

Substitute B 791

Chapter 791: Will You Say Yes Tonight?

Isabelle Willow quickly held him down, "No."

"What's wrong?" Jude Crawford leaned over her, his pliant thin lips kissing her face, "I even ate your ox whip, didn't we agree you wouldn't be able to get out of bed tomorrow? I've prepared for it."

Isabelle Willow's face flushed red and white, she didn't speak, just tightened her grip on her skirt, making it wrinkle.

He made her afraid.

Whether as the young prince of the Crawford family ruling the City of Aethelgard, or as the creator of a powerful business empire now, he was used to being domineering, even more so in bed.

Jude Crawford buried his head in her hair, inhaling her subtle fragrance, "Yara, even now you're shy like a young girl, our Hayden is already so grown up, let me see the allure of a mature woman..."

"..."

Shameless!

Isabelle Willow began to struggle, just then a gentle phone ringtone rang, he was calling.

"Someone's calling, pick it up."

Jude Crawford refused, "You care about the phone at this time, trying to ruin my mood?"

His phone was on the table, Isabelle Willow reached for it and directly pressed the answer button.

"Hello, Mr. Crawford~" A sweet voice came from the other side, it was Jenny.

Isabelle Willow froze, quickly looked back at him.

Jude Crawford was amused by her glance, his large hand threaded through her long hair, holding her face for a kiss, "Jealous?"

"Mr. Crawford, why aren't you talking, what are you doing now, am I bothering you?" Jenny asked.

Jenny hadn't given up on Jude Crawford, she was constantly entangled with him.

Jude Crawford didn't pick up the phone, instead, he raised an eyebrow, his slender brow waves open, maturely alluring, "I just got half my wife's clothes off and then you called, you tell me, is it a bother or not?"

"..."

Isabelle Willow opened her mouth, biting hard on the corner of his lips.

How dare he?

Jude Crawford winced in pain, furrowing his sharp brow, long fingers pinching her cheek, forcing her to release.

The corner of his lip was bitten, blood oozing out, two drops also staining her red lips, enhancing her bewitching look.

A woman of this age, still acting coy, if not seductive then what?

He moved, going to untie the robe belt at his firm waist.

Seeing him get serious, Isabelle Willow's pupils shrank, her face blushed to the point of bleeding, "Jude Crawford, you dare!"

He was still on the phone!

She wanted to express her anger, but as she spoke, she realized her voice was soft and delicate.

She suddenly felt ashamed, after all, Pip was already so grown up.

Jude Crawford's lips curved up, even his low voice had a hint of joy, undoing the robe belt, he leaned down again, kissing her red lips, "Thought of it?"

"Didn't think!" She pushed him.

In her view was the man's amplified handsome face, perfectly handsome, with the robe belt undone, revealing his firm chest, a 50-year-old man, truly in his prime, without an ounce of extra fat, muscled and rippling, a tight narrow waist, a perfect inverted triangle.

"If you want, then want, no one's laughing, after all, we've been apart for so many years, the first two times you fell asleep, you were... drenched..."

In their youth, although there was always storm and strife, there was also happiness, relishing each other's young bodies and beautiful times.

At that time, it never felt enough, and suddenly one day, she disappeared.

Counting the days they knew each other, his touching her was rare.

Isabelle Willow also recalled before, when she had her period, pregnant with Hayden, he didn't let her go.

Past events like dreams.

He was still saying these outrageous things.

Isabelle Willow's face was red like a cooked shrimp, in this regard, she was never his opponent, and couldn't keep up with his pace.

"Mr. Crawford," the call hadn't ended, Jenny's voice transmitted again, "Looking at Mrs. Crawford's demeanor, she must be lacking in sensuality, can she satisfy you?"

Saying this, Jenny confidently laughed, "If you come to my room now, I guarantee to serve you comfortably."

Jenny's coquettish voice came through clearly.

Jude Crawford ignored the woman on the phone, he reached to pull at Isabelle Willow's tightly held skirt, with one tug, Isabelle Willow loosened her grip.

He paused, quickly realizing her unusual demeanor, "What's wrong?"

Isabelle Willow's previously flushed face had turned white, she shook her head, "I'm fine."

"Mr. Crawford~" Jenny still called.

Jude Crawford picked up the phone, laughing coldly, "Don't casually act wanton anymore, shout again and I'll send you to the brothel."

Jude Crawford threw out a sentence, directly hanging up the phone, throwing the phone on the table, then lifted Isabelle Willow up horizontally.

With a few quick strides to the bed, he gently laid her down, "Speak up, what's really wrong?"

Listening to Jenny's words earlier, Isabelle Willow suddenly thought of his affair with Zelda Willow, their fleeting romance, and having a son.

Isabelle Willow remembered their son Zane Crawford's cold, elegant demeanor, it pained her heart unbearably.

"Jude Crawford, she's right, I'm just someone who doesn't understand sensuality, unable to satisfy you."

Hearing this, Jude Crawford slowly curved his lips, his smile chilly, "Isabelle Willow, not understanding sensuality is a matter of a day or a few years, why bring it up now, if you don't want to do it with me, just say so, don't use satisfaction as an excuse."

His gaze was sharp, like X-ray penetrating her.

Isabelle Willow turned her eyes aside, there was still a fall-out between them.

Jude Crawford's features as sharp as carved knife were calm, but his whole demeanor was cold, "I'll ask you one more time, tonight, will you or won't you Mrs. Crawford?"

He emphasized "Mrs. Crawford," reminding her of marital duties.

Isabelle Willow lightly closed her eyes, didn't answer.

Jude Crawford stood up, took off the robe, changed into a black shirt and pants, then turned and left the room.

With a loud "bang," the room door closed.

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Jude Crawford left.

It was so late, he went out.

Isabelle Willow curled up in bed, actually, she didn't want it this way either, but no woman can tolerate sand in love, his affair with Zelda Willow was a fact.

And her daughter, deep guilt and dull pain continuously tormented her.

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At the company.

Jude Crawford sat in a black leather chair, his long fingers held a cigarette, smoking.

The office was filled with the smell of tobacco, a layer of cigarette butts fell in the ashtray.

He had been smoking for a long time.

"Sir," then Butler Thorne came over, handing him a small bag, "This is what you wanted, consuming this will set a raging fire in your body, unless a woman, otherwise there is no cure."

Jude Crawford raised his eyes, amidst the swirling smoke, glanced at the small bag.

Chapter 792: Are You Still Planning to Leave Me Behind This Time?

Butler Thorne has been with Jude Crawford for decades, and he could tell at a glance that his master was unfulfilled as his wife wouldn't let him touch her.

Butler Thorne guessed that this small pack was meant for his wife to consume.

This was an extreme action, but typical of something his master would do.

However, Butler Thorne hesitantly spoke up, "Sir, your relationship with madam has just improved a bit. If you use this drug, I'm afraid things with madam..."

Jude Crawford took a melancholy drag from his cigarette before slowly exhaling, "Pour me a glass of water."

"Yes, sir."

Butler Thorne turned around to execute the request.

But after taking a step, Butler Thorne suddenly stopped in his tracks. He turned back, shocked as he looked at Jude Crawford, "Sir, are you... planning to take it yourself?"

Jude Crawford curved his thin lips; tonight he was determined to have her.

He couldn't wait any longer; time was quietly slipping through his fingers; he didn't want to wait another second.

He knew he had become greedy; he wanted to wholly possess her.

Butler Thorne handed him a glass of water, and Jude Crawford poured the powder from the small pack into it, drinking it all down.

Picking up his car keys, he stood up, heading back to the villa to find her.

He wanted to see exactly how ruthless she could be towards him.

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Inside the villa.

Isabelle Willow lay tossing and turning on the soft big bed, unable to sleep. She didn't know where he went or if he'd come back tonight.

Just then, she heard a "knock knock knock" at the door as someone was knocking.

