

## **Substitute B 831**

Chapter 831: She Is My Open and Unapologetic Favoritism

Leah Thorne was in her apartment when suddenly, a "ding-dong" sounded—the apartment doorbell rang.

Could it be Justin Xavier coming back?

Leah walked over and opened the apartment door. Outside were not Justin but two black-suited bodyguards.

One of the bodyguards spoke, "Hello, Miss Thorne, Old Master Xavier has come to Bayside, and he wants to see you."

Old Master Xavier?

Leah's heart skipped a beat. She had only seen Old Master Xavier once, and that was many years ago on the day Hugh Xavier brought her home. A luxury car slowly stopped outside the Xavier family villa, and she turned around to catch a glimpse of Old Master Xavier through the rolled-down car window in the back seat.

Old Master Xavier sat in the car, quietly watching her.

That gaze was particularly calm, yet it made her hair stand on end.

After that, she never saw Old Master Xavier again.

Old Master Xavier had not been in Bayside for years, yet he was the real powerholder of the Xavier family, wielding life and death authority.

Now, Old Master Xavier had returned and wanted to see her.

Perhaps it was that childhood encounter that left a psychological shadow, causing Leah to innately reject Old Master Xavier.

However, she did not refuse.

Because Old Master Xavier did not give her the chance to refuse.

"Alright, I'll go with you."

...

Half an hour later, Leah arrived at a villa. The bodyguard pushed open the door to the study, "Old Master, Miss Thorne is here."

Leah walked in and saw Old Master Xavier.

Old Master Xavier wore a black Zhongshan suit, looking vigorous. Although his face was deeply lined with age, his turbid eyes shone with a sharp, astute light.

Clearly a formidable character.

"Hello, Old Master. Did you need to see me?" Leah greeted politely and graciously.

Old Master Xavier's cloudy eyes fell on Leah's delicate face and slowly revealed a hint of a smile, "Miss Thorne, don't be nervous. I won't harm you, I have only one matter to discuss with you."

"Is it about Hugh and me?"

Old Master Xavier shook his head, "Didn't Justin confine his father and then drive him out of Bayside, condemning him to live abroad for life, never to return? Since Justin has already perfectly resolved it, those old matters needn't be mentioned."

Leah's finely arranged lashes trembled briefly. She hadn't known about this matter.

"Miss Thorne, today, I'm asking you to leave my grandson, Justin Xavier."

So, Old Master Xavier had come for this.

Leah slowly lowered her head, and after a few seconds, she lifted it again, "Old Master, I think you're mistaken. Between Justin and me, it was never me clinging to him, but him holding tight to me. So, you're looking for the wrong person. You should find your grandson."

Old Master Xavier chuckled, "Since you're already here, Justin wouldn't be far behind. He's already on his way."

"I will make him let go in my way, and I hope Miss Thorne will cooperate by using your way to make him release as well. You're clever, Miss Thorne, so you should understand what I'm saying, right?"

Leah's slender white fingers hanging at her side curled slightly, and her complexion turned pale without a word.

Old Master Xavier picked up a teacup, elegantly sipping a bit of tea, "Miss Thorne, you no longer love Justin, right?"

Leah's heart ached suddenly, curling up involuntarily. She didn't know...

She only knew that in her life there was only... Justin Xavier.

Only him.

At this moment, Old Master Xavier's gaze landed on Leah, squinting those cloudy and sharp eyes to examine Leah thoroughly, then smiled with unclear meaning, "In the blink of an eye, Quinn Thorne's daughter has grown so big."

Quinn Thorne was Leah's dad.

It had been a very long time since Leah had heard her dad's name from someone else's lips, and now suddenly hearing Old Master Xavier bring it up, she widened her eyes in utter shock, staring at Old Master Xavier, "You... knew my dad?"

"Heh," Old Master Xavier chuckled mysteriously, "Back in those days, who didn't know the high-society Quinn Thorne; Quinn Thorne had a pair of children, a daughter who was a cherished rose, and a son... Mort Thorne was an exceptional talent, a rising star, becoming the CEO of FUI at 18, impressively unparalleled. The Thorne family back then was truly dazzling, but unfortunately, Quinn Thorne died in a car accident, and his son Mort went missing overnight, while his daughter became an adopted daughter of another family. It's quite a sigh-inducing tale, isn't it?"

Leah looked at Old Master Xavier, sensing that when he spoke of these things, he wasn't actually sighing in sentiment. On the contrary, Old Master Xavier's eyes glinted with a very dark, mysterious light.

This made Leah gently furrow her delicate brows, having a gut feeling that the relationship between Old Master Xavier and the Thorne family wasn't so simple!

At this moment, a maid walked in, respectfully saying, "Old Master, the young master has arrived!"

Justin Xavier had arrived.

Old Master Xavier withdrew his thoughts, chuckling softly, "Came quite quickly. Miss Thorne, if you would kindly stay in the secret room for a while."

Leah entered a secret room, from where she could just see the situation outside.

Justin hurried over, standing tall and cold before Old Master Xavier, his black eyes scanning the surroundings, "Grandpa, where's Leah?"

Old Master Xavier coldly huffed, "Justin, do you still have me as your grandfather in your eyes now? I see you have only Leah in your heart and eyes now. For her, you didn't even hesitate to turn against your own father."

Justin's expression remained unruffled, speaking blandly, "Grandfather, Leah is timid, don't scare her. Let me send her back first, and we can talk afterward."

"Justin, how did I raise you when you were a child? Marriages among noble families are meant for benefits and exchanges. As a qualified heir, you cannot indulge in true feelings. And how have you acted? The matter between you and Leah has become the talk of the town, turning father against son. I won't tolerate such a woman, break up with her immediately."

"Grandfather, I will not break up with her."

With a "slam," Old Master Xavier slammed the teacup he held onto the table, and his turbid eyes sharpened, scolding, "Unfilial son, kneel!"

Justin's handsome visage remained indifferent, not even frowning as he slowly knelt down.

A servant brought over a whip, and Old Master Xavier seized it, lashing it down hard on Justin's back with a "crack."

This was family punishment.

Inside the secret room, Leah's dark pupils constricted, her heart gripped tight like by a huge hand, with each breath aching painful.

The whip lashed on his body, but the pain was in her heart.

Leah wanted to rush out, but the secret room was closed, and she couldn't find the switch.

With every lash from Old Master Xavier, fresh blood seeped through Justin's clothes on his back. "Justin, what do you say now?"

Justin knelt straight, slowly speaking, "I thought you all knew that over the years... Leah is my well-known private favorite, the one I've blatantly favored."

Chapter 832: Do You Really Think I Can't Support Her Without the Xavier Family?

In the secret room, Leah Thorne froze upon hearing this, her fan-like lashes trembled, and soon her pale eyelids started to redden, a crystal layer of tears welling up within.

He said he thought everyone knew that over the years she was his well-known secret love, blatantly favored.

This statement clearly angered Old Master Xavier, who swung the whip and lashed at Justin Xavier's back again.

Crack.

Crack.

Crack.

The whip hit Justin Xavier's handsome back repetitively, the skin breaking with each strike, leaving shocking marks.

Soon, Old Master Xavier grew tired from whipping; after all, wielding a whip required effort. He threw the blood-stained whip onto the carpet and sat down with a cold snort.

"Justin Xavier, don't think that just because you've grown wings, you can disregard everything. You know that the more you behave this way, the less I can tolerate Leah Thorne. You will only put her in danger." There was a threat in Old Master Xavier's words.

Justin Xavier's back was covered in scars, cold sweat beaded on his forehead, yet he remained composed, showing no sign of distress. Facing Old Master Xavier's threats, he merely lifted his clear, cold black eyes, looking at Old Master Xavier indifferently, "Grandfather, you are old now, so don't overexert yourself and rest instead."

"..." Old Master Xavier, who was panting, stopped suddenly, not daring to breathe loudly.

