

## **Substitute B 761**

Chapter 761: Fallen for a Little Wildcat

One hundred bucks as a tip?

Little Pip was shocked. Is this a thing?

"Pip~"

Little Pip smiled, "Okay, grandma, I'll listen to you. You have the final say."

...

Seraphina Linden bought a pregnancy test and returned to the auction house; after all, she still had to auction that martial arts manual.

But when she returned, she couldn't see Serena Sterling or Isabelle Willow anymore.

Where did the two go?

Very strange.

Seraphina looked around, trying to find them. Julian Rathborne's private secretary saw her searching and quickly approached, "Hello, is there anything I can help you with?"

It was a bit crowded here, and for Seraphina to reach the private secretary, she had to pass through the crowd. Someone accidentally bumped into her, causing her plastic bag to fall to the floor, and the pregnancy test fell out.

"Oh," someone quickly exclaimed, "look, there's a pregnancy test in the plastic bag. Whose is it?"

Due to the sensitivity of the word "pregnancy test," suddenly everyone's eyes fell on her.

This caused quite a stir, and people whispered, "Oh my god, who brought a pregnancy test to the auction?"

"Isn't this too embarrassing?"...

Seraphina glanced at the pregnancy test on the ground, then bent down, reached out, and collected it along with the plastic bag with great composure. She smiled, "Sorry everyone, this is mine. My husband...how should I put it, was eager in his old age, so I bought a pregnancy test to check."

The private secretary nearby was petrified on the spot. What does this mean? What exactly does it mean?

The private secretary turned and ran off.

When Seraphina reached the place, the person who was supposed to help had already fled, leaving her a bit puzzled.

...

The private secretary sprinted upstairs like a hundred-meter dash and opened the door to the VIP conference room.

At the time, Julian Rathborne was holding a high-level meeting, with the financial director presenting the quarterly report, and he was flipping through the documents in his hands.

"President." The private secretary stepped forward and whispered.

"Hmm?" Julian Rathborne responded nonchalantly.

The private secretary swallowed, "President, I need to report something. President...please stay calm. I just saw Miss Linden downstairs, and she was holding a pregnancy test. She's pregnant!"

Julian Rathborne's clean fingers flipping through the documents suddenly stopped, and his deep voice was icy, "What did you say?"

The sudden exclamation from the man frightened the financial director, who stopped the report. At the conference table, the high-level executives secretly glanced at the man, only to see his handsome and distinguished features cloud over, exuding a terrifying and penetrating chill.

The executives dared not breathe out of fear of provoking the big boss.

The private secretary stiffened his neck, "President, you didn't hear wrong; Miss Linden is pregnant, and she also said...said you fathered a child late in life. President, congratulations, you're a papa!"

As his words fell, the entire meeting room fell into a stifling silence, so quiet you could hear a pin drop. No one dared to speak because they already sensed the iciness of the boss's mood, like a glacier.

At this moment, the financial director, taking a risk, asked, "Pre...President, should I continue..."

"Get out!" Julian Rathborne spat a cold word from his thin lips.

With a "swish," the executives swiftly rose from their chairs and rushed out of the meeting room as if fleeing for their lives.

The high-level meeting was thus interrupted.

Julian Rathborne's well-built chest began to heave, obviously struggling to suppress a huge tantrum.

The private secretary said, "President, could...could it be that the child isn't yours, and Miss Linden has cuckolded you..."

Julian Rathborne shot a deadly glance at the private secretary.

The private secretary wished he could slap himself.

At that moment, Julian Rathborne's tall figure suddenly rose, and he strode to the floor-to-ceiling window, tearing off his tie. Images of Seraphina Linden's radiant face flashed through his mind. She's pregnant, is she?

Since returning, he hadn't touched her, so where had this pregnancy come from?

It seems she had been with some wild man!

Also, she had been in Alani for these years, and he knew nothing of her past. Julian Rathborne felt like his hair was turning green.

This debt between him and her is far from settled!

"Go investigate for me; I want to know who that wild man is!"

Having followed Julian Rathborne for years, it was the first time the private secretary had seen the man so angry. As a wealthy heir, he knew how to control and restrain his emotions, but whenever he encountered Seraphina Linden, he was not like himself.

"Yes, President."

"Also, has she repaid that 10.2 billion? If not, send her another lawyer's letter. If she pleads, tell her to wait for me in the villa..."

"President," the private secretary had to interrupt Julian Rathborne, "just now, Miss Linden already transferred the 10.2 billion."

Julian Rathborne's tall body suddenly stiffened. He turned, his cold eyes revealing a flash of disbelief, "What did you say?"

He didn't believe Seraphina Linden had the ability to come up with 10.2 billion, so where did this money come from?

Which wild man gave it to her?

"President, Miss Linden transferred the 10.2 billion and also added a hundred. Miss Linden said, said..."

There was an extra hundred bucks.

"What did she say?"

"Miss Linden said that since she intends to settle properly, she couldn't shortchange you. After all, she broke your...virginity, so this hundred bucks are...a tip for you, President..."

Julian Rathborne's handsome face twitched rapidly. What did she say?

A hundred bucks as a tip, did she take him for a gigolo?

He was furious yet amused, his lips curving into a dark arc, "Tell her that since she's offering a tip, a hundred bucks is too little."

Just a hundred bucks, is she serious?

The private secretary was about to cry, "Pre...President, Miss Linden even anticipated you would think it's too little, so she left a message, saying...your skills are poor, only worth that much, a hundred bucks, not even a child."

"..."

Julian Rathborne's handsome face turned pale; that damned woman, "Go investigate where that 10.2 billion came from, and find out who that wild man is!"

The private secretary could see his President was really upset this time. It was strange because the President could have any debutante he wanted, soft and tender, but he ignored them all. He just fancied Seraphina Linden's type...a wildcat who often clawed at his heart.

"Yes, President." The private secretary was about to leave.

Julian Rathborne suddenly spoke again, "Come back."

"President, do you have any other orders?"

"What is Seraphina Linden doing at the auction this time? What does she want to buy?"

"President, I heard that Miss Linden is here to buy a martial arts manual this time."

Chapter 762: Taming This Little Wildcat

Martial arts secret manual?

Julian Rathborne looked at his private secretary, "What martial arts secret manual?"

"This martial arts secret manual came in over the past couple of days. It's going to be auctioned today. If you want to see it, I can go and get it right now."

Julian Rathborne furrowed his brow. He knew Seraphina Linden had a brain full of bold and quirky ideas. Serena and Pip were much like her. This time she was here for a martial arts secret manual. Could it be that the manual contained some exceptional martial art, and she wanted to become the unbeatable champion?

"No need. I'll go take a look now." Julian Rathborne stood up and walked towards the auction hall.

...

Seraphina Linden was waiting for Serena Sterling and Isabelle Willow, but after waiting for so long, there was no sign of them. All she got was the emergence of the martial arts secret manual.

The host excitedly announced, "Next, we are auctioning a treasure: this martial arts secret manual. Everyone can start bidding now."

Seraphina's spirits lifted, her eyes brightened. The martial arts secret manual she had been waiting for finally appeared.

It was evident that the CEOs present in the hall weren't interested in this martial arts secret manual. It was a niche item, and nobody wanted to bid.

Seraphina rubbed her hands in anticipation. She felt her opportunity had come. Since no one was raising their paddle, she could get the martial arts secret manual for the lowest price.

Seraphina immediately raised her paddle, "Five hundred thousand."

The price of five hundred thousand was already quite high.

There was no response from the crowd; no one wanted to increase the bid.

The host smiled, "Alright then, five hundred thousand, anyone? Five hundred thousand once, five hundred thousand twice..."

Seraphina curled up her red lips, greedily eyeing the little treasure that was the martial arts secret manual. "Come to mama," she thought.

