Substitute B 851

Chapter 851: Hayden Crawford Collapsed

Titus Ashworth laughed, "Haha, Serena Sterling, don’t you know that a tracking device has been installed on you?"

Serena’s eyelashes trembled; she didn’t know.

She raised her small hand and pressed the skin behind her ear; it seemed that something had been implanted there.

Serena forced it out, and indeed, it was a very small tracking device.

How could there be a tracking device on her?

Serena furrowed her delicate eyebrows; she hadn’t been in contact with many people recently. The only person who could get so close and implant a tracking device without raising her suspicions, Serena couldn’t think of anyone else but... Zane Crawford.

Zane Crawford!

But how could it be possible?

Serena quickly dismissed this idea; she trusted Zane Crawford, he would never harm her.

"Lord Ashworth, it’s good that you’re here. Today, I’m sure I will draw the Sky Sword," Serena said.

Titus Ashworth looked at the Sky Sword, which symbolized the royal power of Westria, existing there since the state's founding by Westria's ancestors. Once the Sky Sword is drawn, the ancestral temple of Westria will be destroyed.

"Serena Sterling, there's one thing you don't know yet. You can't draw the Sky Sword; only those of pure blood lineage can draw it, and that is... my nephew, Hayden."

Serena's bright eyes fell on Harrison Ashworth's handsome face. She actually knew about this; only Harrison Ashworth could draw the Sky Sword.

Right now, Harrison Ashworth's deep narrow eyes were also fixed on Serena's exquisite face. Their eyes met as he took strides towards her side.

"Serena." He reached out his large hand, wrapping her soft, boneless little hand inside his palm, "Whatever you want to do, I will help you achieve it. Today, I will help you draw the Sky Sword!"

Serena looked up at him with her small face, softly saying, "But you, after all, carry the bloodline of the royal family of Westria..."

"Serena," he tightly held her small hand, "I have never been Harrison Ashworth; I am Hayden Crawford. I don't wish to be any prince Ashworth; I only want to forever be your Mr. Crawford."

Serena's fair eyes suddenly reddened; for her, he could abandon everything to be her Mr. Crawford forever.

Titus Ashworth's face turned cold upon seeing this scene. In fact, he had long guessed Hayden Crawford's choice.

He would always be Hayden Crawford, not Harrison Ashworth.

For a Serena Sterling, he abandoned the glorious royal road and his Ashworth surname.

Since red blood could not be used by him, he must destroy it.

"Serena Sterling, there's another thing you don't know. Although my nephew Hayden can help you draw the Sky Sword, he will pay with his life. Because by drawing the Sky Sword, his pure blood will be destroyed, and over time, all his meridians will slowly sever, enduring unbearable agony until death."

What?

Serena's clear irises suddenly shrank, looking at Titus Ashworth in immense shock.

Titus Ashworth sneered lightly, "This is also the price for forsaking one's mission!"

How could this be?

Serena genuinely didn't know beforehand. At that moment, her hands and feet became instantly cold and devoid of warmth.

Hayden Crawford lowered his handsome eyelids to look at her, his deep, magnetic voice filled with tenderness, "Serena, let's draw the Sky Sword first. I believe in your medical skills; you can heal me."

Serena shook her head. As a doctor, she knew that damage to the heart meridian and severed meridians were incurable with no remedy, and the pain was beyond what ordinary people could bear.

"Serena Sterling, I have already informed my nephew Hayden about this matter. But evidently, Hayden has made his choice, choosing you unwaveringly between life and you."

"Serena Sterling, now it’s your time to choose, between the country and him, who would you choose?"

Serena’s face turned deathly pale. Torn between Alani and her Mr. Crawford, she didn’t know what to choose.

"Serena," at this moment, Hayden Crawford reached out and embraced her, a loving sigh fell on her head, "when you can’t make a choice, let me choose for you."

Serena’s heart skipped a beat. She suddenly looked up, seeing Hayden Crawford already reaching out his large hand to grasp the Sky Sword.

"No!" Serena cried out.

Hayden looked at her, "Serena, you’ve always been the one protecting me; this time, let me protect you!"

With that, Hayden exerted force to pull the Sky Sword.

Soon the Sky Sword was drawn a small segment out, and the entire ancestral temple began to tremble slightly.

However, Hayden faced immense resistance, and blood swelled in his throat, with a hot trickle of blood already flowing from the corner of his lips.

Serena rushed forward, holding him tightly around his strong waist, "Mr. Crawford, please stop."

Hayden slowly but resolutely shook his head, "Serena, don’t be afraid, I won’t die."

The ancestral temple began quaking, and seeing the Sky Sword possibly coming out, the confidant anxiously looked to Titus Ashworth, "Lord Master, what should we do now?"

Titus Ashworth was also a bit apprehensive. The Sky Sword must not be drawn, and he placed all his bets... on Zane Crawford.

But why hadn't Zane Crawford appeared yet?

At this moment, suddenly, a sound traveled over like a sharp blade slicing through flesh, causing one's scalp to go numb.

Titus Ashworth looked up in an instant joy.

Serena also heard the creepy sound of flesh being pierced, and it seemed to be right beside her.

She looked up upon hearing it, and saw a sharp blade piercing through Hayden Crawford's back, directly stabbing his heart.

Drip.

Drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip.

One drop, two drops, three drops... hot blood dripped continuously from the sharp blade...

Serena’s eyes widened suddenly, and at that moment, it seemed like all the world’s sound disappeared. She turned around in a daze, seeing a familiar figure, Zane Crawford.

Zane Crawford had arrived.

Zane Crawford still maintained his aloof and magnificent demeanor, but he held a knife in his hand, and this blade punctured Hayden Crawford’s heart.

Zane Crawford was naturally adept with a blade, and at this moment, his gripping of the knife still looked elegant.

However, he, personally, had stabbed Hayden Crawford’s heart.

Serena was shocked, looking at Zane Crawford, starting to shake her head, unable to find her voice for a long time, "Zane, do you... do you know what you’re doing?"

At this moment, Hayden Crawford let go of the Sky Sword, and his tall, towering body fell to the ground with a "boom".

Zane Crawford’s fair, slender fingers were smeared with blood. He leisurely wiped the bloodstains with a handkerchief, then looked at Serena, softly laughing, "Serena, I want him gone, and he will be gone."

Chapter 852: I Hate You!

Serena Sterling had never doubted Zane Crawford, until this very moment when Hayden Crawford collapsed in front of her.

Serena raised her hand and forcefully slapped Zane’s handsome face.

Slap.

The crisp sound of a slap echoed as Zane’s handsome face was knocked to the side.

"Serena... Serena..." Hayden’s weak voice sounded.

Serena quickly crouched down, pressing her hand over Hayden’s chest, "Mr. Crawford, don’t speak. I’ll stop the bleeding for you..."

Hayden slowly shook his head, opening his mouth to speak, but only coughed up a mouthful of blood.

Serena felt her palm growing wet and hot as the blood gushed out uncontrollably from his chest.

Her pale eyelids began to redden, tears fell like broken strings of pearls.

She cried uncontrollably.

Hayden struggled to lift his hand, wanting to caress her face, wipe away her tears, and tell her, Serena, don’t cry.

But his hand remained motionless in mid-air, eventually falling weakly.

Hayden’s heart stopped, and he ceased to breathe.

"Mr. Crawford! No, Mr. Crawford, don’t leave me, please wake up!" Serena felt her heart being ripped in two, a pain beyond words.

Zane slowly turned his handsome face toward her, with both hands clenching into fists at his sides as he watched Serena crying uncontrollably on the ground.

Titus Ashworth was the happiest, glad that Hayden was gone as the world would be better off without him. Then no one would ever be able to wield the Sky Sword again.

"Serena Sterling, this time you have to admit defeat because the world's only pure bloodline has vanished, and no one will be able to wield the Sky Sword anymore. Your plan to restore Alani has failed completely." Titus laughed arrogantly.

