

Substitute B 771

Chapter 771: The Art of Husband-Taming

Now, their eyes meet, Isabelle Willow pale, Jude Crawford indifferent and aloof.

"Sir, it's the madam and young madam," Butler Thorne noticed the subtle tension in the air, so he spoke up to remind him.

Only then did Jude Crawford start walking toward Serena Sterling and Isabelle Willow.

"Uncle Crawford, are you heading back to Westria? We are going back too; can we take your private jet?" Serena asked, holding Isabelle's arm.

Jude Crawford pursed his thin lips and spoke very sparingly, "You may."

After speaking, he turned and strode inside, without the slightest intention of waiting for them.

Isabelle stood in place, watching Jude's departing figure. His gaze towards her earlier was cold, as if looking at a stranger, a chill emanating from his bones.

All these years, no matter what happened, he always held her hand tightly, never letting go.

But at this moment, Isabelle felt he had let go.

He had let go of her hand.

Isabelle didn't know what happened after that night; his attitude toward her had completely changed.

"Yara Auntie, let's go in too," Serena acted as if she knew nothing and pulled Isabelle inside.

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Inside the luxury private jet.

Serena Sterling and Isabelle Willow sat together, Jude Crawford was seated with the beautiful girl, Jenny.

From her angle, Isabelle could see the two in front. Jude held a financial newspaper, while Jenny chatted happily with him.

Jenny sneakily observed Jude, the man lazily leaned against the seat, his proud long legs elegantly crossed, his handsome features sharp like a sculptor's work, reminiscent of a fine aged Cabernet Sauvignon, richer with age.

Jenny quickly moved closer, deliberately brushing against him, she coquettishly said, "Mr. Crawford, stop reading the newspaper, let's talk for a while."

Jude raised his eyes from the financial section, glanced at Jenny, then looked down, "What are you brushing against? Sit farther away."

"..." Jenny's face turned pale, "Mr. Crawford, do you love your wife that much?"

Jude showed little expression, just curved his thin lips into a shape that seemed to smile but didn't, "You even know I have a wife?"

"..." Jenny felt this man truly couldn't chat, a real conversation stopper, making it impossible to have a pleasant conversation.

Of course, she didn't believe it; fifty-year-old men are the most prone to infidelity, career and family reach a harmonious state, while hidden dark factors like physiological desires are not satisfied and start to emerge.

She is young and beautiful, what man doesn't like young, pretty women?

"Mr. Crawford, of course, I know you have a wife, and she's sitting behind us. But unfortunately, she seems not to care about you. We are sitting together, and she doesn't even look jealous."

Jude was hit at his sore point; he recalled the scene in public where she embraced Chase Sullivan, his dark eyes grew colder and more detached.

Jenny raised her brows, looking at Jude with flirtation, "Mr. Crawford, no matter how good the wife is, she's not young anymore. Now a ripe peach is in front of you, is it not enticing?"

Jude glanced at Jenny's youthful and beautiful face, without much thought, just felt... it's quite presumptuous. He said indifferently, "Don't have designs on me, I'm old enough to be your father."

Jenny flirtatiously played with her hair, calling out, "Daddy."

She had just returned from studying abroad, skilled at seducing men; men love these little games, especially those at this age.

Jude raised his elegant brows at her, exuding a bit of devilish air, slowly leaned closer to Jenny.

Jenny felt the two getting closer, her heart raced wildly; she knew this man couldn't resist her.

Just then Jude stopped, his cold lips curled slightly, leaning close, he said softly, "Let me tell you again, I'm not in a good mood, don't bother me. If you really like looking for 'daddy,' I can help you...find several more."

Jenny froze entirely, her face turned white, his words made her scalp tingle.

She looked at him, although he seemed to smile, the smile didn't reach his eyes. With an effortlessly sinister gaze, he looked at her, indescribably terrifying and frightening.

Jenny quickly shut her mouth, not daring to say anything.

Behind them, Isabelle watched the scene unfold, Jude so close to Jenny, almost kissing, and he was smiling, a smile so devilishly deep.

Knowing Jude the most intimately, she could tell he was definitely... being unscrupulous again, but this time his teasing was directed not at her, but another girl.

Serena then asked puzzledly, "Aunt Yara, what's Uncle Crawford doing, has he fallen for that girl?"

Isabelle diverted her eyes, "His matters have nothing to do with me."

Serena looked at Isabelle's pale face, clearly bothered, jealousy was eating her up inside, yet she appeared indifferent on the surface, alas.

"Aunt Yara, do you really plan not to be with Uncle Crawford anymore? Let me tell you, men are just like children, you need to coax them with some sweetness. If you don't provide it, naturally they will be drawn to the wild bees and butterflies outside, and as the saying goes, as men get older, they prefer younger girls. Now there's a young girl glueing herself to him, taking advantage of the situation, Aunt Yara, you're practically handing your man to someone else, totally not worth it."

Isabelle froze for a moment, looking at the seemingly docile Jenny, her face showed clear admiration and love for Jude, men must like her type.

And then herself, with a cold demeanor, constantly rejecting him, never daring to express her love, never showing him tenderness, so it was only natural for him to turn his affections elsewhere.

Isabelle tried to regulate her breathing, repeatedly telling herself, this is the outcome she wanted, divorcing him, allowing him to find a better girl.

Now everything was as she wished, yet she felt hurt again.

Her heart felt like it was being pricked by needles, not obviously painful, but densely aching, pervasive and inescapable.

Isabelle reached out and tapped Serena's forehead lightly. She had no daughter, but having Serena by her side filled that regret, she teased with affection, "No wonder Hayden listens to you so much, Serena seems to have mastered the art of taming."

Serena blushed, apologetically said, "Sorry Aunt Isabelle, I sold you out."

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The private jet arrived in Westria, all four of them getting off the plane.

Chapter 772: He Beat Someone Up

At this moment, Isabelle Willow's phone rang, it was a call.

"Serena, wait for me a moment, I need to take this call."

"Okay."

Isabelle Willow walked to the side and answered the call.

The call was from the hospital, "Hello, are you a family member of Chase Sullivan?"

Chase Sullivan was also an orphan from a young age, he hadn't married over the years, and Isabelle Willow was probably his only relative.

Isabelle Willow nodded, "Yes, what happened?"

The other day she parted with Chase Sullivan who left disheartened, and they hadn't been in touch since. Now with the sudden call from the hospital, Isabelle Willow felt a pang of anxiety.

"Here's the thing, Mr. Sullivan was assaulted last night and is currently being treated at our hospital."

What?

Chase Sullivan was assaulted?

"Who did it? Is he seriously injured?"

"It's said that while Mr. Sullivan was driving, a van with no license plate suddenly cut in front of him. Several strong men got out of the van and without a word, dragged Mr. Sullivan out, put a sack over his head, and beat him up. However, Mr. Sullivan wasn't seriously injured, just some superficial wounds; he'll be fine after a few days of rest."

Isabelle Willow's tense nerves gradually eased. She and Chase Sullivan had clarified things, and this time Chase Sullivan had given up. From now on, they would only be relatives and friends. She didn't want to see Chase Sullivan in trouble.

But who on earth beat up Chase Sullivan?

"Did you find any clues?"

"It's said that as those strong men left, they mentioned Mr. Crawford." The doctor said.

Mr. Crawford?

Jude Crawford?

Isabelle Willow's pupils constricted. She truly hadn't expected Jude Crawford to send people to give Chase Sullivan a beating. However, Jude Crawford is indeed a domineering and reckless man, and it's not the first time he's beaten up Chase Sullivan. This time was actually mild.