She opened her eyes, "Who is it?"

"It's me."

A deep, magnetic voice sounded.

It was Jude Crawford.

He had returned.

He had actually come back; she thought he wouldn't return tonight.

Isabelle Willow put on her shoes, got out of bed, went to the door, and opened it.

Outside the door stood a tall and straight figure; Jude Crawford's deep, intense gaze focused on her face.

"Why... did you come back?" Isabelle Willow looked at him.

Jude Crawford curled his thin lips, "Do you want me not to come back, or did you expect me not to?"

Isabelle Willow furrowed her brow, saying nothing.

Jude Crawford reached out, his distinctly outlined large hand clasping her slender fair wrist, "Yara, you promised me you'd be my Mrs. Crawford for one month, so even if you don't love me, you need to act like you love me for this month, do you understand?"

Love or not love...

She did love him.

So there's no need to pretend.

A trace of tenderness touched the depths of Jude Crawford's narrow eyes as he placed her soft hand on his cheek.

Lowering his handsome eyes, he rubbed his cheek against her palm, seeking affection.

So obedient, so soft.

Isabelle Willow quickly sensed his abnormality; his body temperature was burning hot, almost scorching her hand.

"Jude Crawford, what's wrong with you? Why is your body so hot?"

"Yara, it's always been me taking a step forward, and you taking a step back between us; this time I'm taking another step forward, don't step back again, okay?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sir, the person is here, in the living room." Butler Thorne approached, softly reporting.

Isabelle Willow took a glance downstairs to the living room; there stood a charming figure, Jenny.

Jenny stood there radiantly, coyly calling out, "Mr. Crawford, I'm waiting for you here."

Why was this person here?

"Yara, I feel uncomfortable." Jude Crawford looked at her, his voice hoarse.

Isabelle Willow felt like his whole body was burning, "Jude Crawford, what have you done to yourself?"

"I drugged myself, Yara, I want you."

Isabelle Willow's clear almond eyes suddenly shrank; he actually drugged himself, had he gone mad?

"Jude Crawford, you've gone too far this time!" Isabelle Willow forcefully withdrew her hand.

Jude Crawford slowly rose, his voice hoarse as he laughed, "Yara, this game has already started; you have to play."

Isabelle Willow's face was cold; this man hadn't changed at all, he was forcing her, pushing her to a corner with no escape.

"If I don't agree, what will you do, sleep with Jenny downstairs?" Like you did years ago with Zelda Willow?

"Yes Yara, our relationship won't change; I'll still love you, care for you, spoil you, but I won't be clean anymore, so Yara, you won't give up on me, right?"

Jude Crawford looked at her with softness; he had walked alongside her for so many years, never abandoning her even in the hardest times, he had only one woman in his life, her.

A man at the pinnacle of power faces many temptations, especially various types of women throwing themselves at him, but he never had any thoughts of them.

When she cheated with Chase Sullivan, he drowned his sorrows every night, but he didn't stray.

When she leapt into the sea over the years, he didn't have anyone.

He always maintained this boundary, always preserving this possibility between them.

Now, he had severed all escape routes with his own hands.

The most enduring thing in life is time, he endured the loneliness, remained true to himself, he never lost.

Now he's putting all his stakes on the table, engaging in a grand bet.

Winning the world but losing to her is also a kind of conclusion.

It's just that, it's very unfortunate.

She made him suffer a total defeat.

Isabelle Willow understood; she understood why, after returning from Alani, she'd come back to him, it was because, despite the regrets, he waited for her at the same place.

He spent half a lifetime waiting for her.

Isabelle Willow's eyes were red, and soon her lips curled into a faint indifferent arc as she softly said, "Whatever."

She turned around, intending to close the door.

But an outlined large hand reached out, pressed against the door, and he hugged her from behind.

The man's strong arms firmly locked her body, gently furrowing his handsome brows, lowering his head to kiss her hair, almost devoutly, "Yara, do you still plan... to leave me this time?"

Isabelle Willow's eyes were moist, ready to spill tears at any moment. She slowly reached out to pry his big hand.

"No..." Jude Crawford was unwilling to let go.

Isabelle Willow pried his fingers apart one by one, slowly yet steadily pushing him away.

With a "bang," the room door closed.

She had closed the door.

Leaving him alone there.

She almost said, go sleep with that Jenny.

The two big hands at his sides tightened into fists, Jude Crawford stood frozen outside the door, one second, two seconds, three seconds... he slowly raised his hand to knock on the door.

"Knock knock," he knocked with certainty and rhythm.

"Yara, if you won't open the door, it's okay, we'll continue like before, I'll knock until the door is opened, alright?"

Inside, Isabelle Willow heard the persistent knocking as she laid her head on the edge of the bed, curled her knees, and sat on the carpet hugging her legs.

Chapter 793: The Last Sweet Moments

She won't open the door.

This is his strategy.

The man outside is a master of manipulation; actually, he is also quite playful. He advances step by step, his sword pointed at her.

"Yara, I feel so hot, the effects of the drug are kicking in, it's becoming harder to bear, I really want you."

The heat radiating from Jude Crawford's body was scorching, even his every breath was hot. Butler Thorne always handled things reliably, and this drug was the best of its kind.

He swallowed, trying to suppress the burning heat within him, but his mind was flooded with images of her.

The drug was like a mirror reflecting the heart; at first glance, it revealed the woman he desired most in his life, his deepest obsession.

"Sir, are you okay?" Butler Thorne asked worriedly.

Just then, the sound of high heels echoed, Jenny came upstairs, rushing over immediately, "Mr. Crawford, I've been waiting for so long."

"Mrs. Crawford doesn't value you, but I do. Feel my heart, it's pounding..."

Jenny grasped Jude Crawford's large hand, placing it on her soft, heaving chest.

...

Inside the room.

Isabelle Willow could hear the sounds from outside clearly; Jenny was already impatient.

"Ah," at this moment Annette cried out, "Mr. Crawford, you're hurting me."

Isabelle Willow quickly raised her hand, covering her ears; she didn't want to listen.

No matter what he and Jenny were doing outside now.

"Ah," Jenny outside cried out again, both pleased and excited, "Mr. Crawford, where are you taking me?"

Jude Crawford took Jenny away, it was quite thrilling.

Soon, it grew quiet around Isabelle Willow's ears.

She slowly took her hands down, there were no more sounds outside.

He was gone.

He took Jenny away.

Pain.

A sharp pain twisted in her heart.

Her eyes grew hot, and large tears fell down.

Suddenly, she broke down sobbing.

In the silent room, her restrained crying echoed, filled with sorrow.

Why cry?

Just felt an urge to cry.

"Why are you crying?"

At this moment, a low, magnetic voice suddenly sounded beside her ear.

Isabelle Willow looked up suddenly; before her stood a tall, upright figure. For an instant, she collided with his intense and tender gaze.

Jude Crawford had come.

He did not leave with Jenny; he came back.

"..."

"I said, we're still like before. I knock on the door, you don't open it, so I come in myself."

It used to be like this too. When he made her angry, she'd lock him outside the door. He would be patient at first, but once he lost it, he would come in directly.

He always had a way to get in.

He had plenty of experience picking the lock.

Isabelle Willow curved her red lips, suddenly breaking out in laughter amidst her tears.

Just now, the gloom was swept away, amused by him.

Jude Crawford slowly squatted down, reaching his distinct, large hand to pinch her face, "Tell me, why were you crying just now?"

Isabelle Willow touched her heart, "It hurt."

"Are you feeling unwell?" he asked with a husky voice.

Isabelle Willow shook her head; it wasn't physical discomfort, but her heart ached because of him, "No need, it doesn't hurt anymore."

Jude Crawford hummed softly in response, not retracting his hand as his rough fingertips gently caressed her skin, one stroke at a time.

His gaze was very warm, looking at her without any concealment, blatantly.