Serena's tearful eyes blurred as she tightly held Hayden in her arms, then looked up at Zane with a pair of red eyes, "Zane Crawford, Hayden Crawford was your elder brother, you personally killed your elder brother. I will never forgive you! I hate you!"

She said, I hate you!

Zane thought, then let her hate him; if hatred is a form of remembrance, he preferred her to hate him.

Zane walked forward, coming to Serena's side, looking down at her and using his long fingers to lift her chin, "Serena, I'll give you time to grieve, but you need to adjust your emotions quickly and prepare to marry me!"

Serena could already smell the blood on his fingers, the blood of Hayden Crawford staining his hand.

Serena's clear eyes grew even brighter, washed by tears as she looked at him coldly and defiantly, "Married? Zane Crawford, you still want to marry me?"

"That's right, I've already discussed it with Lord Ashworth, restoring Alani is now impossible, and as the girl who trains wolves, you'll stay in Westria forever!"

Titus nodded, kindly advising, "Yes, Serena Sterling, only those who understand the circumstances are wise. Now that my nephew Hayden is dead and nephew Zane likes you so much, you should rest assured to marry my nephew Zane. When I pass the throne to nephew Zane, you'll naturally become queen of Westria."

Serena looked at Zane, "You want to take the ruler's throne?"

"Why not?" Zane replied with a light smile.

Serena shook her head, looking at Zane with a face full of unfamiliarity, "Zane Crawford, I realize I don't know you anymore. You're not the Zane Crawford in my memory, or maybe I never knew you."

In her memory, Zane was aloof and pristine, seemingly untouchable by worldly chaos.

But now, he had slain his elder brother, coveted the ruler's throne, and aimed to forcefully marry her, turning into someone utterly unfamiliar.

The Zane before her had completely turned dark.

Zane's handsome face remained unruffled, "Serena, you can come to know me anew now."

Serena forcefully turned her face away, rejecting his touch, as his current touch only repelled her, "Zane Crawford, abandon this thought, I won't marry you, I am your sister-in-law!"

"The person I want, what does it matter if she's my sister-in-law, especially when you're not; you divorced Hayden and never remarried."

Serena realized she and Zane could no longer communicate, and rightly so. He could harm his brother, what regard would he have for a sister-in-law's reputation?

Serena lowered her long lashes to look at Hayden in her arms, still unbelieving that her Mr. Crawford had died like this.

Serena reached out to feel Hayden’s pulse.

But then Zane spoke, "Someone, take away Lord Ashworth."

Several guards came forward, swiftly taking Hayden from Serena’s arms.

"Serena, stay open-minded in the palace for the next few days. The marriage ceremony is being prepared quickly, so don’t resist. After all, Caden, Pip, and Stella are still in Westria. If they get hurt, it wouldn’t be good!" Zane said indifferently.

He dared to use the children to threaten her. Serena couldn’t believe Zane had stooped so low!

"Someone, take the Princess of Alani away!"

Swiftly someone approached, "Princess of Alani, please."

Serena left.

This journey to the ancestral temple ended in Titus Ashworth’s complete victory. Titus approached Zane, "Nephew Zane, you didn’t disappoint me. I know you like Serena Sterling, and I’ve ordered a grand wedding for you. After the wedding, I’ll pass the throne to you; both the kingdom and women will belong to you."

Zane curled his thin lips into a smile without a word.

Everyone had left, and Seraphina Shea, having witnessed everything from the sidelines, remained. Her maid whispered, "Miss, we were wrong about Dr. Crawford; he turned out to be such a terrifying person."

Seraphina watched Zane's cool, disappearing figure, murmuring softly, "Others may find him terrifying, but I don't think he's intimidating at all."

...

Serena Sterling was locked in the castle as a grand wedding ceremony was being prepared outside, with seamstresses coming to measure her for a customized phoenix coronet and wedding gown.

Recent events had turned everything upside down; the suddenly darkened Zane had disrupted everything.

Hayden Crawford was dead; no one could wield the Sky Sword anymore, restoring Alani was futile, and now she was to wear the phoenix coronet and marry Zane. None of these things had she ever imagined would happen suddenly, catching her entirely off guard.

Chapter 853: Don't Touch Me!

Soon, it was the night before the grand wedding.

A matron came to dress Serena Sterling, but she drove everyone away, "I won't dress up, and I won't wear these clothes. Let Zane Crawford come see me; I want to see him!"

"Bride, you're putting us in a difficult position..." Everyone looked at each other, frightened.

At this time, a cool and aloof figure walked out; it was Zane Crawford, "You all can leave."

"Yes." Everyone left.

Only Serena and Zane were left in the room. Zane looked at her, "Serena, I'm here. Are you looking for me?"

Serena stared coldly at Zane, "Where's Hayden Crawford? I want to see Hayden Crawford!"

"He's already dead."

"He's alive; then I want to see him alive. If he's dead, I want to see him dead. No matter if he's alive or dead, I want to be with him, I want to take him away!"

Zane stepped forward to stand in front of Serena. He saw her eyes were red, then nodded, "Okay, I can let you see him."

Serena didn't speak; she couldn't believe he would be so kind to agree just like that.

"But," Zane slowly voiced his condition, "we'll get married first. After the wedding, I'll let you see him. Serena, don't be willful, okay? Otherwise... you'll never see him again."

Serena abruptly stood up, "Zane Crawford, why have you suddenly become like this? Are you... acting? Do you have some plan? Quickly tell me, all this isn't real, the you standing before me isn't real either!"

Zane's gaze caught a glimpse of outside the window; now Titus Ashworth had come, peeking through the window.

"The Lord..."

Titus Ashworth waved a hand, signaling for silence, forbidding speech. Actually, he always had suspicions about Zane. Now that Zane was speaking with Serena in the room, he took the opportunity to eavesdrop.

Zane knew Titus had arrived; his cool black eyes fell on Serena’s petite, exquisite face. Now her bright eyes were brimming with anticipation; he knew this was her last chance for him.

If they met again in the future, they might be at odds.

Zane curled a thin smile, "Serena, what do you want to hear? You’re not unaware of how much I like you."

The light in Serena’s eyes immediately dimmed as she took a step back.

Zane moved his legs and approached her step by step, "Serena, do you want me to bless you and Hayden Crawford? Do you want me to watch you two happily when I can’t? Sorry, I can’t do it!"

"Hayden Crawford has always had more than I since we were young; everything was his. Then when he met you, you were his too. How could I be content? A long time ago, I vowed to seize back everything that should have been mine, including you, Serena!"

Serena looked at the stranger Zane had become, shaking her head.

Soon, her delicate back pressed against the cold wall, and she had nowhere to retreat.

Zane closed in, trapping her between the wall and his chest.

Both big hands grabbed her smooth shoulders, "Serena, Hayden Crawford is already dead. Wake up, be with me; I’ll treat you well!"

After he spoke, Zane lowered his head, aiming for her red lips.

Serena’s lashes trembled as she quickly dodged. In such close proximity, she caught Zane’s clean scent like orchid pine, scent very pleasing as before, but he had changed utterly.

Serena no longer had any expectations for him. Her small hands pushed against his chest, trying to push him away, "Zane, let me go, don’t touch me!"

As she dodged, Zane’s thin lips brushed her soft strands, which were fragrant; every strand emitted a fragrance.

Over the years, Zane transitioned from a graceful youth to a 27-year-old man, not without desires. After all, he was a normal man, facing his cherished girl, longing occurred as well.

Now, after his lips brushed her strands, his tall and handsome body stiffened slightly.

Serena resisted this intimacy, never imagining reaching this point with Zane. She was only one divorce certificate away from remarrying Hayden; no matter how, she was his sister-in-law!

"Zane, don’t be like this... If you touch me, I will truly hate you!"

Zane’s throat lightly rolled, fine then, hate me.

His fair hand landed on the back of her head, gently yet firmly cupping her nape, then kissed her cheek.