Isabelle Willow hung up the phone, very angry. What is he trying to do, beating up Chase Sullivan while finding a new lover?

Isabelle Willow felt it necessary to confront Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford had just deplaned and was about to leave the airport when Isabelle Willow approached, "Jude Crawford, we need to talk."

Butler Thorne saw the madam approaching and knew something was wrong. The madam must have found out about the assault on Chase Sullivan.

Butler Thorne quickly glanced at Serena Sterling, the young madam, as if to say, "This has nothing to do with me. It was you who ordered the beating and the one who released the 'Mr. Crawford' smokescreen. You'd better protect me later."

Serena Sterling just looked around, not catching the glance from Butler Thorne.

Butler Thorne, "..."

This was the first time Isabelle Willow had proactively approached him for a chat. Jude Crawford stopped in his tracks, "What's up?"

"Of course, there's something. Jude Crawford, I just received a call from the hospital saying Chase Sullivan was beaten up. Did you order someone to assault Chase Sullivan?" Isabelle Willow asked bluntly.

Jude Crawford's eyes darkened, then he quickly curled his thin lips in amusement. Just now, there was a fleeting moment of joy and excitement in his heart, thinking she was jealous because of Jenny. But it turns out, he was being overly sentimental. She was here for Chase Sullivan.

Her first love got into trouble, so she came to question him.

Jude Crawford's expression instantly turned cold, a layer of frosty chill and gloom covered his brow. He looked at Isabelle Willow and spoke indifferently, "How badly is he hurt?"

"Just some superficial injuries, no serious harm."

"Oh, it wasn't me."

He said it wasn't him.

Isabelle Willow looked at him suspiciously because he had a history, "Really? But..."

Jude Crawford suddenly stepped forward, his tall and imposing figure casting a shadow over Isabelle Willow. He curled his lips, "You know, if I made a move, he wouldn't just have superficial wounds."

"..." Isabelle Willow was merely suspicious, but his arrogant attitude left her dumbfounded, then a rush of blood surged to her head. She clenched her fist, "Jude Crawford, I won't believe you. You're just an insidious and despicable person. I think you ordered the assault on Chase Sullivan!"

She insisted it was him!

Jude Crawford slowly narrowed his deep, slanted eyes. His every move exuded a chilling aura of authority that made people fear and dread, "Isabelle Willow, you've been with me for so many years. Don't you know me yet? I, Jude Crawford, am not so lowly as to order an assault on someone and not dare to admit it!"

Jude Crawford wished he could strangle this woman. She truly was heartless, still daring to come and wrong him now!

That familiar metallic taste rose in his throat again. Jude Crawford quickly lowered his head, coughed lightly twice.

"Sir!" Butler Thorne's expression changed.

Isabelle Willow felt a pang of worry, immediately reaching out to grab his sleeve, a note of tension even she didn't notice in her voice, "Jude Crawford, are you alright? Are you feeling unwell?"

"Let go! Don't touch me!" Jude Crawford stopped coughing and mercilessly shook off her hand.

Isabelle Willow was caught off guard. His sleeve slipped from her palm, and she staggered back two steps.

Just then, Jenny walked over, "Mr. Crawford, are you alright? The wind is strong here, we should get in the car first."

Jenny held onto Jude Crawford's strong arm.

This time, Jude Crawford did not refuse such intimacy. He gave Isabelle Willow a cold look and then left with Jenny.

Isabelle Willow stood frozen, her hands at her sides slowly clenching into fists, her fair eyes suddenly turning red.

"Aunt Yara..." Serena Sterling stepped forward.

"I'm fine, Serena, I'm just going to the restroom." Isabelle Willow hurried away.

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Jude Crawford exited the airport terminal with Jenny. He quickly withdrew his arm from Jenny's hand and coldly pursed his lips, "You go first."

Jenny knew Jude Crawford was in a bad mood now, and she was tactful, "Alright, Mr. Crawford, I'll go first then. Remember to call me."

Jenny left.

Jude Crawford shot a cold, penetrating look at Butler Thorne behind him, "Butler Thorne, what exactly happened with Chase Sullivan? I'm giving you one chance, explain it to me clearly now!"

Butler Thorne's legs went weak, and cold sweat streamed down. It had come, it had finally come; this disaster was inescapable.

Jude Crawford was such a deep and astute man. He could easily guess the trick with just a little thought.

"Sir, I... I..."

At this moment, a clear and melodious voice sounded by his ear, "Uncle Jude, don't trouble Butler Thorne, he was acting on my orders."

Serena Sterling arrived.

Seeing their young madam arrive, Butler Thorne felt tears welling up in his eyes, wanting to cry but knowing he had to hold it back, feeling wronged, "Young madam, you finally came, I was so scared."

Jude Crawford's deep, slanted eyes landed on Serena Sterling's exquisitely beautiful face, and he let out a cold snort.

Chapter 773: Let Go of Your Hand

At the moment Serena Sterling appeared, Jude Crawford knew what was going on and snorted coldly, "So you're saying you ordered someone to beat Chase Sullivan up?"

Under Jude Crawford's imposing and cold aura, Serena nodded calmly, "Yes, it was me."

"It's one thing to beat him up, but you deliberately framed me?" Jude continued to ask.

Serena still nodded, "That's right."

Jude glanced coldly in the direction where Jenny had just left, "My mother inexplicably placed this person by my side, was that your idea too?"

Serena said, "Yes."

Butler Thorne, who was nearby, felt a cold sweat for their young mistress. Child, why are you being so honest?

Jude Crawford's gaze was icy and sharp as he looked at Serena, "Speak, what do you want to do?"

Serena came beside Jude Crawford, her two small hands behind her back, standing with her hands clasped, "Uncle Jude, have you heard the story of the Princess and the knight?"

"Are you sure you want to discuss fairy tales with me?" Jude frowned and was about to leave, not wanting to hear Serena speak.

Serena smiled casually, "Uncle Jude, have you never realized that Aunt Yara is like the fine sand in your palm? The tighter you grasp it, the faster it slips away."

Jude paused in his steps and looked at Serena.

Serena's lips curled, her bright eyes shimmering with clever flickers, "Uncle Jude, do you know how to hold the sand in your hand?"

As she spoke, Serena extended one of her small hands, slowly opening her soft white palm, "It's actually quite simple, just open your hand."

In Serena's hand, there was a handful of sand, and now as she opened her palm, the sand rested in it without slipping away at all.

Jude was taken aback, something flashed quickly in his deep, narrow eyes, and after a full minute, he turned and left.

Jude Crawford left.

Butler Thorne finally breathed a sigh of relief and quickly followed.

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In the extended luxury business car, Jude Crawford leaned lazily against the back seat. This time he wasn't reading documents but had taken out his phone, browsing a fairy tale about the Princess and the knight.

The Princess and the knight are destined never to be together; the knight's mission is to protect the Princess and her happiness, while the Prince's mission is to be happily with the Princess.

Jude Crawford put away his phone and turned his head to look at the scenery flying by outside the window, roughly understanding what Serena meant.

For all these years, he had been Isabelle Willow's knight, but not the Prince.

Jude Crawford thought again about the sand in Serena's palm earlier. The tighter you hold the sand, the faster it slips away. The only solution is to open your hand.

In the front, Butler Thorne cautiously observed his master's expression, "Sir, please don't blame the young mistress. The young mistress is extraordinarily intelligent and has her reasons for doing things. I can see that she is working to resolve the knot between you and the madam."