Just as the host was about to bring down the hammer, a deep voice suddenly sounded in her ear, "Five hundred thousand and one hundred."

A bidder appeared.

Who?

Who could it be?

Seraphina turned her head and saw a familiar regal figure in the adjacent luxury box: Julian Rathborne.

Julian Rathborne had arrived!

The host on stage also saw Julian Rathborne and almost dropped the microphone in surprise. Julian Rathborne was the big boss of this auction house. All the treasures here belonged to him. And now the big boss, instead of sitting in his office, came out here to bid?

Really knows how to have fun.

Seraphina could never have imagined someone cutting in halfway, let alone that it was Julian Rathborne. Hadn't she already returned one hundred and two billion to him? Why didn't he just let it go?

Five hundred thousand and one hundred. Using a hundred bucks to one-up her, was he here to avenge the hundred bucks tip snub?

Everyone said this son of Aethelgard was inherently noble, with gentlemanly blood running through his veins. But she saw him as a guy who held grudges over every little thing. So petty!

Seraphina raised her paddle again, "Six hundred thousand."

In the adjacent box, Julian Rathborne remained calm, "Six hundred thousand and one hundred."

Seraphina, "... Eight hundred thousand."

Julian Rathborne, "Eight hundred thousand and one hundred."

Seraphina was so frustrated that her teeth itched. She peeked her head out from behind the screen and glared at Julian Rathborne with her lively eyes.

Julian Rathborne elegantly sipped his tea. He couldn't believe he couldn't handle this little wildcat.

"Alright, this gentleman has bid eight hundred thousand and one hundred, eight hundred thousand and one hundred once, eight hundred thousand and one hundred twice, eight hundred thousand and one hundred three times, sold!" The host brought the hammer down. The martial arts secret manual was Julian Rathborne's.

"..." Although Seraphina was unwilling to admit defeat, she generally knew that Julian Rathborne was extraordinarily wealthy. Competing with him over money was like throwing eggs at a rock; there was no way to beat him.

Seraphina could only watch helplessly as the staff handed over the martial arts secret manual to Julian Rathborne.

...

The auction was over. Seraphina hurried out and soon spotted Julian Rathborne's extended luxury sedan up ahead.

He had already gotten into the car and was preparing to leave.

"Julian Rathborne, wait!" Seraphina ran over.

The extended luxury sedan came to a slow stop, and the tinted rear window slid down, revealing Julian Rathborne's handsome face.

Julian Rathborne was seated in the back, his long legs elegantly crossed. He turned sideways, his phoenix eyes giving her a cool, unfeeling glance, "What is it?"

"Of course there's something. Julian Rathborne, give me that martial arts secret manual!" Seraphina extended her hand towards him.

Julian Rathborne thought she resembled a child, reaching out for candy. He picked up the martial arts secret manual, "You mean this?"

"Yes, give it to me!" Seraphina directly tried to grab it.

But Julian Rathborne suddenly raised his arm, keeping it out of her reach. He looked at the martial arts secret manual in his hand with interest, "You want this martial arts secret manual so badly, I'm curious what's inside it?"

As he spoke, Julian Rathborne started to unwrap the exquisite packaging.

Seraphina's pupils constricted, "Julian Rathborne, you can't open it, don't look!"

Just then, a melodic ringtone sounded. Julian Rathborne had an incoming call.

Julian Rathborne glanced at Seraphina and then answered the call. It was from Old Mrs. Rathborne.

Old Mrs. Rathborne's weak voice swiftly came through, "Marcus, where are you now? Come back quickly. I've been feeling unwell lately... I'm an old widow staying home alone. I might even die and nobody would know... My life is so miserable, having an unfilial son like you. I'm getting on in years and don't even have a dutiful daughter-in-law, so pitiful..."

Julian Rathborne immediately had a headache. He knew the old lady was starting up again!

"Mom, I..."

"Oh dear, my head hurts. I'm about to faint. Marcus, hurry back!"

With two beeps, Old Mrs. Rathborne hung up the phone.

Julian Rathborne tossed his phone aside, displeased, and directly instructed the private butler in the front, "Drive, prepare the private jet, head back to the City of Aethelgard."

"Yes." The luxury sedan sped off.

Seraphina was left behind, "Hey, Julian Rathborne!"

The luxury sedan only showed her a domineering and stylish back, kicking up a cloud of dust in her face, Seraphina, "..."

Damn it!

What the hell does this Julian Rathborne think he's doing?

No way, she must get that martial arts secret manual back!

Seraphina quickly made her way to the airport. She had to chase him to City of Aethelgard to reclaim her item!

...

Jude Crawford got off the private jet and left the airport. He called Serena Sterling, wanting to meet Isabelle Willow immediately.

But Serena Sterling didn't answer the call and instead sent him a message, "Uncle Jude, we're waiting for you at the Crawford family old residence."

Jude Crawford read this message over and over. The Crawford family old residence—he hadn't been back there in many years.

Back in the day, when Iris's incident happened, it dealt a devastating blow to the entire Crawford family. Everyone moved out of the old residence, which had been abandoned for a long time.

But now, Serena Sterling was asking him to return to the Crawford family old residence.

Jude Crawford's thin lips curled into a cold smile. This Serena Sterling was really something!

Chapter 763: It's All Over Now

Butler Thorne cautiously asked, "Sir, should we return to the old mansion?"

Jude Crawford pressed his thin lips, "How about the old lady, is she still staying at the temple?"

"Sir, as far as I know, after Miss Serena and Mrs. Yara arrived in the City of Aethelgard, they immediately brought the old lady from the temple; she should be at the Crawford family's old mansion now."

The old lady still doesn't know about Iris Crawford's incident, now Serena Sterling directly took her away, it's obvious she doesn't plan to hide Iris Crawford's matter from the old lady.

The old lady is elderly and can't handle such shocks, but Serena Sterling's bold actions, gathering all the members of the Crawford family in a swift manner, clearly indicate a big drama is about to unfold.

"Sir, the old lady has always cherished Miss Serena, and Miss Serena is skilled in medicine, so I don't think we need to worry about the old lady being too shocked. On the contrary, Miss Serena calling us back to the Crawford family's old mansion must have a purpose. Miss Serena is wise and insightful; there's no dilemma she can't solve in this world. Sir, perhaps we should go back to the Crawford family's old mansion?" Butler Thorne advised.

Jude Crawford showed no emotional fluctuations; indeed, the old lady favored Serena Sterling, even Butler Thorne, who had served him for so many years, was now so convinced by Serena Sterling. It seems whatever Serena says carries more weight than anything else; everyone would listen.

Of course, Jude Crawford was also curious, "Then let's return to the Crawford family's old mansion, I want to see exactly what kind of trick Serena Sterling is pulling this time."

"Yes, sir."

...

The luxury business car parked on the lawn of the Crawford family's old mansion, Butler Thorne respectfully opened the back door, "Sir, we're here."

Jude Crawford got out of the car.

He stood tall and firm by the car, raising his eyes to look at the old Crawford mansion ahead. In the blink of an eye, so many years had passed, and his thoughts became a bit hazy because many years ago, it was probably just such a night, Iris' birthday, when he brought Isabelle Willow back home.

Jude Crawford strode his long legs, stepping steadily to the front door of the old mansion villa, then reached out and pushed the door open with a "boom."

Inside the villa, it was brightly lit.

Jude Crawford was stunned; they hadn't returned to the Crawford family's old mansion for a long time. In his imagination, it should have become desolate and abandoned, but it hadn't. Everything was as it was in memory, the coffee table spotless, the lighting bright and warm.

Soon, a burst of laughter reached his ears, a laughter so familiar, yet so distant.

Jude Crawford walked in, standing in the living room, he turned his head towards the dining room, and quickly his pupils shrank suddenly.