He kissed her eyes, sensing the girl’s fright and panic in his arms. Her lashes fluttered underneath his lips like butterfly wings. He closed his eyes, kissing her eyes repeatedly, affectionately.

Serena knew Zane liked her, though he changed. However, she didn't understand why this degraded version of him kissed so gently and cautiously?

Zane's kisses slipped from her eyes, avoiding her red lips, falling on her cheek, then onto her slender neck.

His other hand clasped her soft waist, lifting her effortlessly into his embrace.

"Zane, no!" Their bodies in such close contact, Serena struggled and flailed.

Outside the window, Titus was satisfied watching this scene, realizing his suspicions of Zane were unnecessary. Zane had truly turned dark.

Titus turned and left.

Zane's peripheral vision saw Titus leave, reason telling him to stop.

But, he couldn't release her.

His hands and body were beyond his control.

In his embrace, her body was soft, smooth as jade, especially during her struggles. As they rubbed against each other, Zane suddenly realized he was at an age where his blood ran hot, having never been in love and never held a girl's hand before. Now, blood surged.

-- one of Jude and Isabelle's daily stories --

When Jude Crawford arrived, he witnessed this scene: Isabelle Willow, like a savage little beast, held her ground fiercely against four, showing no weakness.

However, she was already bruised, with her long hair pulled into a mess. Her delicate, beautiful face had two claw marks, looking pitiful.

Jude’s heroic brow furrowed instantly as he glanced at his secretary, Riley Sutton.

Riley quickly stepped forward and reprimanded, "What are you doing here? Do you take The Crawford Group for a marketplace to brawl and bicker?"

The brawling individuals halted immediately. Isabelle lifted her head and saw Jude by the door right away.

The next second, Jude saw Isabelle stumbling over, tipping her toes to kiss his handsome cheek boldly.

"Mr. Crawford, you do like women, don’t you?"

Chapter 854: Of the Three Thousand Weak Waters, Only a Ladle Is Taken to Drink

Zane Crawford held her delicate wrist against the wall, his low, hoarse voice lingering by her ear with a hint of youthful urgency, "Serena, don’t move."

He told her not to move, but Serena Sterling moved even more vigorously, "Zane Crawford, you’re really despicable and shameless, let me go! Don’t touch me with your hands!"

A hint of passionate crimson flickered in Zane Crawford’s cold black eyes. Nothing in this world could make him lose his way, except for the girl in his arms, who could easily make him lose control.

He adjusted his breathing, but it wasn’t working; his blood was boiling, every cell was clamoring to have her! Why not have her!

Zane Crawford wrapped his arms around her slender waist, pressing her tightly against him, his thin lips moving up to kiss her small face.

Soon, he tasted something wet—tears.

Zane Crawford’s cold, bright body instantly stiffened. He looked up to see a few crystal-clear tears hanging on Serena Sterling’s delicate face, her bright eyes blurred with tears.

She was crying.

Zane Crawford’s lost mind instantly cleared, like being doused with cold water. What was he doing?

He had let his greed and desires run rampant, bullying her into tears.

This version of himself, he found deeply shameful.

Serena Sterling’s eyes were red, her small nose was also red, both hands pushing him away, "Zane Crawford, go away, I don’t want to see you anymore, I hate you!"

She said she hated him!

Zane Crawford felt a bit flustered; this was the girl he loved most. He raised a clean finger, wanting to wipe her tears, "Serena, I’m sorry, I... I..."

Their bodies were still close, and Serena Sterling suddenly felt something hot and hard against her. Her pupils shrank, and she looked up at him with shocked and angry eyes.

She was no longer an innocent girl; having given birth to three children, she obviously knew what it was.

He actually!

Zane Crawford quickly realized too, a light blush spread over his fair, handsome face, and he released her as if shocked, putting distance between them.

With his right hand in his pocket, he turned and left.

Serena Sterling watched his back, seeing the 27-year-old Zane Crawford shed his aloof image, now looking somewhat naive.

It was like... fleeing in panic.

"Zane Crawford, I'll agree to marry you tomorrow, but you must give Mr. Crawford back to me." Serena Sterling called loudly.

Zane Crawford paused in his steps; a few seconds later, "Okay."

He left.

...

Zane Crawford walked out of the room, the cold wind outside brushing his handsome face, dissipating his restlessness.

At this moment, someone approached from the front—Seraphina Shea.

Seraphina Shea looked at Zane Crawford and greeted him, "Dr. Crawford."

Zane Crawford had no emotional fluctuations; he just nodded slightly and walked away.

The maid whispered, "Miss, this Dr. Crawford actually walked out from the Princess of Alani's room. Her brother just died, and Dr. Crawford can't wait to take over his brother's woman. I think he's just a beast in human clothing, Miss, you'd better stay away from someone like him!"

Seraphina Shea watched the direction Zane Crawford disappeared, "What are you afraid of?"

"Miss, of course, I'm afraid Dr. Crawford will bully you!"

Seraphina Shea's red lips curved into a faint, mocking smile, "Don't worry, Dr. Crawford has no interest in me. In this world of abundant waters, he only draws from one cup in his entire life."

...

The wedding day arrived, Serena Sterling donned the custom-made phoenix coronet and robes, with a red veil covering her head, allowing others to arrange her.

The happy bride attendant joyfully entered, "Bride, the auspicious time has come, we must go pay respects."

Serena Sterling did not resist as the bride attendant took the red string, leading her out.

"Wait, the bride's dress needs to be tidied." At this moment, a young maid ran over to straighten Serena Sterling's dress hem.

Soon, a note was secretly slipped into Serena Sterling's hand.

This young maid...

Serena Sterling's heart quivered; she knew her people had arrived.

The people of Alani had arrived to take her back.

These past days, Serena Sterling had stayed put because she was in the imperial city, her freedom restricted. If she acted rashly, innocents would surely be sacrificed.

She feigned agreement to this grand wedding because the wedding's commotion would surely reach the people of Alani's ears. Plus, the wedding guests were numerous, it was a great chance to leave amidst the chaos, tonight was the perfect opportunity.

She wanted to take Mr. Crawford and leave, return to Alani!

So Serena Sterling had been waiting, and now, she was at last waiting for it.

Serena Sterling discreetly hid the note in her sleeve, then followed the bride attendant out.

Outside, the sound of gongs was deafening, red filled the eyes, Zane Crawford stood there, elegant and poised.

At this moment, confidant Wade Wyatt came over, leaning in to whisper, "Master, the people of Alani have arrived, they just handed a note to Miss Sterling, it seems Miss Sterling will leave tonight."

Zane Crawford heard but his handsome face remained calm, showing no surprise. He had guessed it.

How clever she was, how could she let him manipulate her?

She didn’t want to stay by his side; she was sure to leave.

This grand wedding, for her, was a sham.

"Groom, the bride is here!"

Zane Crawford looked up and immediately saw Serena Sterling being led out by the bride attendant.

She was wearing the phoenix coronet and robes, standing in the shimmering beads, her grace captivating.

The coldness in Zane Crawford’s black eyes slowly warmed with tenderness; this grand wedding, for her, was a sham, but for him, it was reality.

"The auspicious time has come, pay respects!"

Zane Crawford and Serena Sterling stood together as someone shouted, "First bow to heaven and earth!"

Zane Crawford and Serena Sterling bowed together.

"Second bow to parents!"

Titus Ashworth happily drank tea.

"Spouse bow to each other!"

Zane Crawford and Serena Sterling faced each other and bowed.

"Ceremony completed, to the bridal chamber!"

Serena Sterling was once again led away by the bride attendant, into the bridal chamber.

...

In the bridal chamber, Serena Sterling sat by the bed, and the bride attendant said, "Bride, the groom has to entertain the guests outside, wait a while, when he comes, he will lift your red veil."

Serena Sterling didn't hear clearly what the bride attendant was saying. She quietly opened the note, which had a line of small words saying, 'By the Luoshui Riverside, welcoming the queen home.'