Jude gave Butler Thorne a look, a faint smile tugging at his lips, "Young mistress, young mistress, is that all you can say now, Butler Thorne? Who exactly do you answer to now?"

Butler Thorne was startled, breaking out in a cold sweat, "I... I am, of course, loyal to you unto death!"

"Never mind." Jude broke into a slight smile, "Not just you, now even the old lady has joined Serena in plotting against me. This Crawford family will eventually end up in her hands, and you haven't done anything wrong."

Butler Thorne looked at Jude Crawford in awe, it seemed... the master had also acknowledged the young mistress as the head lady of the family.

Jude was silent for a few seconds, then picked up his phone again and dialed a number.

This call wasn't for Isabelle Willow, but for Jenny.

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Serena returned officially, and Cherie was anxious, "Princess, you've finally come back. Tomorrow is Caroline Sloan's 20th birthday. I was worried you'd miss it."

"Have that little white lotus and her parents stirred up anything while I was gone?" Serena asked.

Cherie was furious, "Didn't Mr. Crawford plan a birthday party for Caroline Sloan? The location has been set at the most luxurious seven-star hotel in Westria, Port Sterling. I heard Caroline Sloan's bizarre parents are ecstatic, extremely arrogant these days, boasting to everyone that Mr. Crawford is their prospective son-in-law. Tomorrow they're bringing every relative from far and wide to show off. They're very pleased with themselves, making a splash everywhere."

Compared to Cherie's anger, Serena was very calm and said with a smile, "Oh, I see."

"Princess, aren't you even a little angry? What's Mr. Crawford trying to do, lifting Caroline Sloan's whole family to the skies? It's simply too much!"

"We'll know what Hayden Crawford is up to tomorrow, Cherie, let's go." Serena got up.

Cherie was puzzled, "Princess, where are we going?"

Cherie really felt more anxious than the emperor himself. Hayden Crawford's baffling actions were really aggravating. The unbecoming demeanor of Caroline Sloan's bizarre parents had caused a storm of gossip outside, making her furious, but her Princess wasn't angry at all, which was strange.

Serena wasn't angry because, in her view, Caroline Sloan was Hayden Crawford's business, not hers. He would handle it. Now she had her own matters to attend to.

"We're going to Iris Crawford's apartment," Serena said.

What, going to Iris Crawford's apartment?

"Princess, why are we going there?"

Serena thought for a moment, "Uncle Jude and I have investigated those people in the Crawford family from back in the day. They're all clean, without any problems. I can't figure out how members of the Merfolk Clan managed to infiltrate the Crawford family unless... they were brought in by someone from the Crawford family themselves."

Cherie's mouth dropped open in shock.

Serena continued to speculate, "Old Mrs. Crawford and Uncle Jude have no issues. They've stood in the Crawford family for so many years, deeply insightful, with no problems around them. Aunt Yara was trapped in Jill's room, so she wouldn't have problems either. The issue is likely with... Aunt Iris, and back then, the Merfolk Clan also used Aunt Iris as an entry point."

"Now Aunt Iris is in a coma, and we can't ask her anything, so I need to check out the apartment where Aunt Iris had her accident. I have a feeling... I've overlooked something, and I also feel... I'm just one step away from the truth!"

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Serena took Cherie to the apartment where Iris Crawford had her accident and entered Iris's room.

The room was very clean, without any traces.

Serena looked carefully bit by bit, and soon she found a word on the sofa; embedded in the sofa, she discovered the word "Lotus"!

Chapter 774: The Heiress of the World's Richest Man

Cherie quickly came over and saw the word "Lian." "Princess, there's a word here, it's Lian!"

Serena looked at the word "Lian." It was hidden deep and written in blood, crooked and rushed.

Consort Willow had disguised herself as Beryl and had been lurking around Aunt Iris. It seemed Aunt Iris had known something before the incident, and in her hurried confrontation with Beryl, she left this last and most crucial clue—the word Lian written in blood.

Lian?

What does it mean?

Serena sat on the sofa where Iris had fallen. She reached out her slender fingers and gently touched the word "Lian."

"Princess, what does this Lian mean? A lotus?" Cherie pondered.

Serena quietly lowered her long lashes. Soon, her fingertips paused on the word Lian as she murmured, "This word Lian reminds me of someone."

"Who?"

Serena looked up and spoke a name, "Caroline Sloan."

Cherie gasped, "Caroline Sloan, that's right, Caroline's 'Lian' is this Lian. But what's the relationship between Caroline and Aunt Iris? What does Aunt Iris want to tell us by leaving this word? This single Lian really leaves us clueless."

Serena withdrew her small hand, and a sharp gleam quickly flashed in her clear eyes.

She had thought of something, but needed to verify it!

Just then, a melodious phone ringtone sounded, a call was coming in.

"Princess, it's from Mr. Crawford."

Hayden Crawford was calling.

Serena took the phone and answered the call. Hayden's deep, magnetic voice carried over quickly, "Serena, where are you now?"

"Mr. Crawford, I'm here at Aunt Iris's."

"I'll drive over to pick you up. Let's have dinner together tonight." Hayden warmly invited, wanting to dine with Serena.

Serena curled her lips, "Mr. Crawford, tomorrow is Caroline's 20th birthday party. If you eat tonight, can you still eat tomorrow?"

Hayden replied, "Serena, do you want to come to the birthday party tomorrow and have some fun?"

"Sure, I was planning to come. I'll attend on time tomorrow. Mr. Crawford, I don't have time tonight, so see you tomorrow."

Serena hung up the call, and Cherie said, "Princess, are you really going to Caroline's birthday party tomorrow? Aunt Iris left a bloody word, Lian. I think something is odd about Caroline."

Serena raised her delicate eyebrows, "Precisely because it's odd, I need to go personally. I feel the whole thing is coming together. I think I understand something, I've grasped the point."

Cherie was delighted, "No wonder you're our princess, so clever and resourceful!"

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Caroline's birthday party was held at Port Sterling. Serena attended on time. As she entered the party hall, she saw Caroline's parents looking pleased as punch, wearing flashy mink coats and surrounded by many relatives from the countryside.

"Wow, this place is so luxurious. I've never been to a place like this in my whole life, not even in my dreams."

"I heard Lian is with a wealthy man. I didn't expect he's this rich to throw such a party for her here."

"Brother and Mrs. Sloan, you've really hit it big now, become high society people. The good days are just beginning; don't forget us poor relatives."

Caroline's parents were floating on these compliments, beaming and making grand gestures, "Don't worry, you all can follow us, and you'll have meat to eat and soup to drink."

At that moment, Mrs. Sloan was the first to see Serena, and her smile stiffened, "Serena, what are you doing here?"

"Swish," all those relatives' eyes fell on Serena's face, "Brother and Mrs. Sloan, who's this?"

"Oh, she's Lian's boyfriend's ex-girlfriend. Mr. Crawford already dumped her, but she just can't let go and keeps pestering him. Now she's shameless enough to come to Lian's birthday." Mrs. Sloan said.

The relatives immediately sided with Mrs. Sloan, pointing at Serena and gossiping,

"Ugh, shameless!"

"Mr. Crawford is Lian's! You, homewrecker, should stay away."

"Leave now; you're not welcome here."

Serena felt like she was about to be drowned in these scornful words, but she didn't care and walked in gracefully.

Caroline's parents didn't want to see Serena, concerned she might cause trouble. Mr. Sloan immediately shouted, "Manager! Call your manager over here quickly!"

Port Sterling is Westria's premier seven-star hotel; a manager isn't someone just anyone can meet. Yet, Mr. Sloan just yelled with his big voice, truly the ignorant fear nothing.