The place he caressed began to burn, and Isabelle Willow naturally turned her face aside.

Seeing her avoid him, Jude Crawford slightly furrowed his handsome brows, hiding all emotions beneath his gaze. He stood up, picking her up in his arms, and placed her onto the soft big bed.

"Rest assured, if you don't want to, I won't force you. Just now, it was a scare," he said with a sigh of indulgence, "Yara, I'm still the same, can't deal with you."

Isabelle Willow softened inside, "I thought... you left with Jenny."

"No, I just drove her away."

"Don't want any women?"

His deep eye sockets were bloodshot, filled with a frightening emotion that made him look a bit terrifying.

The drug effects on him were getting stronger.

Jude Crawford lifted his gaze, giving her a look, "The only woman I want is you; I never intended to touch Jenny. It's nothing. Later, I'll take a cold shower in the bathroom. If you don't want me to touch you, I won't, as long as you stay by my side this month."

Isabelle Willow's heart faintly ached again because of his words.

He had never intended to touch Jenny, not from the beginning to the end.

"Sleep, I'll go to the bathroom," Jude Crawford stood up.

Isabelle Willow watched his back, thinking, let it go. Though Zelda Willow was a regret, he was enough to fill all the regrets.

Isabelle Willow got out of bed, rushed forward, and hugged his solid waist from behind.

She hugged him tightly, unwilling to let go anymore.

She came out, embracing him.

This embrace was many years late; in midnight dreams, she had rehearsed it many times in her dreams.

To embrace her loved one.

To embrace her Jude Crawford.

Jude Crawford's steps completely froze.

He reached a large hand and touched the small hands around his well-built waist, rubbing them back and forth, "Yara, you're torturing me again, aren't you? To me, this bit of initiative feels like a hint. I've used up all my strength to restrain my desire for you, so stay away from me, leave me alone, let go of your hands while you still can."

Isabelle Willow shook her head, "I won't let go."

Jude Crawford quickly turned around, his deep blood-red eyes staring intently at her, "Do you know what you're doing?"

She knew.

She knew.

Isabelle Willow lifted her hands to wrap around his neck, tiptoed, and kissed him proactively.

Jude Crawford's pupils constricted as his gaze grew deeper, like two small whirlpools gathering up, about to swallow her whole.

The next second, he bent low and lifted her onto his shoulder, taking a few strides forward, and directly tossed her onto the soft bed.

"Playing for real?" His gaze was fervent, almost melting her.

Isabelle Willow did not answer, she wrapped her arms around his neck and lifted her body to kiss his thin lips again.

Tolerable, but intolerable?

Jude Crawford rarely had the chance to enjoy her kissing him proactively, now it felt like a beautiful dream; he couldn't wait any longer. The self-control he had just now broke instantly. He reached out to pull at her nightgown.

But Isabelle Willow pressed against his solid chest, with a force, directly pushing him over onto the mattress beside him.

Jude Crawford froze, looking at the crystal chandelier above, raised his hand to cover his blood-red eyes; he knew it, this wasn't real.

She pushed him away again.

Perhaps the kiss just now was out of pity for him.

Jude Crawford thought this way when suddenly his vision darkened; Isabelle Willow also flipped over, straddling his solid waist.

Now, man below, woman above.

Chapter 794: His Sudden White Hair

Jude Crawford's pupils contracted involuntarily. He wasn't aware of what the special occasion today was.

His large palm clasped her waist, locking his gaze onto her with eyes as scorching as magma.

Isabelle Willow's face flushed. For the better part of her life, she had never been the initiator. Others always said that men preferred women who understood the art of seduction; she didn't want to be lacking compared to others. If others could, then so could she.

Yet, under his gaze, she still felt as if aflame. "What are you staring at?"

"I'm just checking if you really haven't aged a bit."

"But I see that you've aged."

"Mrs. Crawford, you must understand, men get better with age."

"..."

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The next morning.

Outside the door came the childish voice of little Pip, "Grandpa, Grandma, time to get up. The sun is shining on your little behinds already. Why are you lingering in bed today?"

The maids in the villa, seeing Mr. and Mrs. Crawford waking up so late for the first time, could easily guess what had happened last night.

"Little master, please don't make noise. Let Mr. and Mrs. Crawford sleep a bit longer. I'll go play with you," a maid coaxed the little boy.

Little Pip's big eyes sparkled mischievously, "Alright, I'll go play by myself for a while."

Twenty minutes later, as little Pip sat in the living room, he heard footsteps. He looked back, "Grandpa, good morning."

Jude Crawford came down. Today he was wearing a grey thin sweater with black trousers, exuding a homely elegance and sophistication.

His gaze fell on Pip's small face, "Good morning."

At this moment, a melodious voice reached his ears. Isabelle Willow had come downstairs, "Pip."

Today, Isabelle Willow was dressed in a deep blue qipao, not lace embroidered but made of silk brocade. This silk material perfectly outlined her graceful figure.

Today, she didn't wear her hair up but let it down loosely, tucked casually behind her ear. Isabelle Willow looked exceptionally radiant today, resembling a thirty-something charming mature woman.

"Wow, Grandma looks so beautiful today." Little Pip ran over and hugged Isabelle Willow's leg.

Isabelle Willow affectionately pinched the little boy's cheek, "Our Pip's sweet-talking is exceptionally good today."

Little Pip grinned cunningly, "Grandma, didn't we agree last night to make sure Grandpa couldn't get out of bed? Why are you up late too?"

"..."

Isabelle Willow's face quickly turned red. She glanced at Jude Crawford beside her, only to see his gaze lingering tenderly on her, "Pip, stop saying nonsense."

Pip, I wasn't saying nonsense.

"Grandpa, Grandma, Dad and Mom are going on a trip far away. They're leaving tonight, and before they go, they're coming to have dinner."

Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling's trip to Bayside was officially on the itinerary, leaving tonight.

They knew Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow had reunited, so they were not at ease and came over for dinner before departing.

Isabelle Willow's eyes lit up, "Great, I'll cook dinner myself tonight."

...

Hayden Crawford brought Serena Sterling over. Serena went into the kitchen to find Isabelle Willow, while Jude Crawford and Hayden Crawford stood talking on the veranda at the villa's entrance.

On the lawn, the maids brought out many fireworks. Little Pip lit one, and the dazzling fireworks instantly illuminated the night sky.

Jude Crawford watched the fireworks, "Hayden, I heard you're taking Serena on a trip to Bayside?"

Hayden Crawford nodded, "Yes, we're going to handle some past matters."

Jude Crawford didn't ask further. Tonight he seemed particularly homely, setting aside that layer of sharpness and authority, his brows and eyes imbued with the gentleness of a father and husband.

"Uncle Crawford~" At this moment, Serena Sterling came out.

Jude Crawford turned back to see Serena leaning by the door, her bright eyes smiling at him.

"Daddy, these fireworks are so much fun. Hurry and come over," little Pip called out to Hayden Crawford.

Hayden Crawford went to accompany little Pip.

Serena Sterling came to Jude Crawford's side. She looked up at the night sky tonight, for some reason, tonight's night sky was extraordinarily beautiful, everything was so warm and lovely.

"Uncle Crawford, are you happy now?" Serena Sterling asked.

Jude Crawford nodded, "Very happy."

"I just saw Aunt Yara. Aunt Yara is also very happy. Uncle Crawford, after drifting through half of your life, you'll always be happy together in the future."

Will we?

Does he have time?

Jude Crawford slowly curved his lips into a smile, but he did not respond.

Serena Sterling noticed Jude Crawford's strangeness tonight, as if he was hiding something from everyone. She wanted to speak, but just then, little Pip came running over, "Mommy, hurry and come play~"

Jude Crawford gently said, "Go ahead."

Little Pip pulled Serena Sterling away. Walking on the lawn, Serena Sterling turned back, looking towards Jude Crawford in the veranda.