Her people were by the Luoshui Riverside.

At this moment, with a creak, the bridal chamber door was pushed open, the bride attendant laughed, "Why is the groom here so quickly, this is absolutely the fastest groom I've seen, the groom must be eager to lift the bride's red veil."

Zane Crawford had arrived.

Amidst the bride attendant’s teasing, Zane Crawford walked up to stand in front of Serena Sterling.

Chapter 855: The Rise of Xuanyuan, The Emergence of Alani

Zane Crawford lowered his handsome eyelids, looking at Serena Sterling at that very moment. He knew in his heart that her decision to leave was final. He hadn’t planned to make her stay, but Serena, just wait a moment, just a moment will do. Later on, I’ll personally take you home.

The bridesmaid brought the wedding scale, "Groom, you may unveil the bride now. May you have a loving and happy life together, with everything as you wish."

Zane Crawford extended his fair and beautiful fingers to receive the wedding scale.

He slowly lifted the red veil.

Serena Sterling raised her head and looked at him.

This single glance suddenly broke into Zane Crawford’s line of sight. She was adorned in a brilliant red phoenix coronet and ceremonial robe, her hair styled for him, the gold hairpins and dangling ornaments clinking. Her delicate and stunning face emanated a breathtaking radiance.

This glance, endured over the years, undying.

Serena Sterling’s bright eyes watched him, yet with no warmth in their depths, "Zane Crawford, is this enough?"

Zane Crawford raised his hand, dismissing the bridesmaid, "You may leave now."

"Yes." The bridesmaid withdrew.

The room now left with just the two of them, Serena Sterling curled her red lips in sarcasm, "Zane Crawford, I've fulfilled my promise to you. Surely you're not still thinking about... the bridal chamber?"

Zane Crawford looked down at her, "If I said I wanted to, what would you do?"

Serena Sterling's eyes flashed with a chill, then she whistled.

"Ah!" There were screams outside, "A wolf! It's a wolf!"

The next second, the window of the bridal chamber shattered, and a wolf as tall as a person leaped in, obediently crouching at Serena Sterling's feet.

Serena Sterling looked at Zane Crawford, "Zane Crawford, tonight you'd best stay away from me. Otherwise, the wolf's claws are merciless, and you'll have to deal with that yourself!"

At this time, the wolf king let out a howl towards Zane Crawford, baring a mouthful of sharp teeth.

Tonight's wedding night, Serena Sterling had the wolf king on guard, keeping Zane Crawford at a distance.

Zane Crawford said nothing, he turned and left.

He just walked away like that?

Serena Sterling felt a bit suspicious, she didn’t know what scheme he had in mind again, "Zane Crawford, where’s Mr. Crawford? You promised me, give Mr. Crawford back to me!"

Zane Crawford didn’t turn his head, "I did promise you, but not tonight."

After saying this, he left.

Serena Sterling clenched her fist, he actually played word games with her, utterly shameless!

However, her people had already gone to search for Mr. Crawford’s whereabouts and would bring him out.

Now, she must hurry to the banks of the Luo River; her people were all there, and she feared any delay might pose a danger.

She didn’t know why tonight she felt restless, with a constant sense that something was going to happen.

...

Zane Crawford exited the bridal chamber, Wade Wyatt whispered, "Master, I’ve had someone stall Titus Ashworth, now you can go to the ancestral temple."

"Good." Zane Crawford nodded, "How is Serena?"

"Everything is arranged, Miss Serena will have a smooth journey out of the royal city tonight, Master, Miss Serena is so wise, there’s no need to worry."

Indeed, she’s so wise, even without him, she could safely leave the royal city.

But he still couldn’t rest easy, fearing even the slightest danger for her.

"Let Alani’s people handle my big brother, let Serena take him back," Zane Crawford ordered.

"Yes." Wade Wyatt nodded.

"We should go."

"Master, I don’t understand... Why are we going to the ancestral temple, there’s only the Sky Sword there." Wade Wyatt couldn’t understand why his master wanted to go there.

Zane Crawford lifted his cold black eyes to gaze at the black night ahead, then lightly lifted his thin lips, "To pull out the Sky Sword!"

What?

Wade Wyatt’s eyes widened, he suspected he was hallucinating, his master going to draw the Sky Sword?

But only the blood of a pure child can draw the Sky Sword?

No, drawing the Sky Sword would lead to death!

"Master!" Wade Wyatt followed closely, alarmed.

...

Ancestral Temple.

Zane Crawford entered the inner chamber, where the Sky Sword, radiating its sharp cold gleam, stood resolutely.

Zane Crawford stepped forward, reaching out his hand.

"Master, you mustn't!" Wade Wyatt swiftly stopped him, "Master, I don't know how you became the blood of a pure child, but you absolutely mustn't draw this Sky Sword, once drawn you will suffer heart and veins damage and perish."

Zane Crawford spoke indifferently, "I know."

He knew, Hayden Crawford must not die, because if he died, Serena would be heartbroken.

So, only he could replace Hayden Crawford.

"Wade Wyatt, step back."

"Master, you truly cannot!" Wade Wyatt fell to his knees.

Zane Crawford was resolute, nothing could stop him. He extended his hand, grasped the Sky Sword, and slowly exerted force.

The Sky Sword slowly emerged from the fissure in the ground, the entire ancestral temple began to tremble again.

Blood welled up in Zane Crawford’s throat, and with a cough, he quickly spat out a mouthful of blood.

Wade Wyatt’s eyes turned red, "Master!"

Zane Crawford wiped the fresh blood from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand, then, using all his strength, slowly and determinedly drew the Sky Sword out.

...

The small earthquake prompted by the ancestral temple quickly dyed half the sky over Westria red, this spectacle drew everyone’s attention.

People all stepped out from their houses, looked up at the crimson sky, and started discussing,

"Quick, look, what’s going on over there?"

"Heavenly phenomenon, it feels like something big is happening!"

Titus Ashworth was poured with lots of liquor and was somewhat drunk, then someone hurriedly ran over, panic-stricken, "Sire, something terrible has happened, the Sky Sword has been drawn!"

What?

Titus Ashworth sprang from his chair, cold sweat breaking out all over him, sobering up most of his earlier state of intoxication.

Titus Ashworth hurriedly ran out, nearly stumbling while rushing.

He pushed through the crowd, looked up, only to see the redness in the sky growing deeper, as if the earth itself had been soaked in blood.

This is bad!

Titus Ashworth's heart sank completely, he knew that the Sky Sword sealed in the ancestral temple for a hundred years had been drawn.

Sky ascends, Alani emerges.

Back then Alani vanished into the sea, and now, it returns forcefully to the world's sight.

What's going on?

Inside Titus Ashworth, waves of shock had arisen, who had drawn the Sky Sword?

Hayden Crawford was already dead, no pure blood remained in this world, who on earth drew the Sky Sword?

"Someone! Quickly!" Titus Ashworth called out.

"Yes, sire." The subordinates quickly came forward.

"Hurry to the ancestral temple, seal the city gates, I want an investigation, I want this person brought out!"

At this moment, someone beside him cried out, "Look over there, a mirage! My goodness!"

Titus Ashworth raised his eyes to see, only to find the banks of the Luo River ahead, the long river flowing east, the cold mist on the water slowly dispersing, the view growing clearer.

The bright moon hung high at this moment, the river waters clear to the bottom, sparkling with waves, so beautiful it’s surreal.

Chapter 856: How Are You So Charming at Such a Young Age?

At the end of the riverbank, a mirage slowly appeared; it seemed like a kingdom, a realm beautiful as a fairyland on earth.

Elderly guests at the wedding stared dazedly at the mirage over the sea, whispering in astonishment, "Ala... Alani!"

As these words fell, they instantly caused a storm.

Titus Ashworth was stunned on the spot, too late, everything was too late, Alani has appeared!

...