However, Port Sterling's manager was indeed called over by his yelling and quickly ran in.

Seeing the manager, Caroline's parents stood even straighter, pointing at Serena, "Manager, we are your distinguished guests, you should serve us well. Now someone has intruded into our banquet hall, shouldn't security throw her out?"

"Yes, throw her out!"

They all wanted to see Serena embarrassed as she got thrown out.

Port Sterling's manager didn't look at Caroline's parents but went to Serena, bowing respectfully, "Miss Sterling."

Miss Sterling?

This address puzzled Caroline's parents.

The manager then looked at Caroline's parents, "This hotel is under The Rathborne Group. Our CEO, Mr. Julian Rathborne, is the world's richest man, and Miss Serena Sterling here is his only daughter, his treasured child, the world's richest heiress."

What?

Caroline's parents and relatives gasped in shock, staring at Serena. She... she... she's the world's richest man's daughter?

She has such an incredible father?

Caroline's parents suspected they were hearing things.

At this moment, the manager looked at Serena and respectfully asked, "Miss Sterling, would you like me to order these people all out?"

Caroline's parents shrank back in fear. They never thought Serena's background was this astonishing. Now their plan to embarrass Serena had backfired. If they were really thrown out, it would be truly disgraceful!

Serena's clear eyes landed on Caroline's parents, and she smiled, "No, let them stay."

Chapter 775: The Woman I Deeply Love and the Only One I Love

When Serena spoke, the manager of Port Sterling quickly nodded, "Yes, Miss Sterling. All of you better watch your words. If you dare speak disrespectfully to our young lady again, I'll have you thrown out immediately. If it weren't for Mr. Crawford's face, we wouldn't have let you hold the birthday party here. You must know, in front of our boss, even Mr. Crawford is just a junior."

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan and those relatives immediately fell silent. Serena's father, Julian Rathborne, is the world's richest man. In front of Julian Rathborne, Hayden Crawford is a new rising star, having only become the top tycoon in recent years, indeed a junior.

It was just unfortunate for them that Serena had such an impressive father, instantly putting them to shame.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan awkwardly laughed, extremely embarrassed. They now really didn't dare to offend Serena, but they also couldn't believe Serena was so kind as to let them stay here.

At this moment, a soft voice like a nightingale's called out, "Dad, Mom."

Caroline Sloan had arrived.

Not only had Caroline Sloan arrived, but Hayden Crawford also came. The two appeared simultaneously.

Today, Hayden Crawford wore a handmade black suit, tall and noble. Caroline Sloan wore a long gown studded with diamonds, delicate and beautiful. Standing beside Hayden, they looked very well-matched.

"Mr. Crawford, Caroline, you finally came." Mr. and Mrs. Sloan's eyes lit up.

"Oh my, Caroline, your gown is absolutely beautiful! Are those real diamonds encrusted on it? Must be worth a fortune, right?" The relatives' eyes all swiftly got drawn to Caroline's diamond-studded gown.

Mrs. Sloan quickly took hold of Caroline's hand, "Caroline, show everyone your gown. This was personally custom-made by Mr. Crawford for you!"

As she spoke, Mrs. Sloan's gaze drifted over to Serena, as if deliberately speaking for her to hear, trying to infuriate her.

So what if Serena had the world's richest father? She still got dumped by Hayden Crawford, and now her daughter is favored!

Those relatives were full of envy and admiration as they turned their gazes back to Hayden Crawford. His handsome and noble demeanor nearly made them want to bow to him.

"Mr. Crawford certainly is a fine figure, truly matches our Caroline perfectly."

"Mr. Crawford, when are you marrying Caroline? We'll come over to celebrate."

Caroline's face was full of sweetness. In fact, she had purposely brought Mr. and Mrs. Sloan from the mountain areas, and having this duo's help indeed sped up her progress with Hayden Crawford.

During this period, Hayden Crawford gave Mr. and Mrs. Sloan a bank card for their expenses, threw her a birthday party, and had a dress custom made for her. Of course, these were external matters, but it was more than enough to annoy Serena and drive a wedge between her and Hayden's relationship.

At this point, Caroline looked at Serena, "Sister Serena, you came too. I'm so happy you came to my birthday today."

As she spoke, Caroline pitifully waved a small hand, "Sister Serena, please don't misunderstand. My big brother... no, Mr. Crawford, and I didn't have anything happen."

Serena smiled and said nothing.

Then Hayden Crawford strode over to Serena, reaching out his strong arm to hug Serena's slim waist, "Serena, I was going to pick you up. Why didn't you let me? I feel like I'm out of favor now."

Serena raised her exquisite little face to look at him, "You're celebrating Caroline's birthday. How could I bear to interrupt?"

"I think you just didn't miss me!" Hayden lowered his head, his thin lips landing on her forehead, placing a kiss there.

What... what are they doing?

Caroline's face changed. She thought she had successfully sowed discord, but right at her birthday party, Hayden kissed Serena on the forehead in front of everyone.

A man kissing a woman's forehead is the highest expression of love and cherish.

And who was that slightly pouting man complaining to Serena just now with, "You just didn't miss me?"

Who is he?

Caroline was stunned.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan and the relatives were also frozen, "Mr... Mr. Crawford, what's going on between you and Serena? You're supposed to be our Caroline's boyfriend, isn't it inappropriate to still be entangled with your ex-girlfriend?"

Hayden held Serena in his arms, his deep, narrow eyes resting on Mr. and Mrs. Sloan's faces, looking over with a faint glance, "Who said I'm dating Caroline?"

Then Hayden looked at Caroline with a slight frown, "Did you say so?"

Caroline froze, quickly shaking her head, "No... it wasn't me."

"Then now would you kindly clarify to them to prevent further misunderstandings?" Hayden's tone was stern.

Caroline's face turned pale. The indulgence from Hayden during this time gave her an illusion, and she didn't expect that right at this birthday party, Hayden would suddenly turn against her.

Caroline's eyes turned red, bemused with a layer of sparkly tears. She looked pitifully at Hayden, almost about to cry.

However, Hayden directly ignored her tears, "What, you don't want to explain? If you don't want to explain, then let me do it."

Hayden's indifferent, cold gaze swept over Mr. and Mrs. Sloan and those relatives, curling his lips, "Caroline and I have no relationship at all, so don't try to attach gold to your faces. Your faces are just too big!"

"Also, the woman I love deeply and the only woman I love is Serena Sterling! Nobody else!" Hayden declared assertively.

Serena's heart softened. She admitted that all women love to hear sweet words. Her clear eyes were immediately watery as she looked at him.

Caroline's face turned snow-white, Mr. and Mrs. Sloan and the relatives were all stunned. They practically performed on the spot an "Where am I? What did I hear? Who am I?"

"Serena, let's go." Hayden now hugged Serena's waist, taking her away.

Hayden just walked away like that?

Today was Caroline's birthday party, and the party hadn't even started yet. The key thing was... the bill wasn't settled yet.

The expenses at Port Sterling had always been astonishingly high. Today was Caroline's birthday, and everything was the best. The bill was likely going to be shockingly high, and now the one who should pay was about to leave. Mr. and Mrs. Sloan would certainly be the first to disagree.

"Mr... Mr. Crawford, wait a minute!" Mr. Sloan quickly spoke up.

Hayden paused his steps, casting a look over, "Anything else?"

Mr. Sloan sheepishly tugged on his clothes, "Aren't you staying for Caroline's birthday, and besides, the bill... the bill hasn't been settled yet."