At this time, the vintage palace lanterns in the veranda cast a glow on the man's upright shoulders. This Crawford family's favored son, who at merely teenage years created his empire legend, reigning at the peak of power for decades was someone refined by time, a ruler, a conqueror. Yet, for some reason, tonight he seemed touched by the frost of time. Amidst the chaotic world, noisy and bustling, he stood there alone. Serena Sterling didn't know if she was seeing an illusion, but she vaguely thought she saw a few strands of white hair on his temple.

Serena Sterling didn't know at the moment that tonight would be the last time she saw Jude Crawford.

Little Pip pulled Serena Sterling over, and Hayden Crawford grasped her hand, "Serena, why is your hand so cold?"

Cold?

Serena Sterling sensed an unpleasant foreboding, her intuition usually accurate. She felt something was quietly slipping away from her side.

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Jude Crawford stood in the veranda, soon he lightly coughed, feeling a warm surge of blood in his throat. He swiftly turned around and went inside.

Reaching a quiet place, he took out a handkerchief, coughing up a lot of blood.

"Sir." Butler Thorne hurried over, his face changing drastically, "Sir, your coughing blood has worsened in the past two days. I'll go call the doctor."

Jude Crawford gently raised his hand, stopping Butler Thorne.

He knew his own body, it was even worse than the doctor's diagnosis. He probably hadn't even a month left.

Jude Crawford stood before the floor-to-ceiling window, outside fireworks were dazzling. He extended his hand, watching the stream of time slipping through his fingers.

He knew he had already boarded the last train of life, his end was near.

It was estimated to be these two days.

During the days Hayden Crawford and Serena Sterling were away.

Why did it feel so sorrowful?

Why was it so hard to let go?

Happiness was clearly within reach.

Unknowingly starting to crave the present, always wishing time could slow down, and slow down some more, but he had already reached the end.

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Serena Sterling still felt uneasy, so she went upstairs, heading straight to the study to find Jude Crawford.

But as she reached the study door, she heard Butler Thorne's voice.

Chapter 795: Midnight Winds Rise, Parting Sorrow Arrives

"Sir, here's the medicine brewed for you. You've caught a cold recently, so drink it while it's hot," Butler Thorne said.

Shortly, Jude Crawford's voice came from inside, "I know."

Outside the door, Serena had already placed her hand on the doorknob, intending to push the door open and enter. But upon hearing this, her heart quickly settled; it turned out he had caught a cold. She initially thought there was something wrong with his health.

Serena turned and left.

In the study, Butler Thorne listened to the gradually fading footsteps outside, "Sir, the young madam has left."

Jude Crawford nodded. Earlier in the corridor, he had already sensed Serena had noticed something was amiss, so he had called for Butler Thorne to stage a little act for her.

No matter how wise and unmatched Serena was, in front of his deep and seasoned self, she could only appear naive.

"Sir, do you really not plan to tell the young master and young madam about your illness?"

"No need."

...

The family had dinner together one last time. Hayden Crawford was preparing to leave with Serena and little Pip.

"Grandpa, Grandma, we're leaving," little Pip waved her small hand.

Jude Crawford and Isabelle Willow stood together, "Go on, have a safe trip."

Hayden and Serena each held one of little Pip's hands, turning away and walking into the distance.

As he watched the family of three's departing silhouettes, Jude Crawford knew in his heart this was the final farewell. He stepped forward and softly called out, "Hayden, Serena."

Hearing the call, Hayden and Serena stopped and turned to look at Jude Crawford.

"Mr. Crawford, do you have more to say to us?" Serena's bright almond eyes looked over.

In Jude Crawford's sharp, handsome eyes was a soft expression. He curled his thin lips, "Serena, are you still calling me Mr. Crawford now?"

Serena's red lips curled sweetly as she corrected herself, "Dad! Mom!"

Isabelle Willow laughed.

Satisfied, Jude Crawford nodded. He slowly extended his hands, grasping both Hayden's and Serena's hands, placing them together in an overlapping manner, "Hayden, Serena, from now on, you two take good care of this Crawford family. It's yours now."

Hayden nodded, "Dad, I understand."

"Good, go ahead."

Hayden took Serena and little Pip into the car, and the luxury car sped off. Through the rearview mirror, Serena glanced back. Far away, Jude Crawford still stood there, watching their car drive away.

The light elongated his shadow, imbuing it with an inexplicable sense of loneliness.

Though his lifelong love stood by his side, why did he still harbor such sadness during this time of supposed happiness?

At this moment, Serena didn't know that tonight's brief warmth would be forever etched in her memory. Every time she recalled Jude Crawford, an emperor of the business world, she couldn't remember how dazzling his life was. What she remembered was only his life's loneliness, and the stationary figure sending them off... her father's back, filled with deep and unspoken paternal love. At this point, tears would always stream down her face.

...

After Hayden, Serena, and little Pip left, Isabelle Willow entered the kitchen to clean up the dishes.

At this moment, the maid saw a tall and straight figure at the doorway. Jude Crawford had arrived.

The maid was surprised because they had never seen the master enter the kitchen before. Someone like Jude Crawford, a Crown Prince of a wealthy family, typically abstained from such domestic chores.

The maid wanted to speak, but Jude Crawford raised a hand, directly signaling her to leave.

The maid quickly and respectfully retreated.

Jude Crawford drew near with long strides, moving close to Isabelle Willow's back and pressed up against her.

Isabelle Willow's hand paused, holding a pair of chopsticks, as she felt a tall and strong man's body pressing up from behind.

She wanted to evade.

"Where are you going?" Jude Crawford extended a strong arm, wrapping around her soft waist, embracing her from behind into his arms.

Isabelle Willow's face turned crimson; she twisted, trying to break free from him, "Don't do this, this is the kitchen, someone might see."

"I sent them all away," Jude Crawford kissed her silky hair.

"..."

In the middle of the day, acting so affectionately, disregarding others' views, truly... thick-skinned.

"Let go of me and go wash the dishes," Isabelle Willow teased with a smile, commanding him.

Jude Crawford raised an eyebrow. Regarding washing dishes, he truly was a novice, having never done it and unsure whether he could do it well.

Jude Crawford actually let her go, then rolled up his sleeves and began to wash the dishes.

Isabelle Willow was stunned, having said it as a joke, never expecting him to actually wash them. These hands, meant for signing documents, were now humbly washing dishes.

"Jude Crawford, what's wrong with you? I feel like you're acting strange?" Isabelle Willow looked at him suspiciously.

Jude Crawford finished washing a dish surprisingly clean, "Mrs. Crawford, I washed this dish so well. Do you have any reward for me?"

As he spoke, Jude Crawford leaned over, aiming to kiss her.

Isabelle Willow immediately popped a small grape tomato into his mouth, "Is it sweet?"

Jude Crawford tasted it, "Not as sweet as you."

"..."

This man!

She had been outsmarted by him.

Isabelle Willow deliberately put on a stern face, "I'm ignoring you!"

She turned and started to walk away.

But after taking two steps, Jude Crawford wrapped his arms around her from behind, easily lifted her, and spun her around.

Her navy cheongsam flared into a beautiful arc in the air, her heart tightened, frightening her, "Ah! Jude Crawford, what are you doing?"

"Spinning around,"

Isabelle Willow blushed; youthful couples loved spinning around, but at their age!

"Put me down,"

"I won't!"

The two of them goofed around in the kitchen for a long time.

...

In the deep night, Jude Crawford slept and had a long, long dream.

He dreamt of the past again, Isabelle Willow leaping off Jill's room high platform, and for the long twenty years afterward, he had been searching, waiting for her.

Jude Crawford suddenly opened his eyes, awakening from the dream, drenched in cold sweat.

Reaching out to feel beside him, he wanted to hold Isabelle Willow, but his hand quickly froze as it touched emptiness.