Serena Sterling disguised herself and escaped from the royal city as a maid. She was puzzled because the escape was too smooth, with no danger at all.

However, today was the wedding day, everyone went to drink, and defenses naturally slackened, which could be understood.

Serena Sterling rushed to the Loshi Riverbank at the fastest speed; Cherie and the people from Alani had already been waiting here for a long time.

Cherie quickly approached, "Your Highness, you have finally arrived."

"Cherie, have you found Mr. Crawford?" This was Serena Sterling's most pressing concern.

"Princess, we have found him; he is on the way here."

Great!

Serena Sterling definitely intended to take Hayden Crawford away.

At this moment, someone hurried over, "Princess, something's wrong."

"What happened? Where's Mr. Crawford?"

"Princess, we had found Mr. Crawford's hiding place, but when we got in, we found that Mr. Crawford was already gone!"

What?

Serena Sterling quickly furrowed her beautiful brows; how could Mr. Crawford suddenly disappear?

This matter was quite puzzling.

"Princess," Cherie quickly said at this point, "Princess, we're running out of time, let's hurry back to Alani!"

But Mr. Crawford was missing; she meant to take Mr. Crawford back, but now Mr. Crawford was still left here, how could she leave?

Serena Sterling's heart was a mess, she didn't know how to decide.

"Princess!" someone shouted then, "Look!"

Serena Sterling lifted her bright, clear eyes; the sky above was filled with red clouds, a celestial anomaly had occurred.

Serena Sterling's long lashes trembled, her pupils suddenly contracted.

"Princess, what happened, how did Westria's sky become like this? When the Keeper Granny was still around, she once said, back when our Alani ancestors died, when Alani's blood stained the entire Loshi Riverbank, the celestial anomaly was just like this, red blood filled the sky." Cherie said in confusion.

Serena Sterling looked at the sky like this and murmured, "The Sky Sword... has been withdrawn!"

What?

Cherie was shocked, "But Princess, Mr. Crawford is the only one in this world with pure blood; only Mr. Crawford can withdraw the Sky Sword, Mr. Crawford is already dead, so who withdrew the Sky Sword now?"

Serena Sterling shook her head, didn't know, she didn't know either.

What on earth happened?

"Princess!" Cherie called out in surprise, "Princess, look, Alani has emerged! Congratulations, Princess, you have finally fulfilled the ancestral wish to revive Alani!"

Serena Sterling looked as the mist over the Loshi Riverbanks had all dispersed; Alani, the ancient kingdom beautiful as a fairyland on earth, was on the other shore of the water, Alani has appeared.

Everything that happened tonight completely got out of control; Serena Sterling couldn't guess what had happened; she was completely confused.

At this time, many footsteps came from afar; Serena Sterling's eyes suddenly turned sharp, "Titus Ashworth is coming with people!"

"Princess, let's go home! We can go home now!"

Go home.

Yes, she was going home.

Serena Sterling turned back to glance in the direction of Westria; she knew Mr. Crawford was forever left here, but she must go home now.

She would come back again!

...

Titus Ashworth hurried to the Loshi Riverbank with his men, only to see two light boats at the riverbank, Serena Sterling in a white cloak, standing gracefully and slender at the bow, evidently waiting for him.

"Lord Ashworth, you are late." Serena Sterling slightly curled her red lips; at this moment, her unparalleled beauty almost merged with the Loshi Riverbank, like a goddess of Loshi descending from the heavens.

Titus Ashworth was so angry he stomped his feet on the spot, shouting wildly, "Serena Sterling, come back to me!"

Serena Sterling looked at Titus Ashworth, "Lord Ashworth, I will surely return."

After saying this, she turned around, stood with hands behind her back, and her unparalleled figure slowly disappeared from sight along with the light boat.

Serena Sterling was gone.

Titus Ashworth felt he was about to vomit blood; he had calculated everything, everything was supposed to go smoothly, who knew this wedding would have so many unexpected events, the Sky Sword was raised, Alani appeared, Serena Sterling sailed back.

"Lord, what shall we do now?"

Titus Ashworth's eyes showed a fierce intent, "Serena Sterling is gone, but the person who withdrew the Sky Sword is still in the royal city, hurry to the ancestral temple, I want that person captured and torn to pieces!"

...

In the ancestral temple, Zane Crawford used all his strength to withdraw the Sky Sword, but his vital essence was severely damaged, the sword tip resting on the ground, with a "boom," Zane Crawford fell to one knee.

He spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

"Master!" Wade Wyatt ran over to support his master with eyes full of red; he had just watched his master risk his life to withdraw the Sky Sword.

Zane Crawford’s handsome face, as fair as jade, turned deathly pale, cold sweat densely dotted his forehead, he gently raised his hand, stopping Wade Wyatt from assisting him.

Wade Wyatt could only stand where he was.

Zane Crawford closed his beautiful eyelids, forcibly suppressing the surge of blood at his throat, after several attempts, he finally managed to stand up from the ground with difficulty.

Zane Crawford walked out, each step slow yet firm, he exited the ancestral temple, arriving alone on the grass outside.

Raising his head, he looked at the all-encompassing red clouds, as if talking to himself, "Is it... has Alani appeared?"

Wade Wyatt followed behind, nodding, "Yes, master, Alani has appeared."

Zane Crawford felt something lightly grazed his handsome cheek; it turned out to be golden maple leaves rustling down, he slowly lifted the corners of his thin lips, the curvature gentle and soft, he softly said, "Serena, goodbye."

The sudden kiss made Jude Crawford stiff; he had never been kissed by a girl, this was the first time.

Secretary Riley Sutton was shocked, his mouth wide open, OMG, was... the president just pounced on?

Jude Crawford looked at Isabelle Willow; the girl was very persistent about the question just now, asking if he liked girls, now a pair of watery eyes were expectantly waiting for his answer.

Jude Crawford pressed his thin lips, large hands clasped her slender wrist, he directly dragged her away.

In the president’s office, Jude Crawford threw her in; Isabelle Willow hit her lower back against the edge of his desk, had not yet reacted, when her sight went dark, Jude Crawford approached, blocking her, "How old are you this year? How at such a young age can you seduce people?"

Chapter 857: Mr. Crawford Vanishes from This World

When she left, he couldn’t see her off, so he could only softly say to himself, Serena, goodbye.

Pfft.

Zane Crawford spat out another mouthful of blood.

"Master!"

At this moment, Titus Ashworth’s voice came from afar, "Quickly, surround this place completely, don’t let even a fly escape!"

"Yes!"

Wade Wyatt’s face changed dramatically, "Master, Titus Ashworth is here, we don’t have time to leave now."

Zane Crawford’s face was very pale, the blood at the corner of his mouth highlighted his wan beauty, and he softly ordered, "Wade, you go, don’t worry about me!"

"Master, I won’t leave! A person’s heart can only willingly agree; you are willing to die for Miss Summer, and I am willing to live and die with you. I hope the master won’t drive me away!"

Zane Crawford pressed his pale lips together, wanting to speak, but at this time a pleasant voice reached over, "Dr. Crawford."

Zane Crawford looked up, it was... Seraphina Shea.

Seraphina Shea had arrived.

Seraphina Shea looked at Zane Crawford, "Dr. Crawford, please come with me."

...

Titus Ashworth had surrounded this place inside and out, but he didn’t see a single person.

An aide reported, "Master, we’ve searched every corner, there is no one here."

How can that be?

Where did the person who drew the Sky Sword go?

After drawing the Sky Sword, that person wouldn’t live long.

Titus Ashworth pondered for a moment, now he suspected one person, to be precise, he had always suspected one person, and that was Zane Crawford.

"Quick, back to the imperial city!" Titus Ashworth immediately turned to leave, he needed to find Zane Crawford.

...

In the imperial city.

Titus Ashworth rushed back with forceful momentum, he asked the maid, "Where is Dr. Crawford? Where is he now?"

"Master, Dr. Crawford is currently in his room."