Old Master Xavier didn't like Hugh Xavier; in his eyes, Hugh was simply a good-for-nothing. Hugh's only contribution was giving birth to Justin Xavier for the Xavier family.

Old Master Xavier was very fond of Justin Xavier. From a young age, he groomed him as the heir; Justin grew up in darkness, with a cool and ruthless nature flowing in his veins, which pleased him.

However, Leah Thorne entered Justin Xavier's life, becoming the unreachable ray of sunshine for him.

In truth, Old Master Xavier already regretted not taking action to make Leah Thorne disappear back when Justin Xavier hadn't yet fully developed his capabilities.

Now Old Master Xavier squinted his cloudy eyes at Justin Xavier, who was still kneeling on the ground. Justin looked back at him with a calm gaze, yet there was a deep, dangerous ink-like depth within.

Old Master Xavier knew that one day, this grandson would slip out of his control.

It's just that this day came earlier than he had expected.

Justin Xavier could already contend with him.

For Leah Thorne, he had moved against his own father, shaken the foundation of the Xavier family. Old Master Xavier didn't know how far he would go for Leah in the future.

The Thorne family had been broken to pieces, leaving only this daughter, who seemed powerless, but she was the tenderest part of Justin Xavier's heart.

There might be a day when the daughter of the Thorne family uses herself as a spear to completely destroy the Xavier family.

He absolutely could not allow the Xavier family to be destroyed by the daughter of the Thorne family.

"Hmph, Justin, are you now going to defy me for Leah Thorne? Everything you have now is what I gave you. If I take it back, you will have nothing." Old Master Xavier said.

Justin Xavier looked at Old Master Xavier, "Grandfather, I can give you everything about the Xavier family, ask for nothing, but do you think I can't support Leah Thorne on my own?"

Old Master Xavier paused, then smirked, "Justin, have you asked Leah Thorne what she wants?"

Justin Xavier pressed his thin lips together, silent.

"This conversation ends here today, Justin, go back and think it over. I'm giving you time."

...

In the secret room, Leah Thorne watched the man kneeling outside with tear-filled eyes, his back crisscrossed with bloody marks. Yet, his kneeling figure remained upright and strong, his long, curled eyelashes covering his eyes heavily, his face calm and unreadable.

Leah Thorne felt deeply pained, her delicate body sliding weakly down the wall.

At this moment, footsteps echoed in her ears, Old Master Xavier had arrived.

"Miss Thorne, I let Justin choose between you and everything the Xavier family has, and I'm letting you make a choice too."

Leah Thorne looked at Old Master Xavier with red-rimmed eyes, "What do you mean by that?"

"Miss Thorne, those who are not useful to me, I will destroy with my own hands. Justin is the eldest grandson of the Xavier family; his life is mine too."

Leah Thorne trembled all over, Old Master Xavier was threatening her!

Why, why was Old Master Xavier so cruel to him? He was Justin Xavier's own grandfather!

Leah Thorne's heart twisted in pain.

"Miss Thorne, don't you understand? You are the source of all of his pain. He hates you, hates the Thorne family, but he can't let go of you either. It's like a tug of war, every day you're with him is like tearing him in two."

"Only when you leave, can he be completely free, can he and his mother live in peace."

Leah Thorne left distraught, and as the steward walked over, he asked in a low voice, "Old Master, do you think Leah Thorne will break up with the young master?"

Old Master Xavier looked in the direction they disappeared, "She will. Leah Thorne is the daughter of the Thorne family. She and Justin will never be together."

"Old Master, should we tell the young master about the matter between the Xavier and Thorne families?" the steward asked hesitantly.

The past between the Xavier and Thorne families was a hidden earth-shattering secret that would ruin everyone once revealed.

Old Master Xavier shook his head, "Not for now. By the way, has there been any news of Mort Thorne recently?"

"No, ever since we spotted Mort Thorne last time, he disappeared without a trace, as if he never existed."

"Quinn Thorne's son is extraordinarily talented. He was once the little overlord of Bayside. Once he returns, he is likely to turn Bayside upside down. Have someone keep a tight watch; he must not be allowed to return."

Although Old Master Thorne had a premonition that Mort Thorne would soon return.

...

In the apartment.

In the room, a doctor in a white coat left with a medical kit, leaving behind a strong smell of disinfectant.

Justin Xavier lay on the bed, his upper back bare, the whip marks interweaving on his back. Although treated by the doctor, they still looked raw and fresh.

Private secretary Coleman spoke softly, "Miss Thorne, the doctor gave the president a painkiller injection. He's now asleep; please take care of him tonight."

"Alright." Leah Thorne nodded.

Coleman left with the doctor, and Leah Thorne walked over to the bedside on her slender legs. She extended her soft white fingers, gently touching his handsome back. She wanted to touch his wounds, but she didn't dare.

He must be in so much pain.

Leah Thorne stared at him quietly, suddenly wondering whether his unyielding attachment to her was borne out of hatred or... love?

## Chapter 833: Honey~

For these past few years, Leah Thorne always knew he didn't love her.

She once heard his conversation with his mother; all the affection and favoritism he showed her were merely methods of revenge—to lift her high into the clouds and then slam her down, breaking her into pieces.

But now, Leah wondered if he... might love her too?

"Water..." The man's hoarse murmur reached her ear.

Leah quickly came back to her senses. He was thirsty and needed water.

Leah poured a glass of water and brought it to his thin lips, but it flowed from the corner of his mouth, soaking his collar quickly.

This way of giving water was inconvenient.

Leah thought for a moment, then took a sip of water herself and leaned down over his thin lips.

He was lying there, and she kissed his lips, feeding him the water from her mouth.

Mouthful by mouthful, she fed him a glass of water.

The sleeping man tasted the sweetness of the water and instinctively took the lead, drawing in her lips.

A kiss supposed to be the sweetest thing, but Leah tasted the bitterness.

His mouth was bitter.

So was hers.

...

The next morning.

Justin Xavier slowly opened his eyes; he was now in Leah Thorne's apartment.

"Leah, Leah..."

He called Leah's name but got no response. The room was quiet; Leah wasn't there.

Justin Xavier got up and with his long fingers picked out a gray shirt. The shoulder blades on the man's back spread open, looking straight and handsome, with those criss-crossing whip marks adding a touch of rebellious wildness.

Putting on the gray shirt and buttoning it up, he stretched his long legs out of the room to look for Leah.

But after searching everywhere, he couldn't find Leah.

Where was she?

Because Leah had hidden behind the curtains before, Justin Xavier, tall and leggy, stood by the curtains, took a deep breath, and with a "whoosh," pulled the curtains open.

But this time, behind the curtains was empty.

No one was there.

The dawn sunlight hit Justin Xavier's narrow eyes; he found it glaring.

Leah Thorne was gone.

Countless voices echoed this sentence in his ear: Leah Thorne was gone.

He took out his phone from his pocket and dialed Leah Thorne's number.

The melodious ringtone sounded once, and then the call was answered.

She picked up.

"Hello, Leah, where are you now? Didn't I tell you not to wander off?"

"Justin Xavier," Leah's calm voice came through the phone from the other end, "let me go."

Justin Xavier, hand on hip, furrowed his handsome brows, restrained his temper, and spoke softly, "I'll give you a chance to talk properly; my back still hurts, I don't want to hear this."

"Justin Xavier, yesterday when your grandfather was hitting you, I was there too. Your grandfather made you choose between the world and beauty, which one do you want?"

Justin Xavier's handsome face showed no emotion, "Didn't you hear my answer?"

The world and beauty, how would he choose.

He chose beauty.

"Justin Xavier, your answer doesn't matter at all; what matters is, I told you before, you'd better never step down from that position, don't lose the power, money, and status you have now, otherwise... I'd be the first to kick you away when you're left with nothing."

After saying this, she directly hung up the phone.