Isabelle Willow was gone.

Jude Crawford sat up abruptly, his eyes filled with confusion, unable to distinguish whether this was a dream or reality.

Isabelle Willow was gone again.

The happiness he had longed for was so close, yet it shattered like a bubble.

In this lifetime, he suffered the loss of his love.

The barren part of his heart grew larger, suddenly becoming unbearable, prompting him to throw off the covers and get out of bed.

With a clatter, he accidentally knocked over a glass.

Not wearing shoes, he stepped barefoot, and countless shards of glass pierced into the soles of his feet, embedding deeper with each step.

"Yara!" he called out.

No one answered.

"Yara..."

"Yara, where are you..."

Chapter 796: I Love You, Do You Know?

"Yara..."

He called out repeatedly, the echoes of his own voice resonating in the empty room.

He twisted his head searching, those deep narrow eyes gradually lost their focus, becoming hollow and pale.

He seemed like a lost child, searching the world over.

Searching for what?

Searching for his heart.

His heart was lost.

He opened the door, ran outside, the man dressed in black silk pajamas, the chilly autumn wind made his pajamas flap noisily.

The night's wind rises, and with it comes a sense of loss.

His steps were hurried and chaotic, no longer composed as before, he ran all the way, leaving a trail of blood like blooming poppies, deadly and hauntingly beautiful.

Yara!

He must find his Yara.

At this moment, a familiar sweet voice sounded by his ear, "Jude."

Jude Crawford halted, quickly turned around, a slender figure emerged from the darkness, Isabelle Willow.

Feeling thirsty at night, Isabelle Willow had simply gotten up to pour some water, and soon she heard Jude Crawford's voice.

She came over, and indeed saw him, along with...his trail of blood.

"Jude, what happened to you?" Isabelle Willow swiftly approached him.

Jude Crawford reached out, pulling her into his arms, burying his handsome face in her hair, "Yara, so you were here, I've been looking for you for so long."

He lowered his head, kissing her forehead, murmuring, "Yara, I missed you."

He said, Yara, I missed you.

Truly, truly missed you.

Twenty years have passed, and this belated "I missed you."

He held her tightly, tighter and tighter.

"Jude, what's wrong with you, are you feeling unwell, your foot is hurt, let me take a look..."

The next second, Isabelle Willow's words ceased abruptly, for she felt her cheeks damp, tears falling onto her face.

He...

Isabelle Willow's pupils contracted.

Jude Crawford, though holding her tightly, still felt empty inside, lacking any sense of security.

A layer of mist gathered in his eyes, the mist thickened, and finally, drop after drop of tears fell down.

He began to cry, his broad shoulders trembling, crying incessantly.

He held her, crying painfully.

The path of love in this life has been rocky, his face still young, but his heart has aged, a short few decades traversed like crossing vast seas.

Climbing mountains and crossing ridges, bearing traces of the years.

There's no sweet scene in the memory, this love-hate entanglement makes recalling it painful.

Never obtained, always waiting.

Never loved, yet still losing.

The softest part of his persistent heart in this life was given to her.

She was like poison, making him gravely ill.

One drop, two drops, three drops of tears... falling on Isabelle Willow's face, wetting her small face.

Jude Crawford hurriedly wiped them for her, in the end wetting his own hands, smudging her face.

Would his Yara be angry?

Jude Crawford forced a smile, one that was seemingly ingratiating.

He smiled ingratiatingly, cried in distress, at this moment, this business titan on life's last train was crying and laughing like a fool.

Isabelle Willow felt a strong panic, a deep panic, she was scared, she had never seen Jude Crawford like this.

She never knew that Jude Crawford, this man, could cry.

A bad premonition swirled in her heart, causing it to plummet rapidly, "Jude, what's wrong with you, I'm right here, I won't leave again."

Jude Crawford gradually calmed down, but his face was very pale, his eyes filled with deep sorrow and farewell, "Yara, I'm fine, don't be afraid."

"Then let's hurry back to the room, you're hurt."

Isabelle Willow held his large hand, leading him back to the room.

...

In the room, Isabelle Willow took out a medical box to treat his wounds, those fragments of glass deeply embedded in the flesh of his soles, she used sterilized tweezers to pull out the pieces one by one.

Her heart ached painfully, she didn't know he was hurt so badly, stepping on so many shards of glass.

"Jude, I'll call the doctor to come to help you handle it, so the wound doesn't get infected and inflamed."
Isabelle Willow stood up.

Jude Crawford grasped her small hand, gently shaking his head, "Yara, I'm a bit tired, let's call the doctor tomorrow, I want to hold you and sleep for a while."

Isabelle Willow turned back to look at him, at this moment he was quietly sitting on the bed, fatigue heavy in his eyebrows.

Soon, she saw his temples, there... seemed to be strands of white hair.

Isabelle Willow stiffened, then slowly raised her hand to touch his hair.

One strand, two strands, three strands...

Those white hairs were too many to count, with the storm of the night, he suddenly aged.

Isabelle Willow felt her heart being gripped tightly by a large hand, the pain making it hard to breathe.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Isabelle Willow quickly shook her head, "Nothing, Jude, let's sleep."

She didn't want to tell him, plan to buy hair dye tomorrow and dye his white hair black.

At this moment, Isabelle Willow didn't know, tomorrow after tomorrow, lost so many years between them, time had been exhausted in twenty years of waiting, she and he would stop at tonight, with no more tomorrow.

The two lay on the bed, Jude Crawford stretched out his strong arm, holding her in his embrace, Isabelle Willow rested on his arm, listening to the strong beating of his heart, feeling somewhat comforted.

"Jude, what happened to you today?" she asked softly while lying in his arms.

Jude Crawford closed his eyes, "Nothing, just had a nightmare, dreaming you left me again."

Isabelle Willow felt a sharp pain in her heart, she reached out and hugged his waist, her eyes red.

"Yara, I love you, do you know that?"

Isabelle Willow sniffed her reddened nose, nodding forcefully, "Yes, I know."

"But, I love you, and I've loved enough in this life, if there's an afterlife, I don't wish to meet you again." His voice was deep like an ancient bell, telling her slowly.

He never believed in past lives, but if there truly is an afterlife, he hopes not to meet her again.

Loved enough, hurt enough, waited enough, if there's another lifetime, he wouldn't want time to start over, hoping to meet someone to enjoy being loved, to fill the regret of unrequited love in this life, he wishes for that person to treat him gently.

Isabelle Willow clutched at his clothes, "Jude, I..."

Jude Crawford closed his eyes, interrupting her words, "Zane..."

Isabelle Willow's heart skipped a beat; it was the first time he mentioned Zane Crawford to her.

Jude Crawford didn't open his eyes, just drew a gentle curve, "Although I have never admitted it over the years, because he was by my side, I felt the days weren't so hard to endure, so, I truthfully raised Zane as a son, Yara, I... really like him."

Chapter 797: The Song Ends, But the Crowd Has Dispersed

Isabelle Willow didn't understand why he wanted to say such things to her, Zane Crawford was superior and distinguished, it was normal for him to love his son.

Isabelle Willow nodded, "I know."

In the future, she would also try to accept Zane Crawford, work hard to forget that past between him and Zelda Willow, and from now on he and she would be fine.

"Jude, actually there are some things I want to tell you, me and Chase Sullivan..."

"

"Yara, don't say anything, I'm tired, I want to sleep for a while."

Isabelle Willow wanted to confess everything to him, but when she looked up at him, his eyes were dark with fatigue, she nodded, "Okay, Jude, we'll talk about it tomorrow."

Jude Crawford didn't reply, he seemed to have fallen asleep.

Isabelle Willow raised her hand and gently covered him with the quilt.

At this moment, Jude Crawford suddenly spoke again, and this was the last sentence of his life, "Yara, call me husband, let me hear it."

She had never called him husband before.