For there were many people in the dining room, the old Crawford lady, Isabelle Willow, Iris Crawford, Dylan Gardner, they were all there.

The old Crawford lady picked up a wine glass, looking lovingly at Iris Crawford, "Iris, happy birthday, you've grown another year older."

Iris Crawford sweetly smiled, "Thank you, mommy~"

Jude Crawford stood watching, his sharp eyes quickly spotting Iris Crawford's protruding belly, looking almost nine months along.

Time reversed, everything returned to thirty years ago.

The same night, the same scene, it was Iris's birthday, everyone was there, except him.

Jingle~

Suddenly, a bell sound interrupted, this bell sound was particularly pleasant, as if carrying a bewitching power.

At the dining table, Isabelle Willow quickly frowned, showing signs of discomfort.

Jingle~

The bell sound rang again, the scene shifted, Isabelle Willow and Dylan Gardner stood together, conversing about something unknown.

Seeing this, Jude Crawford's large hands hanging by his side quickly clenched into fists. He wanted to walk over, but it was as if his feet weighed a thousand pounds, and he couldn't move.

Isabelle Willow turned, walked upstairs; Jude Crawford saw her face, Isabelle Willow's face was deathly pale, her eyes hollow, her steps mechanical as if being controlled.

Jingle~

The bell jangled again, accompanied by a sharp scream!

Jude Crawford looked up, only to see Iris Crawford, her nine-month-pregnant belly, wandering out of the room in a daze, heading towards the staircase.

That staircase was where many years ago Iris tumbled down, and where the child was lost.

After so many years, experiencing this scene again, Jude Crawford's eyes were bloodshot, veins bulging on his forehead; he shouted out, "Iris, it's dangerous there!"

Jude Crawford wanted to rush forward to stop it all.

But suddenly a small hand reached over and tugged on his sleeve.

Jude Crawford stopped, turned his head, and Serena Sterling's delicate, beautiful face came into his view.

Serena Sterling had appeared.

Today, Serena Sterling wore a dress, standing gracefully; her bright, clear eyes fell on Jude Crawford's face. She raised her small hand, in which she held a small, bright-red bell.

It turned out the bell sound he had heard since he entered was coming from it.

Jude Crawford parted his lips, intending to speak, but Serena Sterling suddenly smiled gently, and with a flick of her hand, the bell rang again soothingly.

"No!"

Jude Crawford looked up to see that Iris Crawford on the stairs had already stepped into the void and tumbled directly down.

Blood.

The glaring blood quickly spread from Iris Crawford's skirt.

Jude Crawford breathed heavily, almost splitting with rage, and painfully moved towards the blood-drenched Iris Crawford.

He squatted, reaching out, wanting to caress Iris Crawford, but he touched nothing; Iris Crawford disappeared right there, everything vanished.

It was all just an illusion technique.

Jude Crawford's hand stayed frozen in midair, just then Serena Sterling walked over, her skirt gracefully trailing over the carpet. The little red bell was clasped in her hand, as she spoke in a clear, soft voice, "Uncle Jude, it's all over."

Jude Crawford stood up, seeing the old Crawford lady and Isabelle Willow walking out, Dylan Gardner also came, pushing forward an unconscious Iris Crawford, everyone from back then was present.

Jude Crawford's deep eyes fell on the red bell in Serena Sterling's hand, "What is this?"

"This is the Red Enchanted Bell of the Merfolk Clan. Once rung, it can control people's hearts. During Aunt Iris's birthday banquet back then, Aunt Yara, Uncle Gardner, and Aunt Iris were all controlled by the bell's sound. That night, sorrow turned into a torrent, enveloping the Crawford family in gloom for years; this saga of love and hate spanned thirty years, burying so many youthful times, none were spared." Serena Sterling spoke softly.

Now that the truth is revealed, everything began and ends with the enchanted bell.

The old Crawford lady's eyes were already red as she took hold of Serena Sterling's small hand, "Serena, what grudge and resentment lay between our Crawford family and the Merfolk Clan that they would have laid their plans so early, thirty years ago?"

Chapter 764: I Am Very Happy

Serena Sterling tightly grasped Mrs. Crawford's aged hands, "Grandmother, it's all because of... Aunt Isabelle."

"Because of Isabelle?" Mrs. Crawford was confused.

"Grandmother, you might not know yet, but Aunt Isabelle is not actually a daughter of the Willow family, her true identity is that of the Grand Princess of the Royal Family of Westria."

What?

Mrs. Crawford looked at Isabelle Willow, then at Jude Crawford beside her, and suddenly remarked, "Jude, doesn't that make you the Prince Consort of Westria?"

Jude Crawford, "..."

Mrs. Crawford laughed to herself, "Back in the day, when Jude was young, he suddenly ran back to the old estate one day while I was sitting on the sofa there. Jude ran back saying, 'Mom, I've fallen in love with a girl, and I want to marry her and make her Mrs. Crawford.'"

"At the time, I was stunned. Knowing my son has such high standards that those aristocratic heiresses couldn't catch his eye, I later learned that the girl who captured my son's heart at first sight was actually the young lady of the prestigious Willow family."

"Now, I've realized my son's taste was indeed exceptional; the girl he fancied turned out to be the Grand Princess of the Royal Family of Westria living among commoners. So many years have passed at a blink of an eye..."

Mrs. Crawford heavily struck the carpet with her cane, her eyes red, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

The person Serena Sterling admired the most was Mrs. Crawford. Mrs. Crawford had managed the Crawford family's affairs for so many years, stood firm during turbulent times, never complaining or despairing, and raised her grandson Hayden Crawford so kindly and generously.

"Grandmother," Serena tightly held Mrs. Crawford's hand, offering a gentle smile, "I've mentioned, everything is in the past now."

Mrs. Crawford looked lovingly at Serena Sterling, "Good child."

Just then, Dylan Gardner suddenly spoke out, "Quickly look, Iris moved."

Serena Sterling quickly lifted her head, seeing that the comatose Iris Crawford moved a finger, she really did move.

...

In the room, Serena checked Iris Crawford's body; Iris hadn't completely regained consciousness yet, but the movement of her finger was a very positive sign, indicating she wasn't far from waking up.

Outside, Jude Crawford stood together with Dylan Gardner, the atmosphere between the two men was silent and oppressive, quickly broken by Jude Crawford, "Leave, I still cannot tolerate you in my sight, I don't want to see you again."

Dylan Gardner gazed up at the sky outside the window, "I'll leave once Iris wakes up."

Finishing his words, Dylan turned away.

In the next moment, Jude Crawford's voice quietly came from behind, "Don't you have anything you want to say to me?"

Dylan Gardner paused, then slowly spoke, "Although I was bewitched by the sinister chimes to commit wrongs back then... The one stunned by Isabelle Willow back then was not just Iris, it was me too; on the day of your grand wedding, when she stood amidst the lights and turned unexpectedly, I couldn't forget for a moment."

"Iris admired my talents most, and when she discovered that drawer full of portraits of Isabelle Willow, and when she realized I used the paintbrush she admired to paint another woman, I could only imagine her anguish."

"I've hurt two people simultaneously, regarding Isabelle Willow; she harbors no personal feelings for me, I hope you'll no longer misunderstand her, the wrongdoing remains mine alone."

Dylan Gardner walked away, disappearing from sight.

Jude Crawford stood tall and firm, his handsome face remaining expressionless, unable to reveal what he was thinking.

At this moment, Serena Sterling walked over, gently calling out, "Uncle Jude."

Jude Crawford curled his thin lips, though now being obedient, yet it was her who had threatened him to the old Crawford estate.

"Serena Sterling, you truly have never let me down, this particular performance was executed wonderfully, I indeed fell into your scheme."