Justin Xavier dialed her number again, but what came was a mechanical female voice: Sorry, the phone you dialed is switched off.

She said she'd kick him, and then she turned off her phone.

Justin Xavier repeatedly dialed her number, as if unaware that she had turned off her phone, dialing back and forth over a dozen times, his entire handsome face darkened, the veins on his forehead throbbing, he raised his hand ready to smash his phone.

But he held back.

In the study, Old Master Xavier had said why not ask Leah's opinion.

He had not replied then, because he knew Leah wouldn't give him time.

She was eager to escape; she had been waiting for this day for too long.

Justin Xavier held the phone and thought about how he lost the girl who once loved him so deeply.

At her 18th birthday party, she'd had a bit to drink, her cheeks slightly red, and in his room, he pinned her to the wall and took her first time just like that.

She was in pain, crying softly, her voice like a canary, so delicate it seemed it could break at any moment, she said, "Brother, it hurts..."

His eyes filled with terrifying desire, focused only on his own comfort, speaking harshly to her, "Don't cry!"

Frightened, her tears hung on her cheeks, then timidly extended her small, soft white hand to embrace his neck, enduring the pain and awkwardly pleasing him, kissing his handsome cheek, "Brother, it doesn't hurt at all... I'm happy... I'm finally yours..."

Justin Xavier still clearly remembers her obedient compliance that night, but everything changed from the moment he slapped her.

He spent many years making her fall in love with him, then personally pushed her away, losing her love.

...

Soon Justin Xavier found Leah Thorne. Bayside was just this small, he could stir up a storm here, finding someone was simple.

Leah hadn't gone anywhere; she just opened a presidential suite in a hotel, and when Justin Xavier entered, Leah was brushing her teeth in the bathroom.

Their gazes met in the mirror, Leah showed no surprise, because she knew he would quickly find her.

Justin Xavier looked at her, she was wearing the hotel's white bathrobe, with her tea-colored curled hair casually draping over her shoulders, slightly messy, wearing one pink slipper, with the other having fallen off, much like a little girl suddenly deprived of adult care.

Justin Xavier picked up the other pink slipper, walked to her side, then slowly knelt on one knee, his voice low, "You're old enough and still barefoot, you'll catch a cold, lift your foot."

A daily short story by Jude and Isabelle

The academic conference concluded, and Jude Crawford left with his secretary Riley Sutton.

From afar, Jude Crawford saw that cold yet breathtaking silhouette in front, Isabelle Willow.

Besides Isabelle Willow, several young gentlemen stood surrounding her, their eyes bright as they asked for her wechat.

Isabelle Willow waved both hands in refusal, clearly wanting to be free.

Perhaps sensing his gaze, she lifted her head and looked over.

Their eyes met, the girl stood on the street, quickly smiled, then sweetly called out, "Honey~"

Jude Crawford paused.

The girl had already run over, the evening breeze fluttered her skirt, her steps light and joyful, she came to his side, reached out her little hand to wrap around his muscular arm, clinging to him like a koala.

Her little head leaned closer, she blinked her watery eyes looking up at him, calling out sweetly once more, "Honey~"

Chapter 834: He Has Always Liked Beautiful Women

Justin Xavier knelt down and put slippers on her.

Leah Thorne's delicate feathers trembled slightly. She admitted that over the years, except for that slap he gave her on her 18th birthday, he had been too good to her, thoughtful and strong. With such a man by her side, it was hard not to be moved.

Leah didn't move, so Justin reached out his large hand and gently pinched her slender ankle to lift her foot.

Her feet were delicate and small; that's just how she was—fragrant and soft with jade-like bones, perfectly proportioned, an exquisite beauty, every part of her refined.

Now her feet were a bit cold, but when his warm male palm touched them, Leah's five pink toes curled slightly.

Justin's eyes reddened a bit as he looked at her, wanting to kiss her feet.

However, he restrained himself and did not act, simply putting on the pink slippers for her.

Justin stood up, standing tall and handsome in front of her. He showed no emotional waves, his every move exuding the elegant indifference of a businessman, "Why didn't you answer my call?"

"The phone broke." Leah lied.

"Oh, then I'll get you a new phone."

"...Justin!" she couldn't help but call his name.

Justin's cool and dark eyes landed on her small, soft, charming face, speaking nonchalantly, "Hmm?"

"Last time on the phone, I already made things very clear. If you didn't understand, then I'll say it again—let me go!"

Justin pressed his thin lips together, "Leah, just because I didn't lose my temper doesn't mean I don't have one. You'd better stop while you can and not provoke me further."

"So, we can't reach an agreement." Leah turned to leave.

Justin grabbed her delicate wrist in a single motion.

Leah was forced to stop, and in the next second, Justin gently pulled her, making her curvy body fall directly into his arms.

A surge of clean and cold male masculinity overwhelmed her. Leah's body stiffened, her mind flooded with memories of that night when she was 18 with him, followed by images of her leaving alone, the lecherous landlord trying to assault her at night in her room, the non-stop bleeding, the miscarriage, and finally Hugh Xavier tearing apart the facade of a loving father, telling her in a hideous voice, saying that it didn't matter since she slept with his son, what harm was there in sleeping with the father...

Justin didn't mean anything, but quickly noticed her strange reaction. Her body had become rigid like a stone, cold and devoid of warmth.

"Leah, what's wrong?"

Leah pushed him away and immediately bent over to vomit.

She leaned over the toilet, vomiting as if the world was spinning.

Justin wanted to step forward, but Leah didn't look up and just said, "Don't come near me!"

Justin paused, his body suddenly tensing.

He stood there watching her, sweat pouring from her face, tea-colored seaweed-like hair sticking to her face, looking like a broken doll.

"Why are you vomiting again? Is it me you reject, or all men?" It was the same last time; when he touched her, she just vomited.

Leah's face was as pale as paper, "I don't know... I haven't tried being with other men because you wouldn't allow it."

With him around, not even a male mosquito could approach her, so she didn't know if she couldn't accept his touch, or that of all men.

The atmosphere in the bathroom dropped to a low point instantly; Justin said nothing, the silence heavy and depressing.

"Justin, you've already ruined me, what more do you want? I'm worthless to you now, being frigid, unless you like necrophilia."

Justin found it almost laughable. Who would have thought that this most alluring rose, the number one beauty driving all men wild, would actually be frigid.

Justin turned around and walked out. He took out his phone from his pocket and dialed Serena Sterling's number.

...

Serena arrived quickly. She gave Leah an injection, stopping the vomiting, and Leah became sleepy.

Justin and Serena stood in the living room. Justin asked, "What's wrong with her?"

Serena washed her hands and spoke six words, "Psychological traumatic stress disorder."

Justin furrowed his strong brows.

The lighting in the living room was very dim, and Serena continued, "Psychological traumatic stress disorder is a stress disorder following psychological trauma. President Xavier, what you did to Leah when she was 18 was far more serious and worse than you can imagine. Over the years, she has never really healed; she's been quietly licking her wounds, trying to heal herself in places you don't see."

"But such self-healing has not succeeded. Added to your father's recent incident, it's like salt on her wounds. Now, she rejects your touch, or rather, she rejects all men."

A shadow spread over Justin's handsome features, the dim light obscuring his thoughts. After a long while, he spoke, "What will make her better?"

Serena replied, "President Xavier, let her go. Disappear from her life entirely, including the entire Xavier family."

"Will that really help her get better?" Justin looked at Serena, earnestly asking.

He had to ask, because if he let go of Leah's hand, he would never be whole again.

Serena nodded, "Yes, it will."

Yes, it will.

Justin lightly closed his eyes, a few seconds later a faint curve formed on his thin lips. He didn't lose to anyone, but in the end, he lost to her.

"Alright, I'll let her go." Justin turned and left.

...

Since that day, Leah never saw Justin again. She returned to work, her schedule packed to the brim.