Isabelle Willow blushed, she buried herself in his embrace and called softly, "Husband~"

"

Jude Crawford slowly curled his thin lips, although there were many regrets in life, it was complete.

He hugged her tightly in his arms, the entire world began to quiet down, and all the strength in his body was draining away, his consciousness gradually becoming dim.

Who is crying, who is laughing, one finishes singing while another begins the performance, all the hustle and bustle of the world gradually faded away from him.

In such a late night, he dreamt of returning to those bustling times.

In the hospital, voices were continuous, he stopped in his tracks and saw her, a story began to unfold.

The girl with the cold elegance bent down to pick up money, she came to his feet, stunning his eyes.

He once followed his mother to the temple, in those days, the Crown Prince of the Crawford family attracted the attention of the pilgrimage guests, a wandering monk approached, smiled and said whose young man is this, shining so brightly, you and I are destined, I give you a marriage fortune stick.

He never believed in Buddhism, turned and left.

But the wandering monk took out that marriage fortune stick, he looked at it.

On it was a line of Sanskrit "The song has not ended, yet the people have drifted apart, how deep the love, yet shallow the fate."

Love has always been deep, yet fate shallow.

Only now did he truly understand.

Jude Crawford closed his eyes, the entire world was filled with that scene from the grand marriage, she wore a red wedding dress.

Husband~

Jude Crawford slowly curled his lips, his breath halted.

On XX year xx day, this business empress Jude Crawford peacefully departed from this world beside the person he loved most, ending his legendary life.

Pitter-patter, it suddenly started raining outside.

...

The next morning.

Isabelle Willow slowly opened her eyes, now she was still in Jude Crawford's arms.

From last night, Jude Crawford had maintained this posture, holding her tightly in his arms.

Waking up in the arms of a lover, how blissful it is, Isabelle Willow looked up at him, "Jude, wake up, it's time to get up."

No response.

Jude Crawford would be unable to respond to her anymore.

Isabelle Willow moved a little, quickly noticing something was wrong, his body was cold and already stiff.

"Jude... Jude, what's wrong?" Isabelle Willow reached out to push him, soon, the big hand he had on her waist loosened, powerlessly falling to the bedsheet.

Isabelle Willow's breath hitched, her mind went "buzz," as if she sensed something, she slowly reached to his nose, there was no breath there anymore.

He...

Isabelle Willow's pupils constricted, at this moment, the whole world collapsed in front of her.

Many things that happened afterward, Isabelle Willow couldn't remember clearly, it seemed Butler Thorne rushed in, followed by the doctor pronouncing his death, a coffin was set in the villa, the world was chaotic, so many people, so many footsteps, yet he, always quietly lay there.

Isabelle Willow sat beside him, not shedding a single tear, she felt that he was not dead.

Butler Thorne was full of grief, his voice choking up several times, "Ma'am, Mr. Crawford left you two things."

Isabelle Willow's face was pale as paper, those almond eyes unfocused, she blankly looked at Butler Thorne, "What?"

"Ma'am..."

Isabelle Willow's gaze fell back on Jude Crawford, "Shh, don't speak, let him sleep for a while, he is still asleep, when he wakes, he will naturally open his eyes."

"Ma'am, Mr. Crawford has already gone."

"No, he hasn't." Isabelle Willow said with certainty.

Butler Thorne took out the first item, presenting it to Isabelle Willow.

Isabelle Willow took one glance, instantly froze, because the five large characters "Divorce Agreement" fiercely pierced into her eyes.

She looked down, at the bottom was his handwritten signature, bold and powerful Zane Crawford.

Before he left, he signed the divorce agreement.

"Ma'am, this is the first thing Mr. Crawford left you, he said, he said..."

"

That night, Jude Crawford sat in the study, in the dim light, he quietly finished the cigarette in his hand, then picked up a pen and signed.

He said

"Even though our marriage will automatically dissolve after my death, I want... this marriage was obtained through my forceful seizure, so now, it should end by my own hand."

Isabelle Willow reached out, her fingertips trembling, she picked up the divorce agreement little by little, looking over his signature several times, then shaking her head, "He didn't sign this, I know him too well, he was domineering his entire life, there's no way he would let go of my hand, allowing me to be with another man, based on his character, he should have taken me with him."

Isabelle Willow was the person who knew Jude Crawford the best, such a strong emperor-like man, he should have taken her with him.

"Ma'am, Mr. Crawford's heart condition never improved, in fact, it worsened over time. As he neared the end of his life, Mr. Crawford did indeed consider taking you with him, but in the final moment, he chose to let go of your hand and give you freedom, as per Mr. Crawford's order, Chase Sullivan has already been released, he is now outside the villa, Ma'am you can leave."

Isabelle Willow curled up her whitened fingers, clutched the divorce agreement tightly, after so many years of entanglement, it turned out their ending was him letting go.

She remembered last night when he talked about the next life, he said, if there is a next life, he wouldn't want time to go back, he wouldn't want to meet her again.

Isabelle Willow never knew he could be so ruthless.

All these years, no matter where she was, or how far she went, he always stood behind her, within reach when she turned back.

But this time, he turned and walked away.

He truly didn't want her anymore.

Not even in the next life to meet again.

"Has his heart condition never improved?"

Butler Thorne shook his head, "Ma'am, you left, how could Mr. Crawford's heart condition improve?"

Chapter 798: Zane Crawford Is Her Biological Son

All these years, she always thought that when she left, his heart ailment would be cured.

Recently, Iris told her that he had truly gotten better, so she believed he was healed.

But she was wrong.

She left, how could his heart ailment be cured?

It was only now that Isabelle Willow realized that her love was misplaced, that she loved in the wrong way all these years.

At that moment, the villa's front door was suddenly thrust open with a "boom," rain pouring outside, accompanied by a gust of cold wind and a silhouette long absent... Zelda Willow.

The last time Zelda Willow's collusion with The Merfolk Clan was exposed, Jude Crawford imprisoned her. Jude Crawford neither looked at her nor punished her; he merely kept her confined in a small dark room for a long time. That room had no light at all, enveloped in ceaseless darkness. Zelda Willow was trapped inside, fear, anxiety, and confusion growing like vines in her heart, this silent torture rapidly made her emaciated, her mental state extremely poor.

When Jude Crawford truly hates someone, he wouldn't let them die easily; he would only torment them in the most brutal way, making survival impossible, but death unobtainable.

Today, someone opened the small dark room and brought her all the way here.

Zelda Willow was joyful; she finally saw the light again, regained her freedom, and wanted to see Jude Crawford.

"Is it Jude who wants to see me? That's great, hurry and take me to him, I have so much to say to him."

"I was wrong; I shouldn't have been seduced into harming Iris back then. But... but I did all of this because I loved him so much. I just love him so much that I can't lose him..."

"We still have our son, Zane. Zane is so outstanding; no matter how wrong I am, Jude should forgive me just once for Zane's sake."

Zelda Willow ran in from outside, face full of delight.

Soon, Zelda Willow caught sight of Isabelle Willow, she froze, and the smile on her face vanished, "Isabelle Willow, why are you here? Where is Jude, Jude wants to see me now."

Isabelle Willow's eyes were dry, no tears, but within them was emptiness.

"Isabelle Willow, what's wrong with you, why do you seem strange? Where's Jude?" Zelda Willow stepped forward.

The next second, Zelda Willow saw Jude Crawford lying in a crystal coffin, inhaling sharply, and immediately rushed over, "Jude! Jude, what's wrong with you?"

Zelda Willow slowly extended her hand to feel Jude Crawford's breath; at that moment, her blood froze, screaming tragically, "Jude! Jude, wake up! How did you... why did you die, get up quickly!"

"Isabelle Willow, what happened to Jude, who killed him? I know, it was you, it must have been you who killed Jude!"

"He was fine when you weren't here, but once you returned, he died. Isabelle Willow, you killed Jude!"