Jude Crawford had dominated the business world for years, executing affairs decisively and ruthlessly. He hadn't anticipated Serena Sterling's boldness, as she utilized the sinister chimes to unravel everything orchestrated by The Merfolk Clan back then, proving her intelligence unmatched.

Serena Sterling thought a friendly face deserved no hostility, thus she offered a big smile, "Thank you, Uncle Jude, for the compliment."

Jude Crawford glanced at the red sinister chimes, "What do you think?"

Serena Sterling pondered for a moment, "Considering back then the Crawford family had an insider; if I'm not mistaken, the people of The Merfolk Clan were right beside you that night. I have an inkling that this insider is none other than the master of Consort Willow, the princess of The Merfolk Clan."

With Jude Crawford's keen insight, he, of course, had thought of this too, "The Crawford family servants' backgrounds are completely clean, without any issues. That night, no one paid attention to others, making identifying the insider difficult."

Serena Sterling agreed with Jude Crawford's viewpoint that Consort Willow could not summon the Mermaid Clan princess; the only breakthrough point left now was right here within the Crawford family.

She was unable to comprehend how the Mermaid Clan princess managed to infiltrate the Crawford estate that night.

Considering the Crawford family is a century-old flourishing family from Aethelgard, one of notable lineage, infiltrating was no easy task. Thus, back then, The Merfolk Clan collaborated with Zelda Willow, pursuing their scheme subtly given their apprehension of Jude Crawford, the king of commerce, avoiding overt moves.

Serena Sterling couldn't pinpoint the breakthrough; if identified, she could locate The Merfolk Clan princess and reveal their presence.

She mused that the Mermaid Clan princess was indeed already amongst them.

Jude Crawford and Serena Sterling fell into contemplation as footsteps sounded nearby—Isabelle Willow approached.

Jude Crawford's deep gaze settled on Isabelle Willow, his eyes reflecting undulating motion.

"Uncle Jude, Aunt Isabelle, please talk," Serena, being perceptive, excused herself from the scene.

With Serena gone, only Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow remained on site; Jude Crawford slowly extended his large hand, speaking two words, "Come here!"

He beckoned her over.

Dominant and assertive as always.

Isabelle Willow approached him, "Jude Crawford, now the truth is revealed, nothing happened between Dylan Gardner and me..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Jude Crawford reached out, pulling her directly into his embrace.

Suddenly falling into his broad and warm embrace, Isabelle Willow froze.

With strong arms, Jude Crawford wrapped around her soft body, gently pressing his handsome face into her lovely hair, murmuring softly, "Yes, I know, I'm delighted."

Isabelle Willow's heart suddenly softened, a complete mess.

Her hands initially pressed against his chest to push him away, but now her fingers curled in, instead gripping onto his suit.

"Jude Crawford, what's the matter with you?" Isabelle Willow softly asked.

"Hm?"

"I feel you are acting strange."

Chapter 765: She Knows He's Here

Isabelle Willow couldn't quite articulate the feeling, she just felt he was acting strangely, somewhat out of character.

Jude Crawford held her tightly, slowly closing his handsome eyes, "I'm fine, just a bit tired, let me hold you like this for a while, just a little while."

Ripples of emotion spread in Isabelle Willow's heart. So, even he could get tired. This man, usually so dominant and indomitable, suddenly showed a hint of weariness in front of her, leaving her feeling at a loss, bewildered, and a little heartbroken.

He said he was very happy.

Because Serena proved her innocence, he knew that nothing happened between her and Dylan Gardner. Over the years, he had been carrying the guilt towards his sister, Iris Crawford, forging ahead under the weight. On one side was family, and on the other love, many nights he felt suffocated by the pressure.

He was truly happy.

Isabelle Willow released his suit, her hand moved down to his well-built waist, and then slowly, hesitantly, touched it.

She wanted to hug him.

When she found out he had suddenly developed a heart condition, she wanted to hug him.

Since they met, she had never reached out to hug him of her own accord. Not because she didn't want to, but because she didn't dare to. He was her greatest luxury and craving, she didn't dare to let herself, because with him, she couldn't afford to.

Isabelle Willow's hand had already touched his waist, about to hug him when suddenly the maid walked over, "Sir, Ma'am, dinner is ready."

Isabelle Willow's hand quickly withdrew.

With someone interrupting, Jude Crawford released Isabelle Willow, but his arm rested on her waist, "Come on, let's go have dinner together."

Isabelle Willow had no room to refuse, as he was already holding her as they went downstairs to the dining room.

...

In the dining room.

The old Mrs. Crawford and Dylan Gardner hadn't come downstairs, staying with Iris Crawford. Serena Sterling came down and joined Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow for dinner.

Isabelle Willow didn't have much of an appetite, and when the maid served a bowl of carp soup, she quickly pressed her hand to her chest upon smelling the fishy scent, feeling nauseous.

"Ma'am, are you alright?" Butler Thorne asked with concern.

Serena Sterling looked up, her clear eyes falling on Isabelle Willow, with something flickering in her gaze, though she didn't say anything.

"I'm fine, I just have no appetite and don't want to eat, you all continue," Isabelle Willow said, wanting to get up.

But Jude Crawford grabbed her arm, picked up a small bowl and spoon, and started feeding her himself, "You must eat something, open your mouth."

He wanted her to open her mouth so he could feed her.

Isabelle Willow blushed, with so many people in the dining room, and her not being young anymore. Across, Serena Sterling's lively eyes were watching her, making her feel very embarrassed.

"I'm not eating," she refused.

Jude Crawford was full of patience, his deep voice tinged with warmth, "Be good, listen~"

Across, Serena Sterling was speechless, "..."

Suddenly, she felt full, unexpectedly stuffed with a bowl of dog food.

Serena Sterling had always thought Jude Crawford was the classic domineering CEO in his early days, but didn't expect even middle age wouldn't temper him, flaunting affection with complete abandon.

Isabelle Willow neither advanced nor retreated, she could only open her mouth and eat the rice he fed her, "I'll eat on my own."

Jude Crawford was determined to see the feeding through, he scooped some carp soup, picked out some meat from the fish's belly, carefully picked out the fishbones, and fed it to her lips, "Open your mouth."

"..." Isabelle Willow looked at Jude Crawford doubtfully. What was wrong with him? Although when they were young... he often used to have her sit on his lap, confined in his arms, while feeding her, now he was acting strange.

Of course, Serena Sterling knew what was going on with Jude Crawford, he was treating Yara Auntie as if she were a pregnant woman.

Serena Sterling buried her little head and quickly finished the white rice in her bowl, "Uncle Jude, Aunt Yara, I've finished my meal, I'll be off now."

Serena Sterling hurriedly left.

Isabelle Willow watched Serena Sterling's retreating figure, getting more confused; she kept feeling that Serena was hiding something from her.

All in all, she was utterly bewildered.

"Jude Crawford, I've eaten enough, I don't need you to feed me anymore," Isabelle Willow quickly reached out to push Jude Crawford away a little.

Jude Crawford put down the bowl and chopsticks, then placed his large hand on her flat abdomen, gently rubbing it in circles.

What was he doing?

"Jude Crawford, stop it, others are watching," the blush on Isabelle Willow's face burned all the way to her earlobes.

Jude Crawford touched her stomach again, then looked up at her, "Stay tonight."

Stay tonight.

Since she returned, he hadn't made such a request, causing Isabelle Willow's heart to race. She stood up at once, "No, I'm leaving with Serena."

With that, she ran upstairs.

...

Isabelle Willow returned to her room, when a knock sounded, and Serena Sterling walked in, "Aunt Yara~"

Isabelle Willow held Serena Sterling's small hand, "Serena, it's already dark, let's go."