However, Leah heard one thing: Justin canceled his engagement with Cecilia Pence, and shortly after, the Pence family faced a financial crisis and suffered greatly.

Although the Pence family eventually pulled through, they soon disappeared from public view, never to reappear.

All the guests who attended the Xavier-Pence wedding felt a lingering fear and chill. It was known that after Justin relentlessly cleansed Bayside, he turned his attention to the Pence family.

Because it was Cecilia Pence's doing that Leah was drugged.

Justin's affection for Leah crowned the entire city.

With Hugh Xavier stepping down, Justin formally took over Xavier Corp and conducted a sweeping business reform. Soon, other women began appearing by his side, one after another.

For years, Justin, who had kept himself pure and had no women around him, suddenly changed, starting to revel in a garden of flowers, switching women as often as his clothes.

From high-society heiresses to up-and-coming young models in the entertainment industry, the paparazzi captured them all, either having dinner together or spending intimate moments.

If there's a common point among those women, it's that they are young and pretty!

Justin had always liked beautiful women. The prettier, the better.

Chapter 835: Holding an Umbrella for Her

After handling Leah Thorne's matters, Serena Sterling and Hayden Crawford flew back to The State of Westria.

Just as they arrived in Westria, Serena received a call from her mother-in-law, who said she was feeling unwell. Serena was startled. Over the years, although her mother-in-law had been in good spirits, her advancing age meant she had to be cautious, as illness could strike suddenly. Serena quickly parted ways with Hayden and rushed over.

In the apartment, her mother-in-law lay weakly on the bed. Serena walked in, "Mother-in-law, what's wrong? Where do you feel unwell? Let me check your pulse."

Serena took her mother-in-law's pulse and frowned, "Mother-in-law, your pulse is very erratic. Have you been worried about something lately?"

Her mother-in-law leaned against the headboard, holding Serena's small hand. "Serena, I'm fine, just a bit of a headache recently. Ever since I came to Westria, I can almost constantly smell the blood that was shed when our Alani's ancestors were killed. Whenever I think of these family and national grudges, I can't sleep at night."

"Now we've heard that the true heir of Westria's noble blood has appeared, but unfortunately, we have been unable to identify this person. Westria and Alani have an irreconcilable blood feud. We must root it out and make this heir disappear. Serena, is your thinking aligned with mine?"

A realization jolted Serena. Her mother-in-law's mention brought back the insurmountable chasm between her and Hayden.

Her mother-in-law patted Serena's small hand, "Serena, why aren't you speaking? You are the princess of Alani, the future queen. You have a great mission to revive Alani. You mustn't be ensnared by the fleeting romance before your eyes... you haven't forgotten, have you?"

Serena clasped her mother-in-law's hand firmly, saying solemnly, "Mother-in-law, rest assured, I haven't forgotten. I will definitely revive Alani."

"That's good." Her mother-in-law nodded. "The medicine should be ready. Serena, please go check on it."

"Okay." Serena walked out.

After Serena left, her mother-in-law's maid, Irene, approached and whispered, "Madam, despite your probing, the princess still hasn't revealed Hayden Crawford's true identity. I think the princess is deeply in love with Hayden."

Her mother-in-law let out a cold snort, looking in the direction Serena had left with deep disappointment. This time, Serena had let her down too much.

Not long ago, she received a note with a few words revealing that Hayden Crawford was the true heir of the noble blood!

Her mother-in-law was shocked and horrified, never imagining that Hayden was the true heir of the noble blood.

Given the blood feud between Westria and Alani, Hayden and Serena could never be together.

"The deeper Serena's love for Hayden grows, the sooner we must act to save her, ensuring she doesn't fall too deep!"

"Madam, what are you planning to do?"

Her mother-in-law thought for a moment and then whispered a few words to Irene.

...

Serena fed her mother-in-law the medicine. Her mother-in-law said, "Serena, I need to rest. It's late; you should go home too."

"Okay, Mother-in-law, I'll come to see you tomorrow."

Serena left and found herself on the street. A cold breeze blew past, adding an inexplicable chill.

Raindrops fell on the back of her hand. Serena stopped, realizing the sky had started to rain without her noticing.

It was raining.

Serena raised her head, watching the drizzle above.

Suddenly, a black umbrella appeared in her view. Someone had come and was holding a black umbrella over her head.

Who?

Serena quickly turned around and saw a familiar face... it was Zane Crawford.

Zane had arrived.

A luxury limousine quietly parked by the roadside, with an assistant waiting behind. Zane, in a deep blue wool coat, stood cold and elegant beside Serena, holding a black umbrella.

He held the umbrella over her head, getting himself half-soaked, with the incessant raindrops falling on his broad shoulders, forming a layer of chill haze.

Serena's clear eyes brightened, "Zane, what brings you here?"

Zane looked at Serena, gently curving his thin lips, his voice soft and warm, "I came here for some business. When it started raining, why were you standing in the rain daydreaming, on your mind?"

Earlier, sitting in the car, Zane saw Serena standing elegantly on the street in a long dress, slightly underdressed for the late autumn. The rain started, and she looked up. There was a weight of concern on her flawlessly beautiful face, deep in thought.

Serena didn't know what to say; the matter was complicated. "I wasn't thinking about anything."

"Then let me take you home."

"Okay."

Serena walked with Zane to the luxury car. The assistant went to open the rear car door, but Zane's clean, slender fingers reached out to open it himself.

The assistant paused; he knew his Prof. Crawford, how distinguished he was, how distant from women. Zane, already an illustrious figure in the medical field, frequently visited confidential research bases globally, his medical teams operate across every corner of the world, with him leading Aethelgard's research institute, renowned as 'Divine Doctor Crawford.'

Many girls admired him, all well-bred girls who blushed when they saw him, yet he never looked at them, not even once.

Sometimes the assistant wondered if his Prof. Crawford was naturally uninterested in women.

Until now, with Serena's presence.

His Prof. Crawford was entirely different when it came to Serena.

The assistant couldn't help but glance twice at Serena. This seemed to be... Hayden Crawford's woman, his Prof. Crawford's sister-in-law?

The assistant startled, troubled by the notion that Prof. Crawford wouldn't have feelings for his sister-in-law...

The assistant quickly lowered his head, not daring to watch further.

Zane opened the rear car door. Serena lifted her dress, preparing to get in, but hesitated, stopping suddenly.

"What's wrong?" Zane asked.

Serena shook her head, pondering. "No, it can't be... something's off... I have to go back..."

After leaving her mother-in-law, Serena felt an unsettling premonition, growing stronger, as if something was about to happen.

She had to return.

Serena turned and ran, calling back as she went, "Zane, I have something to deal with; you go ahead!"

...

In the apartment, Hayden Crawford arrived.

Her mother-in-law had just called him, saying Serena was there and was feeling unwell. Hearing this, Hayden quickly came over.

Chapter 836: I'll Make You All Join Her in Death

In the living room, Hayden Crawford walked in and immediately saw Grandma.

Grandma had gotten out of bed and was waiting for him, "Hayden, you're here?"

"Grandma, where is Serena? What's happened to her?"

"Serena was fine when she came just now, but suddenly she fainted," Grandma's face was etched with deep concern, "Hayden, Serena is in the room now, you should go in and see her quickly."

"Okay, good."

Hayden Crawford quickly entered the room, only to see someone lying on the big bed, their back turned to him.

"Serena." Hayden Crawford walked over and reached out to lift the quilt.

The next second, there was a flash of cold light, and the person on the bed leaped up and raised a sharp blade to stab at his heart.

Hayden Crawford's pupils shrank as he quickly dodged, the blade missed his heart but sunk deep into his right arm.

Blood flowed like a river.

It was then that Hayden Crawford saw the person on the bed clearly, she was not Serena Sterling at all, but Grandma's maid, Irene.

Irene quickly got off the bed and respectfully retreated to stand behind Grandma. Grandma retracted her kindly smile, her eyes cold and full of hatred as she looked at Hayden Crawford, then snorted coldly, "Hayden Crawford, today is your death day!"