Zelda Willow, in an emotional frenzy, grabbed Isabelle Willow's shoulders, shaking her continuously.

At this moment, two black-clad bodyguards came over, pulling Zelda Willow away. Unable to stand firm, she fell awkwardly onto the carpet.

"Get away from me! Who allowed you to touch me! You're insolent, I am Mrs. Crawford, the real Mrs. Crawford, she's fake!" Zelda Willow glared with reddened eyes, roaring.

Butler Thorne stepped forward, looking down at Zelda Willow, "Zelda Willow, have you had enough of your antics? If you're done, you'll need to accept the arrangements made by sir before he passed."

Jude Crawford arranged everything that night, including Zelda Willow.

Zelda Willow froze, her hands and feet growing cold, "Arrangements? How does Jude plan to deal with me?"

Butler Thorne coldly gazed at her, "What do you think?"

At this moment, Zelda Willow saw a murderous intent in Butler Thorne's eyes; she already had her answer, from the moment she stepped in, she would never be able to walk out again.

This night was her purgatory.

Zelda Willow felt herself truly foolish, came here with joy, only to meet such an outcome.

Jude Crawford towards her... was truly ruthless.

"Ha, hahaha..." Zelda Willow laughed a few times, as she laughed, tears streamed down, her love for Jude Crawford was genuine all these years.

"You can't touch me, Jude can't even touch me because I still have Zane!" Although Zelda Willow loved Jude Crawford, she didn't want to die; now Zane Crawford was her greatest hope for survival, she straightened her back, her eyes shone brightly, "Zane has already arrived in Westria, he knows nothing yet, imagine if he found out his father killed his mother, how would he bear it?"

Butler Thorne said lightly, "Zelda Willow, wake up. Young Master Zane is not your son, never was!"

Once these words fell, everyone collectively inhaled, the air suddenly silent, exuding a suffocating oppression.

Even Isabelle Willow lifted her head to look over, her pale, empty apricot eyes revealing confusion and perplexity.

Zelda Willow's ears buzzed, she looked incredulously at Butler Thorne, "You... you said what? No, you're talking nonsense!"

"That day Jude was drunk, I slept with him, and then I got pregnant, gave birth to the son Zane, how... how can you say Zane isn't my son?"

Butler Thorne looked at Zelda Willow, "The man who spent the night with you was not sir, but someone sir randomly found as a stand-in, sir never touched you, let alone a son."

"You were pregnant back then, but you gave birth to a daughter, that daughter died shortly after birth."

Butler Thorne's words were like a bolt from the blue, Zelda Willow's expression drastically changed, she shook her head, kept shaking her head, "No, impossible, you're lying! The man that night was Jude, definitely! The son is my son, definitely! I didn't give birth to a daughter!"

"Okay, let's say everything you claim is true, then Zane isn't my son, then whose son is he, did you adopt him? How could it be, Jude would raise someone else's son for so many years?"

Isabelle Willow hadn't spoken the whole time, but inside, there was an upheaval; her heart couldn't pass the obstacle, believing it to be an eternal regret, the brief affair between Jude Crawford and Zelda Willow.

But now, with the truth revealed, Jude Crawford never touched Zelda Willow, never.

From start to finish, she was the only woman he had.

She actually... only knew now.

Then Zane Crawford...

Isabelle Willow suddenly had a very bold assumption; her pupils constricted, shocked as she looked at Butler Thorne.

Butler Thorne also looked at her, then slowly nodded under her gaze, "Madam, Young Master Zane is your biological son."

Speaking of which, Butler Thorne took out a second item, handed it over, "Madam, this is sir's bequest for you, your and Young Master Zane's DNA paternity test report."

Chapter 799: Listening to Her Speak—His Past

Isabelle Willow stared at the DNA paternity test report and forgot to breathe.

Over the years, both she and Zelda Willow firmly believed in the trap he had set. She always thought that Zane Crawford was his and Zelda Willow's son.

"Madam, back then your second pregnancy was not a daughter but a son. No matter how ruthless Mr. Crawford was to you, he couldn't bear to touch your son. Probably... he didn't dare to touch him."

"Over the years, Mr. Crawford always kept Master Zane by his side. Because of Master Zane's origins, he treated him very coldly on the surface, but... every year at Master Zane's graduation ceremony, Mr. Crawford would secretly attend, not letting Master Zane know, just standing behind him. Mr. Crawford never forgot Master Zane's birthday. No matter where he was on that day, he would eat a piece of cake and then say into the... air... happy birthday."

"I have followed Mr. Crawford for so many years, and I deeply understand how he both hated and loved Master Zane. Even if he didn't want to admit it, Master Zane has accompanied Mr. Crawford through many long nights, Madam, because he is your son. So, Mr. Crawford has treated Master Zane as his own son for all these years."

"Sometimes... I feel like I don't know Mr. Crawford anymore. Such a decisive and shrewd business monarch, indifferent to everyone else, has repeatedly compromised his principles for you, leaving himself defenseless and utterly defeated."

So that's how it is.

This is the truth.

So this is the real Jude Crawford.

Isabelle Willow felt as if a sharp blade had pierced her heart, twisting with both blood and flesh, causing her unbearable pain.

She didn't know that it could hurt this much, overwhelmed by immense grief.

Zane Crawford is her son...

"Madam, these are the two things Mr. Crawford left for you: a divorce agreement and a DNA paternity test report. Chase Sullivan is outside right now. You can leave and regain your freedom. Before his passing, Mr. Crawford had already divided his estate, and his legacy will be equally split between Master Hayden and Master Zane. Regardless, these two are your biological sons. Mr. Crawford also dealt with Zelda Willow, and with a flick, the Willow family's empire in Aethelgard has turned to ashes. This is the last thing Mr. Crawford did for you, clearing all obstacles on your path and returning your freedom and happiness." said Butler Thorne.

Jude Crawford acted against the Willow family, and with just one applauding gesture, the entire Willow family could be obliterated. These past people, past events, the entangled grudges of wealthy families over the years, have disappeared along with his departure.

In life, he shielded her from the world's storms.

In death, he took all the storms with him.

Zelda Willow seemed to have been pushed into an abyss; Zane is not her son, and the Willow family is gone. In the blink of an eye, she lost everything.

Everything she clung to, everything she greedily sought, vanished like foam.

That man Jude Crawford... truly heartless.

Zelda Willow found an unknown surge of strength, pushing away the two bodyguards beside her and snatching the DNA paternity test report from Isabelle Willow's hands. She still couldn't believe it, unwilling to give up, and needed to see it with her own eyes.

The two bodyguards wanted to step forward, but Butler Thorne raised a hand and stopped them.

Zelda Willow turned to the last page, confirming that Zane Crawford is indeed Isabelle Willow's biological son. She was stunned.

"So it's true. Zane is really not my son. Jude, why did you treat me like this? You deceived me for all these years. I invested all my energy and effort into Zane, but in the end, I raised Isabelle Willow's son for her. Ha, hahaha..." Zelda Willow's hands fell limply as she laughed maniacally, losing her sanity.

Quickly, Zelda Willow looked up at Isabelle Willow, and her eyes suddenly brightened, "Isabelle Willow, do you think you've won? No, you are the one who lost the most, because you lost the man who loved you the most!"

"Of course, Jude Crawford didn't win either; he's also miserable. He had a DNA test done for you and Zane but never thought to test himself and Zane. Jude Crawford probably never knew you maintained your innocence with Chase Sullivan and that Zane is his biological son. You've always loved him, haven't you?"

Butler Thorne's face changed in shock, "Madam!"

Even Butler Thorne didn't know Zane Crawford was his master's son.

To have missed it like this...

Butler Thorne's lips moved, but no words came out, tears already blurring his vision.

"Isabelle Willow, I have several things I want to tell you, things I originally planned for you to never know, but now I see it's more fun to tell you."