Titus Ashworth was very suspicious, "Dr. Crawford hasn’t gone out at all?"

"Yes, originally Dr. Crawford was to wed Miss Summer, but on the wedding night, Miss Summer brought a wolf to guard him, preventing Dr. Crawford from approaching. I saw Dr. Crawford drank excessively, and he was helped to the guest room to rest without ever coming out," the maid said.

Really?

Titus Ashworth was half-believing as he went upstairs and forcefully pushed open the room door.

In the room, Zane Crawford and Seraphina Shea were rolling on the bed, and upon hearing the door open, Seraphina Shea let out a sharp scream, quickly pulling the blanket to cover her exposed body, "Lord Ashworth, how could you just come in without knocking, please leave!"

Titus Ashworth was directly startled; he didn’t expect Zane Crawford would be in bed with Seraphina Shea here.

Now, Seraphina Shea’s clothes were half-off, her face full of bashfulness and blush, it didn’t at all seem fake.

At this moment, Zane Crawford rose from the bed, there was a bit of drunkenness in his cold black eyes, and he reeked of alcohol, "Lord Ashworth, what happened outside?"

Titus Ashworth looked at Zane Crawford; although he was drunk, his stance was steady and strong, indicating that if he were the one who drew the Sky Sword, he wouldn’t be in this good condition.

Titus Ashworth temporarily put away his doubts, "Something happened outside, nephew Zane, get dressed and come out, I’ll be waiting for you."

Titus Ashworth went out.

The room door was closed again. Zane Crawford pressed his hand to his heart where the metallic taste was churning, he couldn’t hold back, and a stream of conspicuous blood flowed from the corner of his mouth.

Seraphina Shea quickly got out of bed, using a clean cloth to wipe the blood from Zane Crawford’s lips, she softly said, "Regarding the matter of the Princess of Alani, Titus Ashworth will not let it go easily, you can hide it for a while, but not forever."

Zane Crawford gently lowered his beautiful eyelashes, "Then there’s no need to hide it."

Seraphina Shea, the eldest daughter of the Shea family, knew what Zane Crawford intended to do, "Dr. Crawford, what do you want me to do? Behind me is the enormous force of the Shea family, should the Shea

family stand up to support you, there would definitely be a resounding call, and you would just be a step away from that supreme throne."

Saying this, Seraphina Shea curled her lips into a smile, "Dr. Crawford, just say the word, and I will surely help you."

Zane Crawford didn’t speak immediately, he glanced at Seraphina Shea, "Miss Shea, what do you want?"

"You!" Seraphina Shea spit out a single word.

Zane Crawford slowly shook his head, "What you want, I cannot give, so I don’t need your help either."

"I once said, you will still need me, I’m waiting for you, but Dr. Crawford, even when in dire straits you didn’t come to me, is this the reason you don’t seek me out?"

Zane Crawford reached out, put on his clothes nonchalantly, his voice indifferent, "What I cannot give you, I will not give you hope, because I know how hard it is to endure waiting, the path I’ve walked, I wouldn’t want Miss Shea to walk again."

Having said that, Zane Crawford opened the door and left.

"Zane Crawford!" Seraphina Shea suddenly called out to him.

Zane Crawford paused.

Seraphina Shea said, "You’ve treated me, saved me, today, consider I’ve repaid you, from now on we’re even."

Zane Crawford didn’t look back, a few seconds later he softly said, "Alright."

...

Alani.

Serena Sterling held a meeting, attended by veteran figures; she had to present an image beyond her years, no longer could she display girlish playfulness.

Cherie said, "Princess, the designers have been found, you need to change the clothes in your wardrobe."

As she spoke, Cherie said, "But Princess, don’t be sad, when we go out, we can still wear pretty dresses."

Cherie felt a bit of heartache and sentiment, the princess was only 24 years old, a blossoming age, but once she ascended as queen, she could no longer wear the lady’s skirts, she must present herself with a queenly demeanor.

Back then, Seraphina Linden couldn’t bear such constraints and ran away.

There are gains and losses; this queen’s position would likely keep the princess’s youth locked away.

The princess was born so exquisitely and purely; it’s truly a pity.

Serena Sterling didn’t mind much, since ancient times, those in power, who could live freely?

Once she was a carefree, happy girl, now she couldn’t be anymore.

She chose this path.

Even though her future years would be confined, and her life trapped within this imperial city, she wouldn’t regret it.

She would move forward boldly.

This was her responsibility.

But... she still hadn’t found Mr. Crawford.

Mr. Crawford seemed to have vanished like a stone sinking into the sea, disappearing overnight from this world.

At this time, a "knock knock" sounded at the door, and a maid said softly outside, "Princess."

Cherie looked at Serena Sterling, "Princess, I’ll go check it out."

"Alright."

Serena Sterling took off her outer robe, then lifted her small hand to take down the jade hairpin, letting her long, inky hair cascade down beautifully.

In the future, she feared she would have to keep her hair tied up.

At this moment Cherie returned, "Princess."

Serena Sterling turned her head, seeing Cherie’s hesitant expression, "What’s wrong?"

Chapter 858: In This Life, I Came Only for Her!

"Princess, I’ve just received news that Titus Ashworth is dead."

Serena’s hand, holding the comb, paused.

"Titus is dead, and the Shea family was the first to come forward, supporting Zane Crawford to become king. Westria is already preparing for the succession ceremony, and Zane will become the new ruler of Westria!"

Serena was not surprised. The now darkened Zane wanted both the kingdom and the beauty. With Westria in turmoil, it was the perfect opportunity for him to seize power.

He killed Mr. Crawford with his own hands, and she would never forgive him.

"Understood, you don’t need to inform me about him in the future."

"Yes."

"By the way, have there been any news about Caden lately?"

She had three children. Pip was always on the move, living a nomadic life, while Stella was always by Seraphina Linden’s side, leaving only Caden...

When Hayden was still around, he sent Caden Crawford to a top global closed-off genius school for training. The training there was rigorous, and Caden adapted well, never keeping in touch with the family. Serena missed him and was a bit worried about little Caden.

Cherie shook her head, "Princess, there’s been no news from His Highness Caden."

Serena felt a bit lost. Her two sons were so independent, they no longer needed her.

"Princess, you should rest early. Tomorrow is the Queen’s coronation."

Serena was officially inheriting the queen’s throne.

...

Westria.

In the deep night, it began to snow outside.

Large snowflakes fell from the sky, quickly covering the ground with a layer of pristine white.

Zane Crawford stepped outside and stood at the top of the steps, looking down from the center of power.

He looked disdainfully upon the entire world.

At this moment, Wade Wyatt walked over, placing a black cloak over Zane’s broad shoulders. "Master, it’s snowing, and the weather is cold. Let’s go back."

The black cloak accentuated Zane’s handsome face, and he looked up at the snow flying in the sky.

Cough, cough.

The solitary night enveloped him, bringing an air of desolation.

Zane stood alone in the snowy night, bowing his head to cough twice.

Wade Wyatt could not help but feel a deep sorrow. He knew his master did not have much time left.

"Master, what are you thinking about?" Wade asked.

Thinking about what?

Zane slowly curved his thin lips, his eyes scanning over his past years swiftly.

His father, Jude Crawford, his mother, Isabelle Willow, his elder brother, Hayden Crawford, his aunt, Iris Crawford, and his grandmother...

Lastly, he thought of Serena.

He never imagined that the fateful encounter in his youth in the City of Aethelgard would last a lifetime. Serena was all the beauty and warmth in his heart; he loved her.

But she left.

"What time is it now?" he asked.

"Master, it’s midnight," Wade replied.

Midnight?

Wade hesitated, then said, "Master, tonight is New Year’s Eve. Serena has officially ascended as queen, and she will spend this night celebrating the New Year with her people."

As he spoke, Wade handed over a video, and Zane looked down to watch it.