Serena Sterling blinked her long lashes and playfully smiled, "Aunt Yara, why are you in such a hurry, could it be... Uncle Jude asked you to stay the night?"

"..." Isabelle Willow gently tapped Serena Sterling's forehead with her finger, "Don't talk nonsense, between your Uncle Jude and me... it's already over, and besides, your Uncle Jude's health was compromised before, it's still... not recovered. The last time I even saw him visiting doctors for treatment..."

Serena Sterling arched her delicate brow and just smiled without saying anything else. Jude Crawford's tactics could only deceive the simple and innocent Aunt Yara.

"Serena, why are you laughing, be honest, are you hiding something from me?"

Serena Sterling took out a small pill and offered it to Isabelle Willow, "Aunt Yara, take this."

"What is it?"

Serena Sterling smiled mysteriously, "Aunt Yara, once you take it, you'll know everything."

Isabelle Willow took the pill, and Serena Sterling left. Filled with curiosity, she soon felt her eyelids grow heavy, as the familiar sensation swept over her once again.

Isabelle Willow lay on the bed, soon closing her eyes, but this time was different; though she fell asleep, her mind was completely clear.

Serena's pill!

What did Serena mean by this?

Just then, the door suddenly creaked open, someone was entering the room.

Isabelle Willow's heart tightened, she dared not move, pretending to sleep.

She heard the steady sound of footsteps, then the bed beside her sank, someone lay down, and soon a pair of soft lips touched hers, kissing her.

Isabelle Willow had only ever had Jude Crawford in her life; she had been with him since she was nineteen. He had left indelible marks on her. Even though she didn't open her eyes, she knew he had come.

Chapter 766: You Old Bastard!

But, why did he come to her room?

Isabelle Willow didn't have time to think because his thin lips were upon her, overwhelming her with his assertive kisses and presence.

All of this seemed... exactly like the two dreams she had before.

Could it be?

Isabelle quickly considered a possibility, but it shouldn't be so.

After those two times she woke up feeling unwell, she actually suspected something, but she personally saw him consulting a doctor, and he said he was unwell, he just couldn't...do that.

Isabelle was in chaos, and at this moment Jude Crawford left her red lips, his thin lips falling on her neck, and his hand wearing an expensive watch reached inside her clothes...

Isabelle's fingers curled, her face flushed so red it could bleed, and those two times in the dream felt far less intense than how clearly she felt his large hand on her now.

It was now clear to Isabelle, it was not a dream, but...real.

He must have given her some kind of drug, causing her to sleep deeply, then taking advantage of her unconsciousness to enter her room and brazenly assault her like this.

But, she still had a question regarding his condition...

Could it be that he's gotten better?

"Why didn't you listen to me and stay here tonight?" His low, raspy voice enveloped her ear, "Although the medicine I gave you does no harm, your body can't take any more drugs now."

His large hand moved down, resting gently on her belly, tracing circles, "I still don't know how to deal with you and the baby, I never thought you would become pregnant, I originally just wanted to... love you dearly..."

Baby?

Isabelle was completely confused by what he was saying, what baby, did he make a mistake?

She had been feeling unwell recently with constant nausea but definitely was not pregnant. Her daughter was gone years ago, and he had been relentless, making her fear getting pregnant again, so she secretly had

a sterilization procedure, meaning she couldn't get pregnant again. Besides, she was now of age, her grandchildren were three years old, how could she be pregnant?

Serena had even said that it was just nighttime chills causing the lack of appetite.

But one thing was certain, and that was... he did indeed drug her, then...

Isabelle felt his kiss fall upon her face again, soon he grasped her hand, mindful of her pregnancy, not daring to be reckless, leading her hand down on his own.

Isabelle touched something burning hot like a rod, that was!

She abruptly withdrew her hand and opened her eyes, "Jude Crawford, you bastard!"

Jude Crawford didn't expect Isabelle would suddenly wake up, in the midst of suppressing yet feeling aroused, a touch of lust lingering in his deep narrow eyes, when his large hand was suddenly shaken off, Isabelle, beneath him directly awoke.

Isabelle reached out to push him away, overwhelming shame and anger coloring her face bright red, she grabbed a pillow and smashed it into his handsome face.

Jude Crawford didn't dodge, getting hit by the pillow, fully aware he was exposed, he immediately reached out to embrace Isabelle, "Yara, listen to me!"

Isabelle didn't want to hear anything now, just thinking about what he did to her, she wished she could bite him.

How could he be so... shameless!

Reflecting now, the first time she stayed at his place was right when she returned from Alani, and he had already... put her in bed.

The second time she dreamed she became suspicious, he even called a doctor to play along with his act, simply treating her like a fool.

At that time, she avoided him out of guilt for having dreamt intimately, and though he knew everything, he played the role of a gentleman!

His condition was not an issue, quite the contrary, he was very well!

"Jude Crawford, don't touch me!" Isabelle immediately got up from the bed, rushing straight for the door, she didn't want to stay with him for another second.

But Jude Crawford chased with long strides, stretching out a strong arm to encircle her supple waist, dominantly pulling her into his embrace, "Yara, listen to me, don't be angry."

"Jude Crawford, let go of me! You... old bastard!" Isabelle vigorously tried prying his fingers, attempting to break free from his hold.

Isabelle wasn't someone who cursed, yet she was forced to scold "old bastard", old bastard Jude Crawford, "..."

Jude Crawford initially hugged her stomach but feared hurting the baby inside her womb, so his arms moved up, holding her shoulders, locking her in his embrace, "Fine, I'm indeed an old bastard, but don't forget, we're not divorced yet, you're still my Mrs. Crawford, this is called marital obligation, understand? Sleeping with you twice is nothing, I haven't done wrong."

Astonishingly self-righteous, even invoking marital obligations, Isabelle was shaking with anger, "Then let's divorce now!"

"Too late! Originally, your reason for divorce was our years of separation, but now that we've slept together, the judge will only ask why you didn't talk about divorce when sleeping with me, how will you respond then?"

"I..." Isabelle strangely found herself speechless.

Jude Crawford tightly held her, burying his handsome face in her long hair, his eyes rimmed crimson and murmured softly, "Now that you're awake, it's good, I still prefer you conscious..."

"..." Isabelle quickly covered her ears, he remained unchanged, a beast in man's clothing, shameless!

"Get away, let me go, Jude Crawford, I never want to see you again, I'm leaving here... mugh!"

Jude Crawford gripped her shoulders and forcibly turned her around, sealing her red lips directly.

All of Isabelle's words were swallowed by his fierce and assertive kiss, she wanted to struggle but couldn't break free, soon her body weakened, hardly able to stand and sliding toward the ground.

Jude Crawford steadied her, wiping her swollen lips with his thumb, his thin lips curving slightly, "Isabelle Willow, you're always like this, saying no, no, but your body is honest."

The years they were married were filled with many joyful moments, she wasn't without feelings for him, and at least she liked the marital obligations.

Jude Crawford's eyes revealed a trace of smile, "Isabelle Willow, you're still so sensitive. One kiss and you can't take it. Admit it, over these years you've thought about men, you've thought about me, just as I have thought about you night after night."

Isabelle wished she could dig a hole and crawl in, she wondered why her body refused to cooperate.

#### Chapter 767: Fake Pregnancy

Jude Crawford liked to conquer her when her personality was cold and indifferent, which was really hard to conquer, except for between the sheets.

Each time she struggled desperately, but soon she would go weak all over, her face flushed red, and even those almond eyes became extraordinarily captivating. She would look at him with watery eyes, her gaze rippling, revealing a bit of fascination and admiration for him.

Every time at this moment, it seemed he could see her affection for him on her face.

"Yara, don't struggle anymore. I never intended to let you go, you know that, you can't escape, what's more, we already have a child."

"Child?"