The door to the room opened and three women walked in. They were Madame Flora, Rona, and Vivi, who, along with Irene, were known as Flowers of Alani, the four great swordswomen of Alani, with incredibly skilled martial arts.

This time Grandma had summoned them here to set a trap that Hayden Crawford could not escape, even if he had wings.

Madame Flora said, "Grandma, is he the true embodiment of the Blood of Innocence?"

Grandma nodded, "That's right."

In the past, the blood of Alani's ancestors had stained the entire waters of Westria, with the descendants of Alani losing their family and homeland in the betrayal orchestrated by Westria and The Merfolk Clan. This blood feud runs deep in their bones, and no Alani person has forgotten.

Madame Flora immediately raised the blade in her hand, looking at Hayden Crawford with hatred.

Hayden Crawford now understood what was happening. He pressed his hand to the wound on his right arm, where blood was gushing out between his fingers.

His handsome face began to pale, but his deep, narrow eyes looked hauntingly at Grandma, "Grandma, where is Serena?"

Mentioning Serena Sterling, Grandma immediately brushed aside her sleeve, "Hayden Crawford, Serena is the Princess of Alani. There is absolutely no possibility between the two of you. You should give up this idea as soon as possible."

Hayden Crawford curled his thin lips, exuding a cold and powerful aura, "Grandma, I still respectfully call you Grandma now, I don't want Serena to suffer any harm in your hands. Whether it's Alani or Westria, it has nothing to do with me. Whoever dares to hurt Serena, I will make them pay with their life!"

These days, although Serena hadn't said anything, Hayden Crawford sensed that she had something on her mind. In fact, he knew everything. From the moment his lineage was exposed, he knew there was a blood feud standing between them.

She hadn't asked, so he didn't tell her either. Whatever Alani, whatever Westria, has nothing to do with him. The only one he cares about is her.

He is just her Mr. Crawford.

Forever her Mr. Crawford.

Grandma's face turned icy, "Hayden Crawford, what an arrogant tone. You should say more once you live through tonight!"

Hayden Crawford moved, and then his vision darkened, quickly realizing the blade was poisoned.

As consciousness began to slip away, Hayden Crawford closed his eyes and fainted straight to the ground.

Hayden Crawford fainted.

Grandma looked at Irene, "What are you all waiting for? Get moving quickly! Now is the perfect opportunity, once the Blood of Innocence is eliminated, the revival of Alani will be just around the corner!"

Irene and Madame Flora nodded, "Yes."

They raised their blades to stab at Hayden Crawford's heart.

At this critical moment, suddenly a feminine reprimand came at their ears, "Stop!"

Grandma turned around, Serena Sterling had arrived.

Serena Sterling had an uneasy feeling in her heart, and sure enough, when she rushed back, she saw this scene. She was too frightened to breathe. If she had been a step later...

"Your Highness, Princess." The four Flowers of Alani quickly bowed respectfully.

Serena Sterling walked in and looked at Hayden Crawford lying on the ground, "Grandma, what are you doing?"

"Serena, I should be the one asking you, Hayden Crawford is the true embodiment of the Blood of Innocence, why did you not tell me?" Grandma asked coldly.

Serena Sterling's lashes trembled slightly. She actually knew that Hayden Crawford's lineage couldn't be hidden, "Grandma, you already know?"

"Serena, if I didn't know, were you planning to hide it from me forever? You are the Princess of Alani; Hayden Crawford is your mortal enemy. Tonight is a great opportunity; Hayden Crawford is already caught. We must take this chance to kill him, and never allow future suffering!" Grandma said decisively.

Serena Sterling shook her head, "No, Grandma, you cannot harm Hayden Crawford!"

"Serena!" Grandma shouted harshly, "Do you want to be a traitor of Alani, a sinner through the ages?"

"I..." Serena Sterling slowly knelt down, took Grandma's hand, and begged, "Grandma, please let Hayden Crawford go. If...if you kill him today, I won't live either!"

"Serena, you!" Grandma was heartbroken.

At this moment, raucous laughter came, and amidst the commotion, Titus Ashworth had brought his guards to surround the place tightly.

Titus Ashworth walked in clapping his hands, "Princess of Alani, Honorable Grandma, and the four Alani great experts, thank you for gathering here and giving me this golden opportunity to capture you all in one fell swoop!"

Seeing Titus Ashworth, Grandma's eyes sharpened, she quickly pulled Serena Sterling behind her, "Protect Her Highness, the Princess!"

"Yes!"

Serena Sterling's clear eyes fell on the smug face of Titus Ashworth, "Titus Ashworth, how did you know we were here? Is it...The Merfolk Clan Princess?"

Just then, a series of cheerful and charming bell sounds rang out, and The Merfolk Clan Princess appeared, "Princess of Alani is still so clever and unrivaled, you guessed it was me so quickly."

A daily story of Lu and Liu

Isabelle Willow suddenly ran over and affectionately took his arm, sweetly calling him "honey." Jude Crawford furrowed his dashing brows and immediately tried to pull back his sturdy arm.

At this moment, Isabelle Willow tiptoed and leaned close to his ear, whispering pitifully, "Mr. Crawford, please help me out, I'm begging you."

As she leaned over, she carried a youthful, sweet scent. At this time, Jude Crawford was only 18 years old, unacquainted with girls, all of them were in the prime of their youth, and facing a girl acting so softly and playfully, Jude Crawford's earlobes suddenly turned red.

The secretary, Riley Sutton, behind him looked at his young master, this aloof and indifferent master CEO's ears turned red, he widened his eyes as if witnessing the world's greatest spectacle.

Chapter 837: Rebirth from the Ashes

Serena stepped forward, looking at Titus Ashworth and the Merfolk Clan princess standing together. Her clear bright eyes were filled with a sharp light, "Princess of the Merfolk Clan, was it you who sent that note to my grandmother?"

"Clap, clap, clap," the Merfolk princess couldn't help but applaud, "That's right, it was me."

Grandmother's face changed dramatically. She quickly realized she had been used.

The Merfolk princess had exploited her hatred towards Westria, pulling a 'mantis stalking the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind' move.

Grandmother wanted to speak to Serena, but Serena raised her hand to stop her. This was her oversight; recently, she had been busy with the Crawford family's matters, neglecting her grandmother, thus giving the Merfolk an opportunity.

Serena curled her red lips, "Lord Ashworth, so now you want to join forces with the Merfolk Clan to capture us all in one go? I advise you to think clearly. If you make a move, Westria and Alani will go to war."

The Merfolk princess knew Serena's eloquence. Her words were like dazzling orchids, capable of bringing the dead back to life. Fearing that Titus Ashworth might waver, she quickly said, "Lord Ashworth, do not hesitate any longer. Westria and Alani have a blood feud, it's either you die or I perish. This is a golden opportunity for you to strike first. Back then, even the ancestors of Westria couldn't annihilate Alani. If Alani disappears at your hands, then you'll be the greatest ruler of Westria, recorded in history with glory and honor!"

These words struck a chord in Titus Ashworth's heart, and he was very wary of Serena. Now that he had chosen to cooperate with the Merfolk Clan, Serena must die here today.

Titus Ashworth waved his hand, "Men, go! If they resist, then... leave none alive!"

Titus Ashworth showed a sinister ruthlessness.

"Yes!" His subordinates immediately started to act.

Grandmother quickly said, "Protect the princess! Quickly escort the princess away!"

This was Westria, Titus Ashworth's territory, and now he had the place surrounded, the situation was very unfavorable. Irene grabbed Serena, "Princess, we must go!"

Serena grabbed her grandmother, "Grandmother, let's go together!"

Grandmother immediately pushed Serena away, "Serena, you go first, I'll cover!"

Irene broke open the window, "Princess, there's no time, hesitate and chaos will ensue, let's go quickly!"