"Back then, the marriage between you and Jude Crawford started with the Willow family's financial crisis, and you kneeled in front of the Crawford family's door. You probably didn't know, that crisis was manipulated by someone, and that person was Jude Crawford!"

"Jude Crawford was deeply in love with you even when you didn't know it. The Crown Prince of the powerful Crawford family in Aethelgard turned the world upside down to marry you, setting you up in a trap for a marriage he devised."

"That time when you jumped from the high platform at Jill's house, diving into the roaring river, so determined, you probably didn't know that Jude Crawford jumped in after you, searching for you!"

"Later, it took us two days to find him washed ashore on a beach, unconscious. During that time, he was undergoing treatment, suffering from a high fever for a month, disoriented, but day and night, in dreams and reality, he called for you!"

"I bet you know your son Hayden Crawford was sent to a mental institution for two years, right? Did you blame Jude Crawford for that, question where he was, or say he was an unfit father? Now I'll give you the answer: he woke up once during his treatment to arrange your funeral. Right after the ceremony ended, he collapsed into a deep coma. In the following two years, doctors issued several critical illness notices. He hovered at the edge of life and death multiple times. He couldn't even take care of himself, let alone your son."

"It was me. I took advantage of Jude Crawford's coma to send your son Hayden Crawford in, having him tormented. I wanted to turn him into a madman!"

"Isabelle Willow, you see, there are so many things you didn't know. Jude Crawford, what kind of person was he? He schemed to win the world for you, but in the end, you made him lose you. Twenty years, a full twenty years have passed. You left when he was in his prime, and when you returned, he was already in his twilight years."

Chapter 800: Jude Crawford, I'm Here

"You've left him alone for far too long. In the endless nights and constant waiting, he remained silent and isolated day after day. He has two sons; his elder son, Hayden Crawford, who suffers from insomnia, left for Bayside early on. His younger son, he never knew was his own. His affection for Zane was like walking on the edge of a knife, every step bleeding. He has a sister, but Iris holds a grudge against him. He also has a mother, but Mrs. Crawford finds herself in a dilemma. For these years, as a son, brother, and father, he's been a failure. His life has been a complete mess, yet the one thing he never did was hurt you."

"Hahaha, Isabelle Willow, do you think you've won? No, you've lost, completely defeated. For years, Jude Crawford treated you like a princess in the palm of his hand, but you left him with deep regret and loneliness as he departed this world. Your life goes on, but time will never return. You will never meet another man like Jude Crawford, who loves you as he loves life."

Listening to Zelda Willow's words, Isabelle Willow's face turned pale as paper. She clutched her fingers, her fingertips trembling.

It turned out that over the years she left, many things happened.

Zelda Willow knew, Butler Thorne knew...everyone knew, except her.

The people who jumped from the high platform of Jill's house back then were not just her; he jumped down with her.

During her recent visit to the City of Aethelgard, she harshly accused him of being a bad father, but during those two years...he was in a deep coma, constantly undergoing treatment.

The child from back then was always a pain in her heart. He actually kept her child by his side, raising him all the way to adulthood.

She thought he and Zelda Willow were her lifelong regrets, but she did not understand; how could Jude Crawford allow her to have regrets?

Indeed, how could his heart ailment be cured?

Faced with Iris's hysterical crying and raging, he stayed alone in the study, smoking the entire night away.

Facing his children, all the heavy paternal love was condensed into the shadow of a father. He watched them leave for a long, long time.

All these years, he has been alone, accustomed to silence. He never shouted in pain, never spoke of it. But he hurts, he feels pain.

Isabelle Willow remembered last night when she got up for a drink of water, he ran out barefoot on broken glass, trailing blood, looking for her.

At that moment, years of endurance and solitude made his shoulders tremble, and the wounds in his heart were unbearable. He laughed and cried like a child.

He said, "Yara, I missed you."

She left for so many years, and he only ever told her, "Yara, I missed you."

She truly kept him alone for too long, too long.

Isabelle Willow's gaze fell on Jude Crawford's face. She slowly extended her hand, caressing his graying temples. She knew he was too tired.

Until the moment he closed his eyes, she hadn't told him. She hadn't told him that Zane was his biological son.

She hadn't had the time to say the words he longed for all his life, "Jude Crawford, I love you."

With bloodshot eyes, Zelda Willow looked at Isabelle Willow, laughing madly, "Hahaha, Jude Crawford, have you seen? This is the woman you loved your whole life. You died, and she didn't shed a single tear for you. Her heart is cold; she's always been such a heartless and ungrateful woman!"

Butler Thorne glanced at the bodyguards, and two men in black swiftly stepped forward to restrain the nearly insane Zelda Willow, forcibly taking her away.

Zelda Willow was unwilling, looking at Isabelle Willow with hatred, still laughing, "Isabelle Willow, don't think I'm pitiful. The really pitiful person is you. I sympathize with you; congratulations, you've finally lost Jude Crawford!"

Zelda Willow was taken away.

The entire hall quickly returned to silence. Not a single sound could be heard. Butler Thorne stepped forward and spoke, "Madam, Sir has already passed, the eldest young master and young lady have gone to Bayside, and young master Zane is still unaware. Should we inform them? Sir's funeral surely needs to be arranged."

Isabelle Willow was very quiet now. She had always been a woman of gentle temperament, now seemingly even more serene. She continually looked at Jude Crawford without raising her head, "For now, don't inform Hayden or Zane. Prepare a private jet; I want to take Jude back to the City of Aethelgard."

Butler Thorne nodded, "Returning to the City of Aethelgard is fine, but what about the old mistress and young lady Iris..."

"The old mistress is in poor health, and Iris is still in a coma. Wait until Hayden, Serena, and Zane are back with the old mistress before informing her last."

Butler Thorne paused, finding Isabelle Willow quite odd now, "Madam, are we taking Sir back to the City of Aethelgard without returning to the Crawford family home?"

Isabelle Willow gently shook her head, "No, we aren't going to the Crawford family home. I want to take Jude...to a place first."

...

The private jet quickly took off, and Isabelle Willow carried Jude Crawford back to the City of Aethelgard.

It's now late autumn; Jude Crawford sat in a wheelchair with thick blankets over his legs, seeming just like he's sleeping.

Isabelle Willow wore an almond-colored coat and a scarf around her neck, pushing Jude Crawford along the way. They returned to the narrow path behind the Willow family home.

Butler Thorne and everyone else waited behind. Here, there were only the two of them. Isabelle Willow walked the whole way; the evening wind rose, and the maple leaves fluttered down, covering the entire path.

Isabelle Willow brought him back again, with time traveling back. Everything seemed to return to many years ago; their wedding was imminent, and that night he came to the Willow family for dinner, and her father asked her to walk him out.

That night, he and she just walked, then stopped.

The Crown Prince of the Crawford family, once a young man blessing the City of Aethelgard, and she was in her nineteen spring bloom, barely blossoming. He lowered his handsome lids to look at her, saying don't be afraid, be my Mrs. Crawford; in the future, I will treat you well.

And so, he treated her well for a lifetime.

Isabelle Willow stopped, halted at the place from back then. She slowly knelt down in front of Jude Crawford, though she had many things to say.

But now, those words were meaningless.

The distant ancient clock struck again as the night breeze blew, pear blossoms fell, another night of farewell.

Days and months passed, who scattered the youthful years in the tide of time?

Three apologies.

Three 'I love you's.

Isabelle Willow looked at him, then gently rested her head upon his lap, "Jude Crawford, I've left you lonely for so long; now, how could I still bear to leave you lonely and sad?"

You said, if there is a next life, you hope not to meet again.

This time, let it be me.

If there is a next life, I will surely find you among the vast crowd, I will fill all your regrets and treat you tenderly. I will take you on a journey that lasts till the end of time."

"Jude Crawford, I'm here."

Isabelle Willow gently closed her eyes.