Hayden raised an eyebrow, "Oh, the bill? I only promised to throw Caroline a birthday party but didn't say I'd pay, right?"

Chapter 776: Is There a Reward?

As soon as Hayden Crawford finished speaking, Caroline Sloan, her father, and her mother all gasped; they completely didn't understand what Hayden Crawford was talking about.

Hayden Crawford glanced at the opened wine at the party, "Wine from '52, a bottle must be a lot of money, right?"

The manager of Port Sterling quickly nodded, "Yes, Mr. Crawford, one bottle of wine is six figures. Just now, this couple ordered a whole case of '52 wine and treated it like tap water."

Caroline immediately glared at her parents.

Burp~

At this moment, Father Sloan burped quite inappropriately. The '52 wine they just drank was really too good, and he accidentally drank himself full. He awkwardly looked at Hayden and laughed nervously, "Mr... Mr. Crawford, I..."

Hayden Crawford curled his thin lips, "No need to explain, as long as you're happy. After all, I'm just helping you throw a birthday party."

"This..." The Sloan parents wanted to say something.

Hayden raised his handsome brows and interrupted them, "Did I not do a good job? Are you not satisfied with having a birthday party in Port Sterling?"

The Sloan parents, "This..."

"Wasn't the '52 wine you drank tasty?"

"This..."

"Didn't you gain enough face in front of these relatives?"

"This..."

Hayden looked at the manager of Port Sterling, "So, since you're satisfied, my task is complete. The bill is naturally yours to handle. Manager, prepare the bill for them to see. Renting this place and the wine doesn't come cheap."

Caroline and her parents stood frozen like statues; they never expected Hayden Crawford to dodge the payment.

"Mr. Crawford, the bill is here." The manager of Port Sterling promptly brought the bill over.

Hayden didn't look at it, "Let them have a look; they're the ones paying."

"Yes." The manager of Port Sterling quickly walked in front of the Sloan parents, "Take a good look, this is your total spend for today."

The Sloan parents took a glance, and the sheer number of zeros on the bill nearly blinded them. They really spent extravagantly today.

They initially thought Hayden Crawford would settle the bill. Now, having them pay — where would they get the money?

The Sloan parents' legs went weak.

At this moment, Mrs. Sloan tugged on Mr. Sloan's sleeve and whispered, "Don't panic, we still have the card Hayden Crawford gave us. We can use the money on it casually. We'll use it to pay the bill; it counts as Hayden picking up the tab."

With this reminder, Mr. Sloan's legs straightened; he remembered the bank card Hayden had given him, still warm in his pocket. These past few days, they had spent quite a lot. This card's balance seemed endless, like a gold mine.

"Alright, we'll settle the bill." Mr. Sloan waved his hand confidently.

Hayden observed the Sloans' petty calculations and slowly curled his thin lips, "Oh right, I forgot to tell you, the card I gave you is actually... a credit card."

Credit card?

The Sloans were puzzled, "What do you mean by a credit card?"

"A credit card actually means there's no money on it; it's just borrowed from the bank and must be repaid. At the time, you wanted the card, so I gave it to you. I even had my secretary change the cardholder, so it has nothing to do with me now. Every penny you've spent is borrowed from the bank, and you must repay it," Hayden said nonchalantly.

The Sloan parents' heads exploded with a "boom," their ears buzzing. They always thought the card was Hayden's, and they had been spending his money, who knew... it was a credit card from Hayden?

No wonder the card's money could be spent so freely, like a gold mine; the gold was fake, it was a bottomless pit all along.

The Sloans tried to remember how much they'd spent these days, but couldn't; they spent money like water. It's over; they suddenly were burdened with massive debts, ones they'd never repay in this lifetime.

The Sloans realized it now; Hayden had set them up on purpose!

"Caroline!" The Sloans quickly looked to Caroline for help, "Caroline, what is going on? This can't be true, quickly talk to Mr. Crawford, it's killing us."

Caroline didn't want to care about her parents at all, but she can't show that, so she pitifully looked at Hayden, "Mr. Crawford, my parents..."

Hayden's deep eyes fell on Caroline's sequined gown, "Oh, I forgot to tell you, you haven't paid for your gown, it was ordered in your name, and you must pay for it later."

"..." Caroline seemed suddenly paralyzed, staring incredulously at Hayden. He actually... was so ruthless.

She understood now, she realized he did it intentionally!

He didn't reveal anything at first, allowing her and her parents to live a heavenly life. The higher they went, the harder they fall. He waited to drag them back to hell at this birthday party.

This time, all her plans yielded nothing, and she ended up owing such a huge debt!

Hayden glanced at the manager of Port Sterling, "Manager, keep a close watch on these people. They're the ones who must pay; don't let anyone escape."

"Yes, Mr. Crawford, rest assured." The manager of Port Sterling gestured, and tall, uniformed security quickly surrounded the area, leaving no gaps.

Hayden stopped looking at these people and lowered his gaze at Serena Sterling, "Serena, the show's over, shall we go?"

Serena raised her exquisite willow brows at him, "Mr. Crawford, I realize you're getting more devious."

Hayden squeezed her soft waist, "You don't like it?"

Serena curled her red lips, "Though it's a bit unkind to say, I quite like it. Mr. Crawford, you're amazing~"

Hayden held her as they left, whispering flirtatiously in her ear, "So, is there a reward?"

As Hayden and Serena left, the relatives quickly said, "Caroline, what's going on?"

"Didn't you say you hooked up with a really wealthy man? We even saw Mr. Crawford, but he clearly doesn't like you; you just threw yourself at him, got slapped hard, didn't you?"

"We thought your family had soared to great heights, only to find you're still just mud on the ground, pfft!"

"Your debts have nothing to do with us, and you promised to reimburse our travel expenses. If you go back on your word, we'll tear down your house, leaving you homeless!"

Chapter 777: A Red Thread Connects Lovers Across a Thousand Miles

These relatives are just people who go where the wind blows. Initially, they were cozying up to Caroline Sloan and her family, but seeing the situation take a turn, they, being uncouth, immediately stepped on Caroline and her family, cursing them to their faces.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan's faces were as dark as they could be. They understood the situation now; the big city had no place for them. They had to return to the mountains, if they could even go back.

"Listen to me, hey, don't go!" Mr. and Mrs. Sloan tried to hold back these relatives, but they just flung their sleeves and left abruptly.

The lively birthday party quickly turned into a deserted affair.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan were so angry that their hearts felt like they were about to burst. Mr. Sloan immediately looked at Caroline, saying nothing, but raised his hand and slapped her hard across the face.

Slap.

Caroline's whole face was knocked sideways, and a bright red handprint instantly appeared.

"Caroline, look at what you've done, you fool! Couldn't even hold onto a man and lost Hugo Woods. Tell me how we're supposed to end this now. We don't have that much money; you have to pay for us!" Mr. Sloan cursed angrily.

Mrs. Sloan was also extremely angry, placing her hands on her hips, "I see you're just a worthless girl, can't even do something as simple as serving a man right."

Mrs. Sloan was mad. She raised her hand wanting to grab Caroline's hair, venting all her fury onto her.

But Mrs. Sloan didn't succeed because Caroline's hand reached out, seized her arm, and gently twisted.

Crack! Mrs. Sloan's arm was instantly broken.

Ah!

Mrs. Sloan screamed, the sudden pain turning her face pale.

Mr. Sloan was startled, quickly looking at Caroline, only to see her head raised. She tore apart that delicate and pitiful image, now looking at them with cold and malicious eyes.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan felt like they were entangled by a venomous snake, a feeling of suffocation. They looked at Caroline in horror, momentarily forgetting to react.