Serena glanced back, seeing Grandmother and Madame Flora, as well as Rona, already caught in Titus Ashworth's encirclement, struggling to hold on, today promised to be a grim battle.

Serena's pale eyes suddenly turned red, and only now did she clearly realize the national hatred between Westria, Alani, and the Merfolk Clan, fearing that a day of reconciliation would never come.

"Princess, watch out!" Suddenly Madame Flora screamed.

Serena looked up, only to see the Merfolk princess aiming a bow with her right hand, arrow ready in her left, "Whoosh," the sharp arrow flew, racing towards her heart.

Serena's pupils contracted, and in the next second, with a "thud," the sound of the arrow sinking into flesh rang out, spine-chilling.

Serena stared blankly ahead; her grandmother had rushed out to block an arrow for her, now it had pierced through her grandmother's heart.

Time seemed to freeze, Grandmother turned around slowly, looking at Serena with a stern yet loving gaze as usual, "Serena, don't... blame... blame Grandmother for being cruel... Grandmother is leaving, Alani... is in

your hands now... go back, become the queen, drive out the mile-long iron cavalry, restore Alani... Serena, your journey... is just beginning..."

With that, Grandmother spat out a mouthful of blood and collapsed to the ground.

Serena was breathless; her lashes trembled slightly, and large tears fell from her eyes, "Grandmother!"

"Princess!" Irene, with reddened eyes, grabbed Serena, "We must go now!"

Irene pulled Serena through the window, leaping down to the ground.

But this place was already surrounded, Irene shoved Serena away, "Princess, I've only managed to escort you this far, now run, don't look back!"

Serena staggered a step, her small hands clenched into fists at her sides, she turned and ran, holding back her blurred vision.

She dared not look back, but the howling wind by her ears made everything sound so clear. Upstairs, Madame Flora, Good Mother, and Rona all lay in pools of blood.

They fought valiantly, paving a path of blood for her.

She dared not stop.

She must not disappoint everyone.

At that moment, there was a "thud," as the Merfolk princess deeply stabbed a dagger into Irene's heart, and Irene too, fell.

A subordinate handed over a clean handkerchief, and the Merfolk princess nonchalantly wiped her blood-stained hands, then looked at Serena; finally, it was just her left.

"Bring me the bow and arrow," the Merfolk princess laughed.

The subordinate quickly handed over the bow and arrow.

The Merfolk princess once again took the bow in her right hand, arrow ready in her left, aiming at Serena's heart, intending to shoot out the arrow.

But at that moment, the sharp sound of brakes screeched, a black van suddenly sped over, stopped, the back door opened, and a large hand reached out, pulling Serena into the car.

The black van quickly disappeared from sight.

The Merfolk princess paused, completely unprepared for someone to suddenly appear and intercept Serena on the way.

Today's plan was flawless, Serena should have been unable to escape!

The Merfolk princess angrily threw the bow and arrow to the ground, then looked at Titus Ashworth, "Lord Ashworth, quickly investigate, find out who those people in the black van are, this is your territory after all, dig three feet deep and find that van!"

Titus Ashworth looked at the black van; there was no license plate on the back, but indeed it was bold for the van to come out to intercept.

"Alright, I'll send someone to investigate. Allowing Serena to escape today might become a major threat in the future," Titus Ashworth said worriedly.

"Why, Lord Ashworth, are you afraid?"

"Merfolk princess, aren't you afraid?"

"..."

Both the Merfolk princess and Titus Ashworth harbored deep fears of Serena, afraid she would rise stronger from this escape.

"Princess of the Merfolk Clan, I'll take my leave now." At this point, several guards brought out the unconscious Hayden Crawford, placing him into Titus Ashworth's luxury car.

The Merfolk princess raised an eyebrow, "Lord Ashworth, what do you intend to do by taking Hayden Crawford away?"

Titus Ashworth curled his lips, "Hayden Crawford is the true essence of the blood of the innocent, I'm taking him back, of course, to... make him inherit the position of lord!"

Chapter 838: For Her, Everything Is Worth It

In the suburban villa, Zane Crawford raised his slender, fair fingers to undo his black coat, standing coldly and magnificently in front of the floor-to-ceiling window.

Soon, a "knock knock" sound came from the door, and Wade Wyatt entered, respectfully reporting in a low voice, "Master, the black van has been destroyed. Titus Ashworth's men haven't found us here, it's very safe."

It was Zane Crawford who saved Serena Sterling.

Zane's incomparable handsome face showed no extra expression. At this moment, Wade said again, "Master, this is Westria, it's Titus Ashworth's territory, and now he's turning the whole place upside down looking for us... Master, risking so much for Miss Sterling, getting involved in the war between Westria's Alani and The Merfolk Clan, is it worth it?"

Zane recalled the underground medical research base over four years ago when Serena hadn't given up on him, so how could he abandon her now?

"It's worth it," Zane said two words.

Everything is worth it for her.

Wade placed a sealed dossier on the desk, "Master, according to intelligence, Hayden Crawford's blood is very special, it is the blood of innocence. Given the hatred between Westria and Alani, Hayden and Miss Sterling probably won't be able to be together in this lifetime."

Saying this, Wade cautiously glanced at Zane's handsome face, "Master, if you like Miss Sterling, now... is a good time."

A good time to take advantage of the situation.

Zane glanced at the sealed dossier on the desk but said nothing. Nobody knew what he was thinking. He was silent for a few seconds before speaking, "Tomorrow, I want to see Hayden Crawford's blood test report."

Wade paused, wondering why his master wanted Hayden Crawford's blood test report?

Could it be that the master wants to analyze Hayden Crawford's special blood?

Why?

What was the master thinking?

Despite having many questions, Wade didn't dare ask a word; he just nodded respectfully, "Yes."

Now Zane Crawford roams the medical world, controlling the largest genetic database system globally; obtaining Hayden Crawford's blood data is very simple.

Zane walked out of the study and arrived at the door to Serena Sterling's room. Inside, the maid had just come out, holding a bowl of bird's nest soup.

The bird's nest soup hadn't been touched, it was clear Serena hadn't eaten a bite.

"Sir, Miss Sterling said she has no appetite," the maid said with difficulty.

Zane reached out and took the bird's nest soup, "You can leave."

"Yes." The maid retreated.

Zane, holding the bird's nest soup, pushed open the room door. At a glance, he saw Serena Sterling, who was now sitting alone on the soft lambswool carpet in front of the floor-to-ceiling window. She was curling her legs, hugging her knees with both hands, her clear bright eyes looking out the window, quietly lost in thought.

Zane walked over and sat down beside her, "What are you thinking about?"

Serena's pale eyes gradually focused; she turned her head to look at Zane, "Zane, thank you for saving me, but you shouldn't have gotten involved, it's very dangerous."

Zane lightly curled his thin lips into a soft smile, "I thought... we were friends."

Serena chuckled and smiled.

"What are your plans for the future?"

Serena felt very cold, wrapping her slender arms around herself for a bit of warmth, "I need to hurry back to Alani."

This time going back to Alani, she was to inherit the queen's position.

Zane listened silently as Serena continued, "But... before going back to Alani, I still have some matters to resolve, some people to deal with."

When Serena spoke these words, she regained her usual brilliance, mixed with sharp wisdom and a few moments of composure.

Zane's eyes were bright and clear; he knew this was the Serena he knew. She never feared any obstacles in the world and grew stronger in the face of battle.

"Do you need me to help you with anything?"

"I want to see Grandma and Aunt Hua before the moon is full."

Zane nodded, "I heard Titus Ashworth and The Merfolk Clan princess took Grandmother and Aunt back and will publicly display them at Xuanwu Gate tomorrow. I know some people who can disguise you to get in tomorrow."

"Titus Ashworth and The Merfolk Clan princess know I will definitely go tomorrow; they've already set up a trap awaiting me there."

"And you'll still go?"