"Yes, Yara, you didn't know, did you? You're pregnant, you're carrying our child." Jude Crawford's gaze fell on her belly.

Isabelle Willow furrowed her brow, "Jude Crawford, don't you realize how big a misunderstanding you have? It's impossible for me to be pregnant, I am not pregnant."

Jude Crawford thought she was just having difficulty accepting it. Now that she's pregnant, no matter how she acts, he would indulge her, "Yara, I want you to give birth to this child. You already owe me a child."

Isabelle Willow knew what he was talking about. Years ago, she had a second pregnancy, a daughter that he always thought was Chase Sullivan's.

Later, the daughter was gone, and he kept asking her to conceive, wanting her to give him another one, saying it was what she owed him.

She couldn't take it anymore. On the night she left, she wounded him with scissors and amidst the chaos stood on the high platform of Jill's room and jumped off directly.

She had never seen the child. At that time, she cut herself open, shivering with pain. As soon as the child was cut out, he snatched it away. No matter how she implored him, he wouldn't let her have a single glance at her child.

The child died, Zelda Willow said he heartlessly threw the child in the trash.

Thinking of that child, the blush on Isabelle Willow's face faded completely, turning pale, huge guilt, self-blame, and pain swelled at the tip of her heart, making her whole heart ache.

Isabelle Willow curled her fingers, then looked up at him, "Jude Crawford, where's my daughter from then? Where did you take her?"

At the mention of this topic, Jude Crawford pursed his lips once. He remembered that back then, she didn't know who told her, saying he threw the child in the trash. During that time her mental state was especially poor, living in a daze, waking up at night only to find her absent from his arms. When he turned on the light, he found her curled in a corner, rummaging through trash bins.

She was looking for that child.

Jude Crawford wouldn't tell her, actually, she didn't give birth to a daughter then, but a son, Zane Crawford, which was his punishment for her.

Even if one day she and Zane Crawford met, he wanted them not to recognize each other.

"Isabelle Willow, do you really want to discuss this with me? You know it'll make me angry, and me getting angry does you no good."

Isabelle Willow's face was very pale, she looked coldly at Jude Crawford before her, "Then let's talk about me being pregnant. I am not pregnant, if you don't believe it, you can find a doctor to examine me."

Jude Crawford furrowed his brows, his expression turning gloomy, "Isabelle Willow, is being pregnant with my child really so unbearable for you?"

"Who told you I was pregnant?" Isabelle Willow asked.

Jude Crawford opened his thin lips, "Serena Sterling said so."

Serena?

Isabelle Willow suddenly understood everything; she realized what Serena had been hiding from her, "Jude Crawford, Serena was just joking to lure you to the City of Aethelgard. I am not pregnant, Serena just checked my pulse two days ago saying I was hit by cold at night, so I lost my appetite. Serena already prescribed medicine to condition me, I have been taking it, and I'm much better. I'm still saying the same thing, if you don't believe it, you can find a doctor to examine me, there's no way to deceive whether one is pregnant."

Jude Crawford quickly sensed the subtlety of the situation, his face instantly turned all cold—he might have been tricked by Serena Sterling!

"Someone!" He immediately called out.

Soon, a clear voice with a touch of humble flattery came from outside, "Uncle Crawford, are you looking for me?"

Serena Sterling was just outside the door.

Jude Crawford's face was already quite unsightly. He glared at Isabelle Willow and then shouted, "Get in here!"

The doorknob turned, the door opened slightly, and Serena Sterling poked her small head in to take a quick look, as if wondering if there was anything embarrassing to see.

Then the door was pushed open, Serena Sterling walked in boldly, her bright eyes full of sparkling mirth, "Uncle Crawford, you were looking for me?"

"What do you think?" Jude Crawford asked in return without answering.

To be safe, Serena Sterling moved honestly, bit by bit, towards Isabelle Willow, positioning herself behind her—a hint to Uncle Crawford that she had Yara on her side.

"Heh, Uncle Crawford, here's the thing, I played a small joke on you, actually, Aunt Yara is not pregnant."

Jude Crawford suddenly narrowed his deep, slanted eyes; he glared at Serena Sterling, ready to kill with his eyes.

This girl was good, really good. This trip to the City of Aethelgard had her plotting step by step, interlocking every loop, turning him in circles. Jude Crawford had never been schemed against like this.

Jude Crawford was a bit worried for his son Hayden Crawford, not knowing how he'd fare with that little white lotus. Now Serena Sterling was giving him time, too lazy to act, but once she did, his son and that little white flower would vanish.

Now what?

After all, she was his chosen daughter-in-law, and though he hated it, he couldn't help but appreciate her more—she was who the Crawford family needed.

"Butler Thorne!" Jude Crawford finally spat out the words from his throat.

Butler Thorne quickly wiped his cold sweat and hurried in, tremblingly asking, "Sir...what do you need?"

"Bring the doctor over here, right away, immediately!"

"Yes." Butler Thorne ran off like his life depended on it.

Jude Crawford was quite cautious. He had to personally verify Isabelle Willow's pregnancy matter, so the doctor promptly arrived to check on her.

"Mr. Crawford, your wife is not pregnant, she's just physically weak with a lack of appetite, she just needs more rest and care." The doctor concluded.

Jude Crawford immediately shot a killing glare at Serena Sterling; Serena Sterling looked innocently at him—this time she wasn't joking.

Jude Crawford bit his teeth. Just then Isabelle Willow defensively sheltered Serena Sterling behind her, glaring fiercely at him as if to say, go ahead, if you dare.

Jude Crawford, "..."

Chapter 768: Sometimes I Really Hate You

Jude Crawford, "..."

Where's Hayden Crawford?

Hayden Crawford, hurry up and take your wife back!

At this moment, with a click, the door opened, and the Crawford family matriarch walked in, "Jude, it's so late, what are you all fussing about in here?"

Seeing the matriarch, Jude Crawford's expression softened a bit, "Mom."

"Grandma~" Serena promptly walked to the matriarch's side, sweetly calling out.

"Serena, what's wrong with you? Why is your face so pale?" The matriarch lovingly stroked Serena's face, "Did someone bully you? Tell Grandma, and I'll stand up for you!"

Serena, "Grandma, no one bullied me."

As she spoke, Serena secretly glanced in Jude Crawford's direction.

The glanced-at Jude Crawford, "..."

She said no one bullied her, but her gaze was honestly directed at him.

The matriarch's eyes immediately shot at Jude Crawford, scolding, "Ugh, how shameful for someone of your age to bully your own daughter-in-law. Serena, let's go, you must've been frightened!"

The matriarch took Serena's small hand and directly led her away.

Serena obediently followed beside the matriarch, even reaching out a small hand to pat her own chest, whining, "Yeah, Grandma, I was scared to death."

Jude Crawford, "..."

He's about to cough up blood!

The matriarch took Serena away, and Butler Thorne also took the doctor downstairs, leaving only Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow in the room.

Isabelle Willow looked at Jude Crawford, "Now you know, I'm not pregnant, and I know all the dirty things you've done. I never want to see you again, I'm leaving."

Isabelle Willow turned and left.

Being taken advantage of twice, she now knows but has no choice but to admit defeat. However, she never wants to see him again or give him another chance.

Jude Crawford quickly reached out and grabbed her, "It's so late, where are you going? Stay here tonight, I promise not to touch you."

The moment he finished speaking, Isabelle Willow broke free from his large hand, "Jude Crawford, let go of me, I will never believe you again. You're a scoundrel who doesn't keep promises. Are you disappointed knowing I'm not pregnant? Who knows what you're scheming now..."

"What do you think I'm scheming? To get you pregnant?" Jude Crawford retorted, directly cutting her off.

He was so direct. Isabelle Willow felt embarrassed discussing this topic at their age, her face blushing so much it seemed it could drip with shame and anger.

