgeon globally, officially taking over the Academy of Sciences. At 27, he amazed the medical world as Professor Doctor Crawford.

Zelda straightened her back, knowing her son was her greatest support, with Zane by her side, she never had to fear.

Now that Iris knows, it's fine. Zelda knew Iris and Zane's relationship well, so she wasn't worried at all.

"Iris, I only want to say that everything I do is for Jude. I truly love Jude, but now that Isabelle is back, we must find a way to stop her. Iris, we share the same goal." Zelda returned to the main point, still trying to make Iris her tool.

Iris furrowed her brows but said nothing.

Zelda grew more puzzled, "Iris, what's the matter with you? Don't you hate Isabelle anymore?"

Iris's hatred for Isabelle was deep-seated. She had once driven to confront Jude, causing a scene, but within just two days, her attitude had drastically changed.

Zelda believed something must have happened to cause such a huge change in Iris.

At that moment, Iris silently paused and then slowly spoke, "I've promised Serena to give her some time."

Serena?

Serena Sterling?

Hearing "Serena Sterling" made Zelda freeze. Serena, Serena has resurfaced.

No wonder Iris had such a massive change within two days—all because of Serena!

Zelda had previously clashed with Serena, aware of her terrifying nature. Serena was a cunning and persuasive girl, whom Iris adored.

Unexpectedly, Serena was already involved in the Crawford family's matters!

Zelda thoroughly disliked Serena, even if Serena had saved Zane's life three years ago.

Zane is now 27, and with his outstanding charm, many noble ladies and wealthy heiresses desired him, aspired to marry him. Yet, Zane had no companions — not even a romantic relationship.

She knew, Iris knew too, the entire Crawford family knew, over the years, Zane has never forgotten about Serena.

"Iris, what did Serena say to you?"

"Serena mentioned how the matters of the past were suspicious, she would help me uncover the truth, but I needed to give her time." Speaking thus, Iris gazed out at the dense darkness outside the floor-length window, murmuring, "In the past couple of days, I've realized, Isabelle loved my brother, so why did she... why roll into bed with Dylan Gardner? It's all so contradictory..."

Recalling those painful past events, Iris quickly closed her eyes, "But what I saw with my own eyes couldn't be wrong, I lost my child too..."

Iris felt a headache, her head splitting with pain, and she used her hands to clutch her aching head sorrowfully.

Zelda was utterly terrified, everything that happened tonight was unexpected, as if events were straying away from their predetermined path toward the truth, even Iris, the person involved, was starting to question it.

Chapter 730: Why Are You Blushing?

Serena Sterling!

It's all because of Serena Sterling's arrival!

Zelda Willow quickly stepped forward and hugged Iris Crawford, pretending to comfort her, "Iris, don't think about it anymore, you're getting a headache again. That's enough for today, you should go rest first."

At this moment, Beryl came over to support Iris Crawford, "Miss, let's go upstairs to rest."

Iris Crawford was already having a headache, and when Beryl approached, she seemed to faintly hear a string of bells. This sound immediately made her feel a splitting headache, and she could no longer think clearly.

Iris Crawford's mental state was too poor, her face as pale as paper, and she let Beryl help her upstairs weakly.

Zelda Willow watched Iris Crawford's figure disappear into the bedroom, then she quickly left the place.

Outside, Zelda Willow felt a deep sense of crisis. She hadn't expected Serena Sterling to get involved with the Crawford family's affairs, and the secret hidden in the Crawford family for decades seemed to be on the verge of being uncovered.

Moreover, with Serena's return, Zane was probably coming too. Zelda Willow really didn't want her son to get involved with Serena Sterling again.

All these years, Zelda Willow had been a good mother. No matter what she did in secret, she never told Zane Crawford. Zane's hands remained clean, untouched by the rights and wrongs of the Crawford family.

Zelda Willow took out her phone and began contacting that mastermind.

Zelda knew that young Caden Crawford was a twisted genius, very skilled in tracking and positioning, so she didn't dare contact the mastermind lightly.

Right now, she didn't dare to call, fearing to leave any clues that could be traced. She only sent a text message.

The text message was very safe; once read, it would be smashed and deleted, impossible to trace.

Zelda Willow sent a message saying there's a change in the situation.

Very soon, with a "ding," the mastermind's reply came: Iris Crawford won't live for more than two days, don't worry.

Zelda Willow glanced at it, and the message disappeared.