"Go, of course, I will!" Serena curled her red lips, "Not only will I go, but I will also bring Grandma and Aunt back home."

She wanted to bring them all back. Alani was their home; she couldn't leave them in Westria.

"Are you confident? Bringing Grandma and Aunt back safely through a trap isn't an easy task."

Serena looked to the distance outside the floor-to-ceiling window, "I have my ways."

...

In front of Xuanwu Gate.

The guards threw Grandma and Aunt out, surrounded by an onlooking crowd pointing and talking,

"I heard they're from Alani, trying to assassinate Lord Ashworth but instead squashed."

"Shh, speak quietly, I heard these people were all instructed by the Alani Princess. Now Lord Ashworth has issued an order to hunt her down; they're searching for the Alani Princess nationwide, turning her into a fugitive."

Now Titus Ashworth and The Merfolk Clan princess stood on the throne, overlooking the happenings below, Titus Ashworth said, "Do you think Serena Sterling will really come?"

The Merfolk Clan princess nodded, "She will come, she surely will."

At that moment, a slender figure appeared among the crowd; Serena Sterling came. Today, she was wearing a white cloak with a hat, her face hidden, slowly walking over.

Serena walked through the crowd, standing in front of Grandma and Aunt. The few lively lives as of yesterday were now all devastated.

Serena looked at them and whispered inside her heart, Grandma, Aunt, I am here, I'm bringing you home now.

One Short Story Every Day by Lillian Willow

Isabelle Willow clung to Jude Crawford like a koala bear; seeing this, the young talents around tactfully left.

Jude Crawford promptly withdrew his strong arm from her little hand, his sharp sword eyebrows furrowing as he looked at her, displeased, "Miss, please behave yourself!"

Having said that, he turned around and got into the business luxury car, leaving her with a cold and indifferent figure.

Secretary Riley Sutton: Why does the CEO feel like he's been flirted with by a girl all of a sudden?

Jude Crawford got inside the business luxury car, "Drive."

"Yes."

As the business luxury car started, Isabelle stood gracefully in her dress outside the car, looking at him with a radiant smile and said, "Isabelle Willow! That's my name! I'm Isabelle Willow!"

Jude Crawford's heart stirred, "Isabelle Willow," the name echoed in his ears, inseparable.

The next time Jude Crawford encountered the name "Isabelle Willow" was at a design competition held by The Crawford Group, where Riley handed him the list of participants.

#### Chapter 839: A Fleeting Moment of Beauty

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan saw Serena in the crowd at a glance from the city tower. Her eyes lit up, "Lord Ashworth, Serena Sterling is here!"

"Really? Where?" Titus Ashworth looked down from the tower.

At this time, Serena, standing below, raised her head. Her bright, cutting eyes pierced through the crowd, her gaze falling on Titus Ashworth and the Princess of the Merfolk Clan.

After a brief eye contact, Serena turned and quickly left.

"Guards, come with me quickly. Serena Sterling has walked into our trap, and this time I must catch her!" The Princess of the Merfolk Clan led her men and chased after her swiftly.

Seeing the Princess of the Merfolk Clan give chase, Titus Ashworth didn't fall behind. He was too wary of Serena. Only by eliminating her could he sleep peacefully at night.

Titus Ashworth, accompanied by his guards, also gave chase. When they reached the royal training ground, Titus Ashworth saw the Princess of the Merfolk Clan in front.

"Princess of the Merfolk Clan, where is Serena Sterling? Why isn't she here?" Titus Ashworth asked.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan looked anxious and pointed ahead, "I just saw Serena Sterling disappear over there. Let's hurry."

"Alright." Titus Ashworth followed the Princess of the Merfolk Clan onward.

Suddenly, the Princess of the Merfolk Clan paused and stopped.

Titus Ashworth was taken aback, "Princess of the Merfolk Clan, why aren't you moving?"

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan raised her head, looked at Titus Ashworth, and slowly curved her lips into a smile.

This smile sent chills down Titus Ashworth's spine. After all, Titus Ashworth and the Princess of the Merfolk Clan had only reached a temporary collaboration, and in truth, they both had ulterior motives. Titus hadn't forgotten that over the years, Consort Willow of the Merfolk Clan had been secretly drugging him, gradually weakening his body.

The Merfolk Clan wanted to control him.

So now, seeing the strange behavior of the Princess of the Merfolk Clan, Titus Ashworth felt alarm bells ringing in his mind, "You... why are you smiling?"

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan spoke quietly, "Serena needs to be chased, but I can't let Lord Ashworth go either. If both Alani and Westria disappear, then our Merfolk Clan will stand alone at the top!"

Titus Ashworth was chilled and instantly scolded in anger, "How dare you!"

At this moment, the Princess of the Merfolk Clan moved her hand, and Titus only felt a cold flash in his vision. He wanted to react, but the Princess of the Merfolk Clan was extremely fast. In a blink, a sharp blade was plunged deep into his chest.

Titus Ashworth groaned in pain, his face turned ashen, "Someone, quickly... someone..."

The guards behind him quickly rushed over.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan released the knife and turned to run.

"My Lord, what's happened to you?"

"Don't worry about me. Go quickly and chase the Princess of the Merfolk Clan. Kill on sight!" Titus Ashworth clutched his wound, gritting his teeth in hatred.

"Yes."

...

On the other side, the Princess of the Merfolk Clan was chasing Serena, but soon she came to a halt because Serena was already waiting for her up ahead.

Serena was still wearing that white cloak, having removed her hood. Her pure, black hair cascaded like silk over her shoulders, and a tiny white flower was tucked behind her ear. Without makeup, she appeared exceptionally pristine and unmatched. Now she stood calmly ahead, her bright eyes flickering with shards of light, overwhelming in their brilliance.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan's heart skipped inexplicably; she clearly hadn't expected Serena not to flee but to wait for her here.

"Serena Sterling, why aren't you escaping?"

Serena looked at the Princess of the Merfolk Clan, curling her red lips into a smile, "Why should I run? Now, the person who should run... is you, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" The Princess of the Merfolk Clan didn't understand.

Serena smiled lightly without replying. She stepped back two steps and then waved her small hand mightily, "Quick, come here, the Princess of the Merfolk Clan is here!"

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan looked up to see Titus Ashworth's guards turning in unison, "The Princess of the Merfolk Clan is there. My Lord has ordered her capture, dead or alive!"

What?

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan thought she must be hearing things. Why would Titus Ashworth, that old man, want to capture her? Wasn't the plan to catch Serena?

"Serena Sterling, what have you done?"

Serena raised one of her exquisite, arched eyebrows, "Aren't you aware of what you just did? You stabbed Titus Ashworth not long ago."

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan's pupils contracted. When had she stabbed Titus Ashworth? She hadn't even seen Titus, just chased Serena the whole time.

This isn't good.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan realized she had been tricked, "Serena Sterling, it was you, wasn't it? You disguised yourself as me!"

Serena's bright eyes glinted with a cold sharpness. She raised her hand to remove her white cloak and fastened her long hair up, "Princess of the Merfolk Clan, today I've just come to collect a small interest. You have blood on your hands, and I will repay the enmity between Alani and the Merfolk Clan someday!"

After speaking, Serena brushed her hand across her face, and her unmatched, pristine face quickly transformed into a common one. Many guards rushed over, and Serena blended into the crowd, exclaiming in panic, "The Princess of the Merfolk Clan is there, she's over there!"

Serena's figure quickly vanished into the crowd.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan watched helplessly as Serena escaped. Serena was skilled in disguise, posing as a maid and fleeing amidst the chaos.

"What are you doing? Why are you catching me? Where's Titus Ashworth? Let Titus Ashworth see me, we've been deceived!" The Princess of the Merfolk Clan shouted.

At this moment, the wounded Titus Ashworth hurried over, looking sinisterly at the Princess of the Merfolk Clan, "Princess of the Merfolk Clan, you try running now. I want to see where you'll run this time?"