Tonight, the sky over Alani was filled with stars, and all the people gathered in the square, watching the large LCD screen, excitedly counting down five, four, three, two, one!

A delicate face pushed its way into the frame, Serena’s black hair crowned with a tiara, radiant and beautiful. She made a peace sign at the camera and joyfully shouted, "Happy New Year!"

All the people began to cheer, then bang, bang, bang, the sky erupted with brilliant fireworks, bursting and cascading like meteors.

Zane’s gaze seemed to freeze on her animated, joyful face, and then he gently smiled.

He smiled.

His brief life had been dedicated to protecting that smile of hers.

He once promised, with half a life’s splendor, to exchange for her unbridled years, never to part nor sorrow.

He accomplished it.

The wandering monk once left a prophecy that the world would see the era of two kings. This prophecy came true as he became the ruler of Westria and she became the queen of Alani.

He took on the "Ashworth" surname from Hayden's hands. For her, he wielded the Sky Sword. Tonight, his departure would also take away all the deep-rooted grudges between Westria and Alani, and life would return to peace. Future days would flow gently like water.

How wonderful.

Cough, cough.

Zane again lowered his head and coughed twice.

Wade's eyes turned red because he too felt that tonight was his master's final moment. "Master, if you wish to see Miss Sterling, we can go and meet her."

To be with the one he loved would be fulfillment of a kind.

Zane slowly shook his head, "No need."

Wade wanted to say something but all the words stuck in his throat, unable to be spoken.

A tender voice called out, "Uncle."

Zane turned around. Little Caden Crawford had arrived.

Tonight, little Caden also wore a black cloak. Standing quietly there, he possessed phoenix-shaped eyes far too deep for his age, making it hard for others to look directly.

"Caden, come here." Zane's cold black eyes brightened. He stood in the place of highest honor, extending his large hand to little Caden Crawford, "Caden, come to Uncle's side."

Wade stepped aside, looking up at the small figure of Caden Crawford, stepping up the stairs step by step, walking down the path entwined with blood and flowers toward imperial power.

Wade was startled. Caden was only a few years old, yet he already saw the cold and decisive aura of an emperor in the boy.

Little Caden walked over, and Zane took his small hand. The uncle and nephew stood on the royal city, and Zane slowly smiled, "Caden, from now on... I leave this place to you. I believe you were born for it."

Little Caden looked up, his face still tender as he gazed at Zane, "Uncle, I think you're not well now."

Zane gently touched his little head with his large hand, "Caden, you don't understand yet. Uncle is doing well."

"I can tell Mom."

Zane shook his head, "No need to say anything."

After speaking, Zane turned and left.

...

Zane returned to his room, pushing open the door to the back chamber. A breeze swept in, and the room was filled with blooming red beans.

Unknown to anyone else, Zane had planted a garden of red beans in his backyard.

Now, the red beans bloomed.

Zane walked inside, his cold, elegant figure moving through the red beans. He stretched out his slender, clean fingers, plucking a red bean and placing it in his palm.

Red beans symbolizing longing, brimming with his unspoken deep love.

He suddenly remembered the day of the grand wedding when she dressed him in a phoenix coronet and wedding robes. He lifted her red veil with the wedding scales, and in the flickering candlelight, her unparalleled, graceful features.

He always believed it was real.

He thought she was already his wife.

One can be deeply in love in life, but not be the one who knows how to love best. Can such a person find a good end?

Zane softly closed his eyes. Fate is irreversible, life complete, journeying through mountains and waters unseen, destiny as fleeting as clouds and smoke; this life, came only for her!

Chapter 859: Please Grace Us With Your Beauty

Zane Crawford is dead.

Little Caden Crawford found him lying among the red bean bushes, wearing a clean white shirt and black trousers. His aloof elegance was just as before. Over the years, everyone had changed, but Zane Crawford had never changed. He was still the Crawford family's second young master, renowned across City of Aethelgard, with fair, clean hands meant for medical practice.

He died peacefully, a faint smile gracing his lips.

Little Caden Crawford found his fingers curled, holding something in his palm. When opened, it was a bright red... love bean.

According to Zane Crawford's wishes, little Caden Crawford organized a simple funeral, without notifying anyone.

Seraphina Shea came.

Seraphina stood silently before the tombstone. That night, he told her he didn't want her to walk the path he had traveled, and she gave up then.

She knew she would never be the heroine of his story in her entire life. Such a clean and gentle man, all carriages and letters were slow, and his longing was only for her.

Seraphina's eyes reddened as she looked at little Caden Crawford beside her. "Your uncle has entrusted you with the supreme imperial position, but you are still young. Do you need to appoint assisting ministers?"

Little Caden Crawford looked at Zane Crawford's tombstone. His immature voice carried a hint of detachment, "No need, you just need to know that I will follow my uncle's intentions and let the Shea family enjoy wealth and nobility. However, there are things you should not touch. This imperial position is just a coffin, and it can bury many people."

Seraphina took a breath, shocked as she looked at the child next to her. He was only four years old, yet he could say such words.

From the depths of Seraphina’s bones emerged a sense of reverence and fear. Her intuition told her this child, when grown, would be either terrifying in his detachment or overwhelming in his passion.

"Master, shall we return?" Wade Wyatt said respectfully at this moment.

Little Caden Crawford withdrew his gaze and left with Wade Wyatt.

Seraphina opened her palm, already covered in a thin layer of sweat. She knew that an emperor had begun to take shape, and ten or twenty years later, he would be able to turn the tides, omnipotent.

...

Alani.

Serena Sterling sat in front of the dressing table after freshening up. At that moment, a cold wind blew in, pushing open the window of the room.

Serena got up and walked to the window, intending to close it, but quickly hesitated, for she saw the golden maple leaves on the tree ahead "rustle" down.

Serena felt inexplicably cold. She thought of Isabelle Willow and Jude Crawford, who walked on a day like this when the maple leaves were full on the ground. Suddenly, the wind rose again, and it was another night of departure sorrow.

Cherie entered at this time, immediately seeing Serena standing by the window in thin clothing, dazing off, lost in thought.

"Lady, the weather is so chilly, why are you idling here?"

Serena pulled her thoughts back, tugged at her lips, then shook her head, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I always feel like... I've lost something very important in my life again."

Cherie reached out to close the window, "Lady, you must be too tired recently. Don't overthink, rest early."

Is it so?

Serena smiled softly.

Everything returned to calm, and life began to flow gently. Serena managed Alani while searching for Hayden Crawford's whereabouts.

She always believed that Hayden Crawford was not dead.

Perhaps no news now was the best news.

Soon, Serena received an invitation from afar, sent by Seraphina Linden.

Seraphina had finally gotten into the business of running schools, hospitals, ruling the underworld, being a queen, and now enthusiastically started her Nth sideline: opening a red club and being a madam.

Seraphina chose an auspicious day for Phoenix Plume Pavilion to officially open, sending an invitation to Serena. The invitation read, "Serena darling, mommy finally became a madam for a while, clap, scatter flowers, I'm really amazing! Serena darling, please come with your beauty to grace the occasion on XX year

XX month XX day. If you can bring your lovely Leah Thorne as well, all the better! Gifts are waived, bring more beauties, the more the better! Lastly, sending mommy's big kiss~"

Looking at the invitation, Serena was both amused and exasperated. Mommy asked her to grace the occasion wasn't enough, she even targeted Leah.

Fine, mommy had opened her mouth, so she must take Leah along to support. It had been a while since she had contacted Leah, and she didn't know how Leah and Justin Xavier were.

...

City of Aethelgard.

Julian Rathborne had been rather busy lately, away on a business trip for over half a month and only just returned.

Off the private jet, in a black wool coat, he walked through the airport. His handsome appearance and elegant, noble demeanor instantly attracted everyone's gaze, adorned with over tens of millions, followed by his private secretary and butler, directly making young beautiful girls' eyes light up like stars, covering their mouths in case they screamed.