At this moment, Caroline reached out, pushing Mrs. Sloan backward, who fell onto Mr. Sloan, the couple tumbling onto the carpet.

Caroline looked down at them, her eyes like poisoned venom. She stepped forward, closing in on them.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan felt Caroline was like a different person, not their daughter at all. How terrifying.

This Caroline was indeed not the real Caroline. She was the Merfolk Clan princess. The real Caroline had died long ago.

Years ago, Westria gave birth to the blood of innocence for the first time in a century. The Merfolk Clan's forces had already infiltrated, following the trail to City of Aethelgard, where they found Isabelle Willow.

At that time, the Merfolk Clan intended to make Isabelle Willow disappear directly. They wanted to control Westria, and Consort Willow had already held Titus Ashworth firmly. The emergence of the blood of innocence would only threaten their interests. Better to eliminate any threat thoroughly.

But back then, Isabelle Willow had already met Jude Crawford, preparing to marry into the prominent Crawford family in Aethelgard as Mrs. Crawford. Jude Crawford, esteemed as a business emperor of his era, with powerful and fierce tactics, flipped situations with ease, and the Merfolk Clan dared not act recklessly, only waiting and watching for an opportunity.

Latterly, the Merfolk Clan traced to Chase Sullivan, marking the first breakthrough.

The Merfolk Clan sold Chase Sullivan and Isabelle Willow's childhood friendship to Zelda Willow, and Zelda fully boarded their ship.

The only thing the Merfolk Clan didn't anticipate was Jude Crawford's deep affection for Isabelle Willow. No matter the hardships and challenges, he could never let go of her, keeping her firmly by his side, hindering the Merfolk Clan.

Caroline, as the princess of the Merfolk Clan, had the greatest mission to infiltrate near the blood of innocence, so she was early on.

She set her sights on Iris Crawford, switching her identity to that of a mountain girl, Caroline Sloan, gaining Iris's affection.

That night on Iris's birthday, she was brought into the Crawford family. It was her first and only time near Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow.

She used the enchanted bell to orchestrate it all.

Soon, Isabelle Willow was pregnant, gave birth to her eldest son, Hayden Crawford, the true identity of the blood of innocence. The Merfolk Clan couldn't prevent this day from coming.

Caroline didn't want Hayden Crawford to exist in this world, so she orchestrated two assassination attempts. During the first, Hayden went to Bayside, fainted in the icy snow, and met Serena Sterling.

On that snowy night, Serena Sterling gave Hayden a softness and warmth he could never forget, along with unwavering strength.

During the second attempt, Hayden went onto a train. Years had passed, and as time flew by, on that train, Hayden reunited with the now grown Serena Sterling.

On that train, Serena Sterling, with a raised eyebrow, rebuked, "Insolence, I'm the bride of Orchid Court," formally started their story with Hayden.

It seemed everything was orchestrated by fate. Hayden and Serena were destined, tightly bound by the red string of love by the moon gods, truly connecting from miles away.

Although the Merfolk Clan orchestrated all this, those involved, Jude Crawford, Isabelle Willow, along with the growing Hayden, were no ordinary people. The course of events often escaped their control.

Latterly, Serena returned from Alani, directly pulling out the string attached to Consort Willow. Caroline had to switch tactics, impersonating Serena to get close to Hayden, wanting to claim him for herself.

But today, everything spiraled out of control again. Hayden's affection for Serena was unyielding; she simply couldn't take advantage of any vulnerabilities.

Now, Mr. Sloan even slapped her. She, the Merfolk Clan princess, was slapped by such insignificant people, she almost harbored thoughts of killing this couple.

"You... Stay away from us, what do you want, Ca... Caroline, we are your parents..." Mr. and Mrs. Sloan kept retreating on the ground, wanting to stay far away from the frightening Caroline.

In Caroline's eyes, murderous intent surged, just as she thought of acting, the manager of Port Sterling suddenly walked in, "Pay up quickly. Have you decided who's settling the bill?"

With someone coming, Caroline quickly concealed her sinister intent, turning back into the delicate, pitiful demeanor.

Seeing Caroline change so fast stunned Mr. and Mrs. Sloan. Was she... a chameleon? Transforming this quickly?

They hadn't reached such a level!

"You, you spent the money. Come over and pay!" Port Sterling's manager pointed at Mr. and Mrs. Sloan.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan trembled in fear, no, don't come over, no, we don't have money!

But several black-clad guards came over and directly dragged the couple away.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan didn't know where they were being dragged to, endlessly pleading, "Manager, please spare us, we're begging you."

Port Sterling's manager walked ahead, "I'm not the one you should be begging; someone wants to see you."

Who?

At this point, the manager of Port Sterling pushed open a room door, and Mr. and Mrs. Sloan were pushed inside. They looked up, only to see a breathtaking, flawless figure standing against the floor-to-ceiling window.

Serena Sterling!

Chapter 778: His Story with That Girl

Mr. Sloan and Mrs. Sloan froze; they hadn't expected to see Serena Sterling here!

Serena, stunning and pure as she stood by the floor-to-ceiling window, turned around, her bright eyes falling on Mr. and Mrs. Sloan. She gently curled her red lips, "You're here. I've been waiting for you for quite some time."

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan looked at each other in confusion, "Serena... Miss Sterling, why are you waiting for us? What do you want to do?"

"Exactly, we have nothing left now. Please don't trouble us, we're just simple country folks. Please let us return to the countryside."

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan felt the countryside was better; they wanted to go back.

Serena looked at them, her eyes sparkling with a captivating glow, "You don't need to be afraid. I have no ill intentions. I just want to ask you a few questions."

Questions?

"Alright, Miss Sterling, ask away. We promise to tell you everything we know."

Serena nodded, "Actually, I just want to chat with you, to talk about your daughter Caroline Sloan's upbringing."

Talk about that?

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan didn't know why Serena wanted to discuss this, but they were willing to talk and dared not refuse, "Caroline is our daughter. She has been obedient and sensible since she was little. We come from a place where having daughters is seen as a financial burden, destined to be married off someday. So, we

always hoped she could marry a wealthy man. However, her academic performance was outstanding, and from a young age, a benevolent person from the big city sponsored her, supporting her entire education."

Cherie brought over a chair, and Serena sat down. She quickly picked up on the key point and raised her eyebrows, "A benevolent person from the big city?"

"Yes, we don't know who that benevolent person is because Caroline never mentioned their name or allowed us to bring it up."

"I remember one year, that benevolent person from the big city even brought Caroline over to stay for a few days."

Serena curled her red lips; she basically understood that the benevolent person from the big city must be Aunt Iris.

Aunt Iris began sponsoring impoverished children in mountainous areas many years ago, which is no secret. Caroline Sloan should be one of them, and she won Aunt Iris's favor with her intelligence and charm. That year must have been Aunt Iris's birthday, when she brought Caroline to City of Aethelgard to enter the Crawford family, leading to a series of subsequent events.

"And then?" Serena asked.

"Then Caroline gradually grew up and went to the big city on her own. She rarely contacts us anymore, and when we call her, she's unwilling to say anything. But she does send us money regularly."

Serena listened attentively, "I see... Have you ever noticed anything unusual about her, or that she's different from how she used to be?"

This?

Mr. and Mrs. Sloan quickly exchanged a glance. They both thought of Caroline's cold, serpentine demeanor earlier, which was chilling.

"Well..." Mr. and Mrs. Sloan hesitated.