"..." The Princess of the Merfolk Clan was speechless. It's often said that one shouldn't fear a god-like opponent, but a pig-like ally. She deeply understood the helplessness in these words now.

"Lord Ashworth, you were deceived. The one who stabbed you wasn't me, it was Serena Sterling. She used disguise to pose as me, trying to sow discord between us. You mustn't fall for it!" The Princess of the Merfolk Clan explained.

Titus Ashworth waved a large hand, obstinately indicating he wouldn't listen, "Princess of the Merfolk Clan, you want to deceive me, do you think I'm that stupid?"

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan, "..." The moronic Titus Ashworth is unworthy of any conspiracy!

"My Lord!" At this point, a guard rushed over and reported, "My Lord, something terrible has happened. A fire suddenly broke out in front of the Xuanwu Gate. Because many onlookers were startled, the crowd scattered chaotically. Amid the chaos, Granny Alani and Madam Fourth disappeared."

"What?" Titus Ashworth was furious.

The Princess of the Merfolk Clan's face changed. She realized this was part of Serena's elaborate scheme.

Today, Serena boldly ventured into the Xuanwu Gate alone, burn her boats, and played them both—the Merfolk Clan and Titus Ashworth—like pawns.

With one clever move, Serena not only sowed discord and dismantled their alliance but also took away Granny Alani and Madam Fourth.

## Chapter 840: She Ran Straight Into His Arms

The Merfolk Clan princess has always known Serena Sterling's capability. This lady from Alani exhibits wisdom like Wesley. Every step she takes is incredibly cautious. Today initially seemed like a dead-end, but Serena Sterling forcibly carved out a path for survival.

"Chase her! Hurry and chase! Relay my orders, immediately block the city gates, and bring Serena Sterling back to me!" Titus Ashworth roared angrily.

The Merfolk Clan princess understood that Titus Ashworth was panicking, scared. She quickly said, "Lord Titus, you must realize now, it wasn't me who stabbed you, but Serena Sterling. This was her chain of tactics. We shouldn't have internal conflicts but should focus our efforts on eliminating Serena Sterling and Alani first."

Titus Ashworth's gaze landed on the Merfolk Clan princess, suddenly breaking out into an ominous laugh, "Serena Sterling mentioned something earlier."

"What did she say?"

"She said if Alani and Westria disappear together, then the Merfolk Clan will reign supreme."

The Merfolk Clan princess's expression drastically changed; Serena Sterling said such words, Titus Ashworth was inherently suspicious, and Serena was attacking his mind.

This statement had already ignited a spark in Titus Ashworth's heart, which would grow wildly in the future.

"Lord Titus, what... do you want to do now?"

"Between Westria, Alani, and the Merfolk, our Westria holds the strongest power. I hereby formally dissolve the alliance with you. On one hand, we will search for Serena Sterling throughout, and on the other hand,

detain you. This way, Alani and the Merfolk will be under my control, hahaha." Titus Ashworth felt exceedingly clever, and he couldn't help but admire himself.

The entire heart of the Merfolk Clan princess sank; she knew Serena's divide strategy had succeeded. How despicable!

...

Beside the Willow River.

At this moment, there stood a delicate silhouette under the willow tree—Serena Sterling!

Serena Sterling stood quietly by the riverbank, a boat in the river, Cherie stood at the bow, waving, "Goodbye, Princess."

The gentle breeze stirred the gauzy curtains in the cabin, revealing five people laying quietly inside, including an elderly lady and four women. They lay there peacefully, dressed in clean clothes, as if merely asleep.

The boat had come to take them home, back to Alani.

Serena's clear eyes leaked a hint of melancholy, and she softly said, "Let's go."

"Princess, when will you return? You should come with us. Titus Ashworth has blocked the entire city, staying here is dangerous," Cherie persuaded.

Serena shook her head, "I know it's dangerous here now, that's why you must leave Westria entirely. I will stay alone; I still have some matters to settle. Once it's done, I will return immediately."

"But Princess, you alone here..." Cherie protested.

Serena raised her hand slightly, interrupting Cherie's concern, "Cherie, go on, take the elder lady and the four women home."

Cherie could only nod, "Goodbye, Princess."

The boat quickly disappeared into the river.

Serena Sterling stood quietly by the riverbank for a while, then she turned, and in the next second, a distinctly noble silhouette came into her field of view.

Zane Crawford.

Today, Zane Crawford wore a black cape; the black color accentuated his handsome, jade-like appearance. Zane's aura has always been clean, naturally carrying the elegance of a noble young man. She wondered when he had been standing there, quietly observing her, waiting for her.

Serena paused, "Zane, why are you here? Didn't I say after entering the Xuanwu Gate we'd part ways? I was worried about putting you in danger."

Zane Crawford's bright black eyes gazed at her, his voice soft, "It's okay. I have my people here. We can move freely."

At this moment, the leader of the Xuanwu Gate ran over courteously, "Doctor Zane, I'll lead you away."

"Alright."

Serena followed Zane Crawford away, and with the leader of the Xuanwu Gate guiding them, their path was indeed unimpeded.

Serena thought to herself, perhaps Titus Ashworth never dreamed that while he was blocking the entire city, she was striding grandly down the very thoroughfare of the Xuanwu Gate.

"Zane, how do you know the leader of the Xuanwu Gate?" Serena asked curiously.

"I once saved the leader's wife, so he's somewhat grateful to me," Zane Crawford replied.

Serena could see clearly, the leader of the Xuanwu Gate held not only gratitude for Zane Crawford but also admiration and devotion. Otherwise, he wouldn't risk such danger to escort them out.

As a physician, the knife he wielded was actually the most formidable weapon in the world.

Over the years, he seemed to have acquainted many people.

Serena's clear eyes fell on Zane Crawford's handsome face, watching intently.

Zane Crawford glanced sideways, seeing her tilt her small head, a pair of clear eyes hanging on his face, he couldn't help but smile, his gaze full of soft affection, "What are you looking at?" "Zane, I feel... you've changed a lot over the years, but... I can't pinpoint exactly how you've changed. It should be... you've become stronger."

Serena pondered for a moment and finally used the term "strong."

Zane Crawford smiled, "Stronger, isn't that a good thing?"

To become stronger was the only way to protect those whom he wished to protect.

Serena blinked her eyes lightly, "Becoming stronger is undoubtedly good, but Zane, you're different from us. We are bound by destiny, but you're not. You can choose a happy and free life."

Zane Crawford walked slowly, at this moment, he wished this path down the Xuanwu Gate would never end, and he and she could walk together like this forever.

She was gently whispering by his ear, her presence beside him was his happy and free life.

Suddenly, a disturbance erupted ahead, and the leader of the Xuanwu Gate quickly said, "Doctor Zane, don't be concerned, these people are posting the royal bulletin. Lord Titus has already chosen his successor, and that person is Harrison."

What?

Serena's steps suddenly halted.

The leader continued, "Lord Titus plans to pass on his position to Harrison, who will soon inherit the Lord's position and become the master of Westria."

--A daily story of Zane with Isabelle--

After work, Jude Crawford took his secretary Riley Sutton down via the exclusive VIP elevator for CEOs. As soon as they reached the lobby, he saw a group of young, beautiful girls walk in from outside.

"CEO, they're here to participate in the design competition," Riley Sutton whispered.

Participants?

Jude Crawford suddenly recalled seeing the name Isabelle Willow on the list.

He raised his gaze, his deep, narrow eyes casually scanning over the faces of those girls, but he didn't spot the person.

She... seemed not to have come.

Jude Crawford quickly furrowed his brows because he didn't understand what he was doing; he actually started searching for that silhouette amidst the crowd.

What was wrong with him?

Jude Crawford felt inexplicably vexed, and he walked away briskly, but as soon as he stepped outside, a hurried figure ran over and directly collided into his embrace.

"Ah!"