Of course, during this time, Julian Rathborne hadn't stopped doing one thing - namely, looking for Seraphina Linden.

The last time at the Rathborne family, he performed poorly and was teased by her. She left behind a note "Qianghuo cures kidney deficiency" as a joke and vanished.

Julian Rathborne had been searching for her, but she seemed to have vanished without a trace.

Julian Rathborne walked steadily through the airport haughtily asking his private secretary, "Any news of Seraphina Linden?"

The private secretary shook his head, "President, not yet."

At that moment, Julian Rathborne's stride suddenly halted because he saw a particularly large billboard in the airport hall.

Julian Rathborne walked over, and with one look he was directly infuriated.

--Daily story snippet from Crawford and Willow--

He asked her how old she was, saying she was bewitching at such a young age.

Isabelle Willow was caught between his desk and his chest. The familiar crisp scent from him overwhelmed, just as pleasant and enchanting as it was in her past life.

Isabelle's almond eyes blinked as she asked softly, "What does... bewitching mean?"

"..."

Jude Crawford knew she was pretending. Though they said the Crown family girl from the Willows was pure and beautiful, whom was this adorable and playful girl in front of him?

Indeed, hearsay isn't reliable.

At this moment, a sweet scent from a young girl filled his nostrils, as Isabelle suddenly tiptoed, putting her irresistible pretty face close to his, "Mr. Crawford, I'm asking you a question."

Their faces unexpectedly came this close; Jude Crawford's gaze caught her red lips, earlier, this was how she kissed.

Her lips, soft, fragrant.

Chapter 860: You're Amazing!

Julian Rathborne looked at the poster, which had three big words: Phoenix Plume Pavilion!

The promotional tagline for Phoenix Plume Pavilion went like this: Want someone to talk to you about stars and the moon? Want someone who can discuss everything from poetry to philosophy with you? Then come to Phoenix Plume Pavilion!

The poster also featured the spokesperson for Phoenix Plume Pavilion. Julian Rathborne looked to the left and right, not mistaken at all—it was his daughter, Serena Sterling!

Of course, alongside her was Leah Thorne, the Red Rose!

The photos on the poster were photoshopped, but that didn't diminish the beauty of Serena and Leah.

"President, I just found out that... Miss Linden recently opened a... Phoenix Plume Pavilion..." his personal secretary stammered.

Julian Rathborne already frowned, his brows shaped like sharp swords. He asked in a deep, mellow voice, "What does Phoenix Plume Pavilion do?"

The President might be oblivious to worldly affairs, but the personal secretary knew, sweating profusely, cautiously observing the President's expression. "President, let me tell you, don't... get upset, Phoenix Plume Pavilion is... a red-light venue, it has many beautiful ladies... entertaining men, talking... playing... and..."

The personal secretary quickly shut his mouth as Julian Rathborne's handsome face turned icy cold. "What are you talking about?"

The personal secretary immediately straightened his back. "Pres... President, I didn't say anything..."

Julian Rathborne's strong chest heaved as he felt a rush of blood to his head. Born into a privileged life, he kept his private life impeccably clean, never having ventured into places like that. But that didn't mean he was clueless!

He had understood, Seraphina Linden actually opened a red-light venue!

What was the boss of such a venue called... a madam?

Madam...?

Great, she alone being a madam wasn't enough; she roped in his daughter, the heiress of the world's richest man, to endorse her place?

Julian Rathborne quickly lowered his gaze to avoid passing out from the anger, that damn woman, Seraphina Linden!

His lifetime reputation was ruined by her; how many more surprises would she throw at him?

Julian Rathborne looked at his personal secretary. "Take down this billboard!"

"Pres... President," the personal secretary was almost in tears, "the Phoenix Plume Pavilion ads are already out; removing this won't stop them elsewhere."

"Then take down all of them and stop any news!"

"Pres... President, it's probably too late; Miss Linden has sent out an open invitation to all heroes and gentlemen to attend. As the queen of Alani, your daughter is unparalleled in beauty, and Leah Thorne, Miss Leah, is the ever-blooming Red Rose in the entertainment industry. The news of them both endorsing Phoenix Plume Pavilion together has already caused a stir, even crashing the social media site Weibo. Plane tickets are sold out everywhere, and netizens are claiming they would crawl if they must to see Phoenix Plume Pavilion."

"Moreover, dignitaries from various countries have already boarded private jets heading towards Phoenix Plume Pavilion. Haven't you noticed, President, all the business associates with us... are not at home..."

Julian Rathborne, "..."

Julian Rathborne was so angry he was speechless. He quickly took out his phone and dialed Seraphina Linden's number.

He had actually called Seraphina Linden several times during this period, but her phone was always off.

Now, it went through.

The melodious ringtone rang once, then was picked up. Seraphina Linden's charming voice came through, carrying a hint of laughter, clearly in a good mood, "Hello, Mr. Rathborne, how come you thought to give me a call?"

Julian Rathborne ground his teeth in anger. "Where’s my daughter?"

"You’re talking about Serena, right? Serena and Leah are both with me now."

"Make them leave immediately."

"Why?"

"Why do you think? Seraphina Linden, is Serena even your biological daughter?"

"Of course, she’s my own, otherwise, I wouldn’t have called her over."

"..." Julian Rathborne chuckled angrily. "So you’re saying it’s a privilege for Serena to endorse your place?"

"Mr. Rathborne, you’re upset, right? Don’t be, don’t be. I know what you’re upset about—but don’t worry, I’m their mother. I won’t let Serena do anything; just borrowing her beauty for some publicity. After all, Serena and Leah are so famous now, I’m borrowing their fame to gain some traction."

"..."

Listen to her, borrowing her own daughter for publicity.

"Seraphina Linden!" Julian Rathborne gritted his teeth.

"Oh my, Mr. Rathborne, I’m a bit busy now, lots of distinguished guests to host, so I can’t chat with you leisurely. By the way, Mr. Rathborne, be good and take the herb Qiang Huo; I’m looking forward to the day you’ll revive your manly prestige, bye-bye." Seraphina Linden hung up the call.

Listening to the busy tone on the other end, Julian Rathborne felt a rush of blood and his tall, handsome figure swayed.

"President!"

"Prepare the private jet, fly to Phoenix Plume Pavilion immediately!" Julian Rathborne spat out several grim syllables from his thin lips; he would go find her right now and have a good talk about this "manly prestige."

One day, he would make her cry for mercy in bed!

He wanted her to say, Julian Rathborne, you’re amazing!

...

Phoenix Plume Pavilion.

Seraphina Linden went through a whirlwind to set up Phoenix Plume Pavilion, and tomorrow was the grand opening—it was quite the spectacle.

All kinds of heroes and dignitaries from various countries were flocking to attend. Especially near Phoenix Plume Pavilion, there were no vacant rooms in any star-rated hotels. To open a red-light venue to this level, Seraphina Linden claimed second; no one dared claim first.

Serena Sterling and Leah Thorne were already staying at Phoenix Plume Pavilion; the two best friends always had endless topics to discuss. Serena tugged on Leah, "Leah, how are things going between you and President Xavier recently?"

Leah lazily swept her hair away from her cheek. "Since the last farewell in Bayside, he hasn't contacted me or appeared in front of me, I've been busy with promotions and recently joined a new film set, my schedule is packed. I guess we've... lost touch."

Serena looked at Leah; Leah hadn't changed, but also seemed to have changed a lot. Her face was calm, no longer smiling, with a cold, sensual aura that was lazily high-class.

Serena knew that during their last conversation, Justin Xavier had let go of Leah's hand.

How long he could keep up with that, Serena didn't know.

After all, she always felt that Justin Xavier, though outwardly gentle and refined, was dark and brooding inside—like a ticking time bomb. His desire for Leah had been too long, just like he had said himself, he treated Leah as his personal possession.

"Leah, let's talk about you—now that President Xavier has backed off, you need to live a normal life. My kid is already grown, when are you going to start dating?"