"You don't want to say? That's alright. Initially, I planned to plead for your sake to Mr. Crawford, since you've spent so much money, which is no small sum. Caroline shouldn't be able to afford it... right?" Serena blinked innocently, looking at Mr. and Mrs. Sloan with pity.

Upon hearing this, Mr. and Mrs. Sloan's eyes lit up. They couldn't care less about their daughter as long as they were well off, "We'll tell, we'll tell... Caroline used to be very obedient and weak, but earlier she seemed like a different person, cold and venomous, even breaking my arm."

"Actually, thinking carefully, Caroline is quite peculiar. In the mountainous area, there was a dog next door that barked throughout the night, which annoyed Caroline. The next day, that dog was dead, and it had met a tragic end, stabbed to death."

Serena nodded, fully understanding now. This Caroline Sloan is fake; the real Caroline must have died long ago.

However, she had a question. Calculating the age, Caroline shouldn't be just 20 years old.

Back then, Caroline went with Aunt Iris to City of Aethelgard before Hayden Crawford was born. This year, Hayden Crawford is already thirty-two, so how could Caroline possibly be 20?

"I have one last question, how old is Caroline Sloan this year exactly?" Serena's bright eyes fell on Mr. and Mrs. Sloan.

"Well..." Mr. and Mrs. Sloan stiffened, then quickly smiled awkwardly, "Miss Sterling, since we've told you everything, we won't hide the age matter either. We lied about Caroline's age; actually, she's... in her thirties."

"We didn't come up with this idea; Caroline did. To be honest, Caroline is like she's reversing the aging process, looking like a vibrant young lady even in her thirties, pretending to be 20 is no problem at all. We thought, for girls, the younger, the better, so, haha, we went along with it..."

Serena understood now. Caroline Sloan, as the princess of The Merfolk Clan, reversing aging wasn't strange, but impersonating a 20-year-old girl as a lady in her thirties, would the "Big Brother" Hayden Crawford shed tears when he learned the truth?

Caroline's age can be faked, but it can't fool Aunt Iris. Once Aunt Iris meets her, everything will be exposed.

Coincidentally, Aunt Iris has also flown to Westria, so Caroline, considering all aspects, had Consort Willow poison Aunt Iris.

Now everything was clear at a glance.

"Alright, thank you both. I've heard everything I wanted to hear. You may leave now."

Black-clad security entered and pulled Mr. and Mrs. Sloan away.

"Serena... Miss Sterling, don't forget what you said earlier, you would plead our case to Mr. Crawford, don't forget that..." The couple's voices faded away.

The room fell silent. Cherie approached Serena, "Princess, it seems now that Caroline Sloan is indeed the princess of The Merfolk Clan!"

Serena nodded, "Yes, this Merfolk Clan princess was already around before both Hayden Crawford and I were born."

"Should we immediately capture Caroline Sloan now?" Cherie asked.

Serena looked at Cherie, "What do you think Mr. Crawford would do if we capture Caroline Sloan?"

Cherie paused.

Serena went to the floor-to-ceiling window, "Though Mr. Crawford and Caroline Sloan are innocent and clean, I know Caroline holds a special place for him. They have a story, but... I don't yet know what that story is, and Mr. Crawford doesn't want to tell me."

"Princess, what should we do now? We can't just consider Mr. Crawford and let Caroline Sloan go." Cherie genuinely didn't understand what madness possessed Hayden Crawford to entangle himself with Caroline Sloan.

Serena looked at the blue sky and white clouds outside the window, trembling her exquisite lashes, "I promised him to give him time, but now that time has run out, I can't wait any longer. I'm going to uncover their story myself!"

Chapter 779: Serena Sterling Was That Girl All Those Years Ago

Cherie's eyes lit up as she gazed at the dazzling Serena Sterling before her; this was her princess!

"But princess, Mr. Crawford is unwilling to share the story between him and Caroline Sloan. How are we supposed to uncover the truth?" Cherie asked.

Serena turned around, her bright eyes glowing with intelligence and brilliance. She slowly curled her red lips, "Then we shouldn't ask Mr. Crawford. Let's ask Mr. Crawford's confidant."

Cherie, "Princess, you mean... Corvus?"

Serena nodded, "That's right, it's him."

The unsuspecting Corvus hadn't realized danger was approaching; he merely sneezed, finding it strange—why did he feel like someone had targeted him?

...

Corvus arrived, summoned by Cherie, and as they walked along the corridor, Corvus asked, "Miss Cherie, did Miss Serena ask for me?"

"Yes, our princess wants to see you."

"Why is Miss Serena looking for me? Our master has already booked a hotel and is waiting to have dinner with her."

Cherie pushed open the door, her tone serious, "Then your master will not be able to meet with our princess because she already knows everything."

What does that mean?

Knows what?

Corvus's eyelid twitched. He hesitated as he walked into the room, only to see Serena standing by the desk, her stunning face cold as ice, as if she were on the verge of losing her temper.

"Miss Serena, you're looking for me?" Corvus sensed trouble instinctively.

Serena raised her eyes and let out a cold snort, "Corvus, let me ask you, what exactly is the relationship between your master and Caroline Sloan?"

"What relationship? There's no relationship at all!" Corvus responded quickly.

"At this point, you're still lying to me? Corvus, just look at what this is!" Serena slapped a sealed dossier onto the desk with a "thud."

Because the dossier was sealed, Corvus couldn't see inside, but his immediate reaction was that Miss Serena had uncovered the past between his master and Caroline Sloan. What did he say before? The truth would come out eventually.

"What is this? I don't understand what Miss Serena means." Corvus chuckled awkwardly a couple of times.

Serena pointed at the sealed dossier, "Inside is a detailed account of the story between Hayden Crawford and Caroline Sloan. Actually, I've never doubted Hayden's feelings for me. I'm just upset why he wouldn't tell me. Could it be that he has some sort of sympathy for Caroline Sloan..."

"Miss Serena," Corvus was shocked and quickly interrupted Serena, "Heaven can testify, my master is wholeheartedly faithful to you!"

"Then why deceive me? Is Caroline Sloan that important to him?" Serena pressed on immediately.

Corvus blurted out, "Miss Serena, the master just feared you'd overthink it. Caroline Sloan saved the master's life when he was a child. He only cherishes that life-saving sentiment..."

Corvus's words suddenly halted because he realized he had slipped up. He quickly glanced at Serena's expression.

Serena paused, her bright eyes falling on him, carrying a playful smile with a hint of amusement, "Corvus, why did you stop talking? I'm still waiting to hear how Caroline Sloan saved your master and how this connection was forged."

"..." Corvus mentally screamed 'oh no,' quickly picking up the sealed dossier and opening it, only to find it empty inside.

This is bad; he fell for a trick!

Serena had cleverly played a trick!

Corvus's legs went weak, and he recalled how his master had once instructed him to never reveal this matter to Serena. What had he just disclosed?

"Miss Serena, you... you deceived me so badly!" Corvus cried out, feeling aggrieved to the point of tears. Miss Serena's tactics were too advanced; he couldn't keep up.

Serena sat down calmly, "Corvus, if you were smart enough, you'd tell me everything you know now. That way, I can ensure your safety."

"..." Corvus really wanted to ask if he had any choice. No!

"Miss Serena, what else do you want to know?" Corvus asked, feeling wronged.

Serena pondered for a moment, quickly thinking it through, "You mentioned earlier that Caroline Sloan saved Hayden Crawford. Actually, he once mentioned this when we were in Bayside. But back then, the person who saved him was Yasmine Sterling; how did it become Caroline Sloan?"