Iris Crawford won't live for more than two days...

Zelda Willow's pupils shrank. Although she wasn't fond of Iris Crawford, Iris was still part of the Crawford family. One wrong move could shake the entire family, yet this mastermind intended to... make a move on Iris?

Actually, Zelda Willow didn't know who the mastermind was. Years ago, the mastermind contacted her first, revealing Chase Sullivan and Isabelle Willow's childhood relationship to her, leading to the subsequent events.

Zelda Willow had never met this mastermind. The mastermind was very mysterious and powerful, and this behind-the-scenes power seemed to have infiltrated their surroundings for a long time, omnipresent. When Zelda Willow most needed help, they extended an olive branch, so she cooperated with them.

Now the mastermind was making a move on Iris Crawford. Zelda Willow was quite alarmed, fearing this time it would cause too much trouble, and she wouldn't be able to extricate herself.

Zelda Willow sent another message saying I don't want to be exposed.

"Ding" went the response from the other side, reassuring her: two birds with one stone, besides Iris Crawford, we'll also take care of Isabelle Willow for you.

Take care of Isabelle Willow?

Zelda Willow was instantly tempted. She hated Isabelle Willow too much because Isabelle took everything from her. How wonderful it would be if Isabelle Willow didn't exist in this world.

Now her greatest wish was about to be fulfilled, and Zelda Willow's eyes lit up. Her inner malice and greed devoured everything.

Zelda Willow strutted off in her high heels with pride.

...

Isabelle Willow slowly opened her eyes and looked around blankly. Where was she now?

She was still in Jude Crawford's villa, in the guest room.

It was already the next morning, and the brilliant morning light seeped through the drapes, casting warmth into the room.

How did she fall asleep here again?

Feeling groggy, Isabelle Willow sat up. At this moment, she felt an ache all over her body, as if she had been run over by a wheel.

This feeling was not unfamiliar; after her last spring dream, she had felt the same way. Isabelle was no stranger to these sensations and knew exactly what they implied.

Isabelle Willow remembered the dream from last night: Jude Crawford entered her room, undressed her, and then...

The dream felt too real. The first time she had a dream like that, she was unsure, but having it a second time made her certain something was amiss.

After all, considering Jude Crawford's character, he was the kind who could do anything to her.

She remembered that last night she had drunk a cup of tea. Had Jude Crawford ordered someone to drug her tea and then...

Isabelle Willow was furious. She must confront him about this. If he really did that to her, it was simply... despicable and disgraceful!

After washing up, Isabelle quickly left the room. Not seeing Jude Crawford, she asked a maid, "Where's your master?"

"Ma'am, the master is in the bedroom."

Isabelle immediately headed to his bedroom, storming over with anger. She was thinking that as soon as she got in there, she would give him a hard slap. If he dared to think she was just as easy to bully as she was years ago, he'd be dead wrong.

Just as she reached the bedroom door, Isabelle's steps halted because inside the bedroom, besides Jude Crawford, there was someone else—a doctor at that.

A doctor in a white coat spoke respectfully, "Mr. Crawford, I just examined you. Your physical flaw has not improved; the deadly injury from years ago truly hurt you. Now we have developed a new drug; take it and see how it works over time."

Outside the door, Isabelle was speechless.

She had been so angry but suddenly stopped. She seemed to have forgotten a very critical issue: Jude Crawford couldn't perform!

Now the doctor was here, and it was obvious that he's been treating this issue for years, though it seemed to have had little effect.

He couldn't perform, so it was impossible for him to have assaulted her. Isabelle felt embarrassed.

Then what about those spring dreams she had?

He hadn't done anything; those dreams were merely her imagination. She had actually dreamt of such intimate moments with Jude Crawford and then came to confront him.

Isabelle's face "thud" turned hot, burning with embarrassment. Generally reserved and shy, she now just wanted to find a hole to crawl into.

At that moment, the door suddenly opened, and Jude Crawford's steady and upright figure appeared before her, "What are you doing standing here? Looking for me?"

Jude Crawford came.

Isabelle Willow looked up, immediately meeting his deep and narrow eyes. Now he was looking at her with an open and calm expression, resembling an innocent good man.

"I..." Isabelle had prepared countless words, but now she couldn't say a single one. She didn't know what to say.

Jude Crawford looked at her and suddenly curved his thin lips, "Why are you blushing?"