"We're both not young; it's not suitable to have children anymore. Yara, you owe me a child, and that will probably remain an eternal regret." Jude Crawford curled his thin lips into a shallow arc, inexplicably showing some loneliness.

In his younger days, he actually wanted to have more children with her, at least two, to give Hayden a brother or sister. If it were a daughter, she'd resemble her; now he wouldn't envy Julian Rathborne for having such a talented and one-of-a-kind daughter like Serena Sterling. If it were a son, he'd be like her too, an elegant and graceful intellectual...

Jude Crawford thought of her son with Chase Sullivan, Zane Crawford. Her son indeed resembled her so much, but unfortunately, the son wasn't his.

Living half a life, this was his greatest regret.

Isabelle Willow also remembered her child, the child that was her biggest heartbreak, and her Hayden.

Isabelle Willow tugged at her fingers, her eyes red as she looked at him, "Jude Crawford, why pretend to be a loving father in front of me? After I left, Hayden was forcibly sent to a psychiatric hospital, where he stayed for two whole years. Jude Crawford, that's your biological son; why didn't you save him? Hayden isn't mentally ill. Where were you during those two years? What were you doing?"

In Alani, Isabelle Willow heard from Serena Sterling that after losing his mother, her Hayden was sent to a psychiatric hospital, which broke her heart. She didn't know where Jude Crawford was during those two years. Hayden was his biological son, so much like him; how could his heart be so hard?

When this matter was mentioned, Jude Crawford's eyes darkened. He slightly opened his thin lips to say something but ultimately didn't utter a word.

"Speak up, why aren't you saying anything, Jude Crawford? You can treat me however you want, but ask yourself if you've been a good father over these years. Sometimes I really despise you!" Isabelle Willow turned and left.

This time, Jude Crawford stood there, not chasing after her. He was thinking that indeed, he wasn't a qualified father, nor was he a good son or husband.

Living half a life, when he looked back at the path he walked, it was riddled with scars and holes.

Sometimes, he also really despised himself.

Cough.

Jude Crawford coughed lowly, suddenly feeling a metallic taste in his throat. However, he didn't take a handkerchief but forced himself to swallow the blood.

At this moment, Butler Thorne walked in, "Sir, why didn't you tell Madame about those two years? You could have explained."

Jude Crawford shook his head, "There's no point in telling her. Without my permission, you won't say anything in front of her, understand?"

Butler Thorne nodded, "Yes, sir."

"You can leave first, I'll rest for a while."

Butler Thorne saw that Jude Crawford's face was extremely pale, and without thinking, he knew that sir's heart condition was acting up again. His heart condition had been deteriorating recently, worrying everyone. The legendary business figure might suddenly fall at any moment.

"Sir, shall I call a doctor for you?"

"No need, you can leave."

Butler Thorne had to leave.

...

Outside in the corridor, the matriarch and Serena Sterling watched as Isabelle Willow left the Crawford family's old mansion, quickly disappearing from sight.

Sigh.

The matriarch let out a heavy sigh.

"Grandma, are you worried about Uncle Crawford and Aunt Yara?" Serena Sterling asked.

The matriarch nodded, "Jude and Yara have been entangled for half their lives, and even I don't know whether it's fate or catastrophe. Jude's heart is all on Yara, but while the lover is willing, the beloved has no dreams. Yara ultimately doesn't love."

Serena Sterling blinked her long lashes, "Grandma, do you also think Aunt Yara doesn't love Uncle Crawford?"

The matriarch looked at Serena Sterling in confusion, "Serena, do you think Yara loves him?"

Serena Sterling slowly curved her red lips, her bright eyes sparkling brilliantly, "Love or not, we just need to test it, right?"

The matriarch's eyes lit up, "Serena, have you thought of another good idea?"

Chapter 769: He Spat Out Blood

Serena Sterling smiled mysteriously, "I have an idea, but I'll need Grandma's help."

The old Mrs. Crawford tapped Serena on the forehead, implying that she's a clever, adorable little girl.

"Serena, hurry up and tell me, I'm all ears," the old Mrs. Crawford said eagerly.

Serena reached out and took the old Mrs. Crawford's arm, "Grandma, there's no rush with this idea. Just now, I heard Butler Thorne say you didn't have dinner tonight. I know you're worried about Uncle Crawford and Aunt Iris, but you must eat to stay strong. You're the pillar of the Crawford family, and you mustn't fall. I still need your help, so please have dinner now, and once you're full, I'll share my good idea with you."

Old Mrs. Crawford quickly laughed and lovingly stroked Serena's long hair, "Serena, you've even plotted against Grandma now."

"So Grandma, are you going to have dinner or not?"

"I'll eat, I'll eat!"

Serena smiled gently, resting her head softly on the old Mrs. Crawford's shoulder. She wore a floor-length dress tonight, its hem trailing as she stood calmly and wisely beside Mrs. Crawford, accompanying her to smile at the ups and downs of the Crawford family over the past thirty years. Her voice was soft, "Grandma, trust me, everything will get better."

The old Mrs. Crawford was startled, then quickly straightened her back and nodded. She knew her time as the family's matriarch was nearing its end, and someone else had arrived to take her hand and lift the burden of the Crawfords from her shoulders.

She had waited many years for this.

The old Mrs. Crawford knew that Serena would do even better than she did.

...

Jude Crawford slept through the night, waking up the next morning. He hadn't rested well last night, with memories swirling in his mind, now leaving his head pounding.

Jude went to the bathroom and, standing in front of the sink, felt an itchy, iron-tasting sensation in his throat. He knew his body best, aware that his heart condition was worsening and his health deteriorating, fearing he didn't have much time left.

The will was already written, and he had nothing unresolved; The Crawford Group had Hayden, and the Crawford family had Serena. Even if he left, it wouldn't fall apart.

The only thing he couldn't let go of was Isabelle Willow.

No matter what happened between them, he had cherished her for so many years. If he died, what would become of her? Perhaps it would be better if she accompanied him in death?

Jude now deeply desired to see her.

Then go see her!

Jude grabbed his car keys and left. He knew Isabelle had gone to an apartment last night. Hayden had many properties here, naturally settling his mother comfortably.

Jude drove all the way to the apartment, then took out his phone and dialed Isabelle's number.

The phone rang melodiously over and over again, but no one answered.

She didn't take his call.

Jude thought she must still be angry; after all, he had wronged her twice, and she wouldn't forgive him easily.

Forget it, it was indeed his fault. If he coaxed her well, she would forgive him.

Jude reached out to open the car door.

But the next moment, he froze, for when he glanced up inadvertently, he saw a familiar figure through the windshield on the street corner, Isabelle Willow.

Isabelle wasn't in the apartment; she had just come downstairs.

Soon Jude saw another familiar figure; it was... Chase Sullivan.

Chase had come to Aethelgard from Westria, now standing below Isabelle's building.

Isabelle and Chase were standing together now, and this scene directly halted Jude's motion to open the car door, his deep eyes zeroing in on the two people.

Isabelle spoke to Chase about something, and Chase reached out to embrace her directly, the two standing in an embrace on the street corner.

Jude's eyes narrowed sharply at this scene, the corners of his eyes flushed with anger, and his hands clenched tightly on the steering wheel, veins bulging.

Chase was a thorn in his throat, causing an enduring ache whenever agitated.

Jude quickly suppressed his handsome eyes, using every ounce of restraint and self-control to hold back the impulse to rush up and separate them. He ought to make Chase disappear from this world!

After a long time, Jude slowly unclenched his tightly gripped fingers, feeling the metallic taste again in his throat. This time, a mouthful of blood spurted directly from his mouth.

Crimson blood splattered onto his shirt, fingers, and car, still warm to the touch.

Forget it.