"Miss Serena, at the beginning, the master also thought it was Yasmine. But one day during a heavy rain, Caroline Sloan bumped into the master's car, with the jade pendant that the master gave out years ago hanging around her neck. We later investigated, and Yasmine was found dead in jail. Before she died, she admitted she was an imposter, and even the jade pendant was fake."

Serena raised her delicate eyebrows with a chuckle; she didn't expect such twists and turns in a life-saving story.

But during her time in Bayside, Serena had known that the little girl from back then held a soft spot in Hayden's heart, a special existence worthy of such drama.

"Was it really such a coincidence that Caroline Sloan ran into the car? Didn't Hayden Crawford suspect anything?"

"Miss Serena, my master had suspicions and thus gave Caroline Sloan the chance to get close. He wanted to see what she was after, and our master wanted to find out who the girl back then truly was." Corvus didn't dare say more.

Serena showed no emotional upheaval as she nodded, "Alright, tell me how she saved him back then so I can help him look for her."

Help look for her?

Corvus was stunned. Was Miss Serena not upset knowing the master was always searching for another girl?

"Back then... the master was ambushed on his way from the City of Aethelgard. By chance, he ended up in Bayside. In the snow and ice, he fell unconscious, nearly freezing to death. That's when a girl appeared, dragging him to a cave and offering him warmth and strength through the snowy night to survive."

As Corvus recounted the story, he observed Serena's expression. Her clear eyes gradually showed a ripple, and soon even her delicate eyebrows furrowed.

"Miss Serena, are you okay?" Corvus asked cautiously.

Serena wasn't particularly shaken; she just felt the story was familiar—coincidentally, in her childhood, she had also saved an older boy in a snowy landscape, spending a night with him in a cave during a snowstorm.

How could this not seem like her story?

She remembered that back then, the older boy had even left her... a jade pendant, saying he would come back to find her.

She didn't take it seriously and placed the pendant in a drawer, soon losing track of it.

Chapter 780: Hayden Crawford Is Her Big Brother!

Serena Sterling did not keep thinking about the rescue from years ago, so when she heard the story of how Mr. Crawford was saved by someone, she didn't immediately connect it to herself. But now that Corvus mentioned it, she was confused.

Big brother...

Could it be that Hayden Crawford is the big brother she saved back then...?

Could it be that Yasmine Sterling and Caroline Sloan were her substitutes, taking her place one after the other?

"Miss Serena, please don't overthink it. This is the reason why my master didn't dare tell you. The master searches for the girl from that year because this matter seems complicated. He was ambushed twice that year, and that girl was involved throughout. Then, Yasmine and Caroline took her place one after the other. This is extraordinary, and he wants to uncover the truth and see who's behind these tricks," Corvus explained.

Serena Sterling came back to her senses, "Oh, I understand. I won't overthink it."

"..." Corvus looked at Serena's calm and composed demeanor, unable to understand what she was actually thinking.

"By the way," Serena wanted to confirm something, "where was Hayden Crawford rescued by that girl back then?"

"There are photos of that place, they are in the master's study drawer."

So what are we waiting for?

Let's go see them now.

Serena Sterling got up directly and headed out.

"Hey, Miss Sterling, where are you going? My master is still downstairs waiting for you to join him for dinner."

Serena didn't look back, "Let him eat by himself."

Serena quickly vanished from sight with Cherie.

It's over, it's over. Miss Serena must be angry. She stood up the master for tonight's candlelight dinner. Corvus felt he had caused a big trouble and quickly went to find Hayden Crawford.

...

Hayden Crawford was downstairs at Port Sterling, waiting for Serena. Earlier, Serena promised to join him for a candlelight dinner, but as they walked outside, she suddenly said she had something to take care of and asked him to wait here. So he waited obediently.

However, he waited and waited, but Serena did not appear.

What on earth did she go off to do?

Hayden planned to go in and find her, but just then, Corvus rushed out, "Master, something terrible has happened."

Hayden pressed his thin lips in displeasure, "What's the rush? I'm in no mood to hear about anything right now. I'm going in to have dinner with Serena."

Hayden turned to go in.

"Master!" Corvus called out quickly, stammering, "Don't go find Miss Serena. She... she has already left."

"Left?" Hayden looked incredulous, as Serena had promised him the candlelight dinner.

He had been waiting for this dinner for days, even if it was by appointment, it was now his turn. He didn't believe she just left.

But Corvus nodded firmly, "Yes, master, Miss Serena has already left. She even said... told you to eat by yourself."

"..." Hayden's handsome face suddenly turned cold, his brow immediately clouded with gloom, "Say, what exactly happened!"

Corvus's legs went weak, almost kneeling, "Master, it's... it's all my fault. Today Miss Serena came to me and caught me off guard. She said she already knew the story about you and Caroline, so... so in my young and ignorant state, I inadvertently let it slip to her... I told Miss Serena everything!"

In Hayden's deep and narrow eyes, a hawk-like cold light flashed immediately. He glared at Corvus with an expression that said, "You're done for!"

Corvus shrank, trembling with weakness.

"Where did Serena go?"

"Miss Serena seemed to have gone... to your villa, master."

Hayden said nothing, grabbed his car keys, got into the Rolls Royce Phantom, stepped on the gas, and sped off.

Corvus could only stand there and fend for himself.

...

Serena, with Cherie in tow, arrived at Hayden's villa, heading straight to the study on the second floor.

Actually, Serena had her suspicions in her mind already, but she still wanted to confirm it. She slowly extended her hand and opened the bottom drawer.

Was Hayden Crawford the big brother from those years ago?

The drawer opened, and Serena took out the photograph, her long lashes falling as she looked at it.

The same exact place, just as she remembered.

It was here in the snowy weather back then, she saved a big brother!

So Hayden Crawford really was that big brother, and the little girl he had never forgotten was her!

Serena couldn't help but smile, indeed she smiled. She reached out, and her pale fingers touched the photograph. He had said upon leaving, "I will come back for you!"

This idiot, she was right in front of him, and he didn't even know!

Who did he look for?

Did he look for Yasmine Sterling?

Did he look for Caroline Sloan?

How foolish could he be?

At this moment, Cherie came over, "Princess, what's wrong?"

Holding the photograph, Serena stood up, "I understand everything now. I've found the key point. I know all about what happened back then."

Cherie couldn't help but want to give a thumbs up. Her princess really was the best.

Just then, a steady footstep came from outside. It wasn't as calm as usual; it was urgent. Someone was rushing over.

The maid's voice came from outside, "Sir... Mr. Crawford, Miss Sterling just arrived. She's in the study now..."

Before the maid finished speaking, the study door was pushed open by a large hand. Hayden Crawford's imposing figure appeared.

Hayden came as quickly as possible.

Serena lifted her bright eyes to look at the man at the door. In just a blink of an eye, ten years had passed. The big brother who once fainted in her arms had grown into such a handsome, mature, and noble man. He no longer needed the warmth and belief she once gave, because he was now strong enough to weather any storm. His broad and sturdy shoulders could shelter any girl in the world from the wind and rain.

She never thought they would meet so early in life.

Cherie and the maid both stepped back, and Hayden strode in, a layer of wind and frost covering him. His deep eyes fell on the photograph in Serena's hands, then on her beautiful face, "Serena, let me explain. It's definitely not what you think."

Serena's bright eyes glanced coquettishly at him, "Oh? Mr. Crawford, then what really happened? Explain it to me properly."

Hayden thought she would be angry, and indeed she was a bit sulky, but in a charming way, exuding an enticing allure.