He was the one who forcefully took what wasn't his; Isabelle had never loved him, not even a little bit.

Jude now understood deeply that she had never loved him.

Jude reached out to wipe the bloodstain from the corner of his lips, then stepped on the gas, turning the car around and speeding away.

He left.

At this moment, a luxury extended limousine slowly parked on the other side, Serena sitting in the back seat. Her bright eyes watched Jude's departing car through the polished glass window, then fell upon Isabelle and Chase.

"Madam, this time, Sir must really be heartbroken. He's been chasing after her for so many years, and now he's exhausted," Butler Thorne remarked.

Serena propped her chin, pondering, "Let's switch it this time and have Aunt Yara chase after Uncle Jude."

How could that be?

Butler Thorne looked at Serena in disbelief.

Serena smiled gracefully, her voice clear and composed, "Butler Thorne, how's the matter I asked Grandma to handle coming along?"

Butler Thorne promptly responded with respect, "Replying to Madam, once the old Madam took your task, she tackled it non-stop. All the noble ladies and heiresses of Aethelgard have been sent to her, for her to

select from. But... Madam, why are you choosing these ladies? Young Master called earlier, joking that anyone unaware might think you're picking out a harem for him."

Hayden dared to say such a thing, a harem, how amusing.

Serena blinked her long lashes, "Next time he calls, tell him these beauties aren't for him but... for his father!"

What?

Butler Thorne stared at his young mistress in shock. She... she was actually picking a bride for her father-in-law?

Serena's bright gaze landed once more on Isabelle and Chase not far away. She clicked her tongue playfully, "Poor Hayden, Dad wants to remarry, and Mom wants to get married too, can't stop them at all~"

"..." Butler Thorne broke into a cold sweat, pleading, "Madam, please don't scare me, where is all this coming from?"

Serena curled her lips mysteriously, "Let's go back."

## Chapter 770: Yes, I Love Him!

"Madam, are we leaving now?" Butler Thorne was becoming increasingly unable to understand what this young madam was thinking. Outside, Mr. and Mrs. Crawford were in an urgent situation, yet this young madam remained unhurried and composed.

Serena nodded, "Yes, we're going back."

"But what about Madam over there..." Butler Thorne glanced at Isabelle Willow and Chase Sullivan outside.

"Oh," Serena seemed to suddenly remember, "Are you feeling unjust for your Mr. Crawford? It's simple, let's vent your anger for Mr. Crawford. Let's find a few people to tie up Mr. Sullivan and give him a good beating."

"..." Butler Thorne looked at Serena, as if to ask, are you serious, madam?

Serena curved her red lips, "I am serious."

Butler Thorne looked into the young madam's clear eyes, which seemed to be filled with a reassuring and convincing strength. He made a firm decision, no matter the consequences of dealing with Chase Sullivan, he was going to follow the young madam to the very end, "Alright, I'll follow Madam's orders."

Serena was satisfied, "Butler Thorne, let's go back. It seems like Mr. Crawford's little white lotus will be turning 20 soon. We can rush back to Westria and celebrate her birthday on the way."

Butler Thorne felt invigorated; the matter with Iris Crawford seemed resolved, and they were about to head back to Westria. It seemed like the young madam was setting her sights on young master Hayden and his little white lotus, Caroline Sloan.

Butler Thorne silently prayed for young master Hayden, "Amitabha, young master, you're on your own now!"

...

On the street, Isabelle Willow was hugged by Chase Sullivan, but she quickly pushed him away.

She hadn't slept since returning from Jude Crawford's place last night, tossing and turning. In the morning, feeling dizzy, she received a call from Chase Sullivan, who was waiting downstairs.

In her haste to come down, she forgot her phone.

Seeing Chase Sullivan, he didn't say a word and just embraced her.

"Chase, don't do this. I've always remembered the kindness you showed me in our childhood. Later, when you got caught up between me and Jude Crawford, I felt guilty. But I've said it before, I don't have any romantic feelings for you."

Chase Sullivan had loved Isabelle Willow for so many years, and if he could let go, he would have long ago. "Yara, I heard you and Jude Crawford returned to the City of Aethelgard, even to the old Crawford estate. Are you planning to reconcile? Don't forget he killed your child with his own hands, who was actually his own child too!"

Isabelle Willow curled up in pain. Actually, nothing happened between her and Chase back then; it was all an act.

Back then, Iris Crawford had spoken to her, and knowing Jude Crawford suddenly had a heart condition, she felt the suffering of everyone in the Crawford family was due to her, and she wanted to leave.

But Jude Crawford held her tightly in his grasp, giving her no chance to escape.

So, that day, she brought Chase to Jill's room, intentionally letting Jude, who returned prematurely, see them.

What she hadn't expected was to find herself pregnant again at that time.

The child was Jude Crawford's.

Reaching that point, she'd lost direction, and he, after one night of drunkenness, also slept with Zelda Willow, who then got pregnant. There hadn't been a more difficult time; this marked the end of their path.

"It wasn't only his fault back then, I was also to blame..." Isabelle Willow said hoarsely.

Chase Sullivan quickly grasped Isabelle Willow's shoulders, shaking them, "Yara, at this point, you're still defending him? He cheated with Zelda Willow and treated you this way..."

"Enough, Chase!" Isabelle Willow interrupted him directly, her cool almond eyes looking at Chase, "Between me and him, none of you are qualified to judge. Whether he treated me well or not is not up to you to decide!"

Chase's pupils constricted; she was defending Jude Crawford so fiercely, rejecting any criticism of him.

She shut the entire world out but opened the door only for Jude Crawford.

He stared at Isabelle Willow in a daze, "Yara, you've fallen in love with him, haven't you? You've fallen for him!"

Isabelle Willow lowered her lashes and, after a long time, softly replied, "Yes, I love him and haven't stopped for a single second."

Chase Sullivan stood frozen in place, his hands falling powerlessly from Isabelle Willow's shoulders.

...

Serena flew back to Westria with Isabelle Willow. At the airport, Serena, holding Isabelle's hand, suddenly said, "Yara Auntie, look, it's Mr. Crawford!"

Isabelle Willow raised her eyes and saw Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford had just stepped out of a long business car; he too was flying back to Westria today. He wore a gray shirt and black trousers, walking with an air filled with mature charm, profound and aristocratic, exuding a subtle dominance.

Butler Thorne followed respectfully behind Jude Crawford.

"Yara Auntie, look, there's a pretty girl with Mr. Crawford. Who is she?" Serena asked innocently.

Isabelle Willow also saw the young, beautiful girl walking beside Jude.

The girl looked to be about twenty, with a face somewhat resembling a younger Isabelle Willow.

This girl seemed to carry the shadow of a nineteen-year-old Isabelle, who had married Jude Crawford during her prime.

The girl wore a long white dress, captivating and lovely, walking next to Jude, while chatting with a bright smile.

Jude's sharp, handsome face remained expressionless, very indifferent.

The girl's eyes sparkled as she looked up at him, filled with admiration and affection, delicate like a bird in its nest.

Isabelle Willow froze on the spot; she hadn't expected that in just one day, a girl had appeared beside Jude, a girl who looked somewhat like her!

"Yara Auntie, who is that girl? Why is Mr. Crawford with a pretty girl?" Serena asked.

Isabelle Willow didn't respond, her hands cold and without warmth, "Serena, let's go."

"Yara Auntie, anyway, Mr. Crawford is flying back to Westria too. Let's have him give us a ride; his private jet is free."

"..." Isabelle Willow didn't want to travel with Jude Crawford, she tried to pull Serena away.

But it was too late; Serena quickly waved her small hand and shouted, "Mr. Crawford, what a coincidence, we're here!"

Jude Crawford turned his head, his deep, narrow eyes landing on Isabelle Willow.