

The Kiss 1101

Chapter 1101

Baber was just a kid, clueless about the adult world. He innocently bore the brunt of Patricia's harshness, a trauma that undoubtedly left a deep scar on

his soul.

Ellinor stroked Baber's head tenderly and said, "Don't worry, kiddo. No one's going to hit you anymore?"

Baber snuggled into Ellinor's shoulder, feeling a sense of security and comfort he'd never known before.

He didn't know why, but he believed every word that kind woman said.

When they arrived at Howard Mountain Villa's dining room with Baber, the servants had already prepared a hearty breakfast for them.

Bartlett was dining alone. Seeing them, he cracked a smile, "Why is it just you bringing Baber? where's Theo?"

Ellinor, carrying Baber, walked over and sat a few seats away from Bartlett, then answered, "He's changing his clothes, he'll be here in a bit

"Oh." Bartlett picked up his glass of milk and took a slightly disappointed sip.

Ellinor didn't engage with Bartlett further. She put Baber on a chair and started feeding him breakfast.

Baber was still young, and no one had the patience to teach him how to use cutlery, so he needed someone to feed him.

Baber had developed a habit of grabbing food with his hands. His grandma was hot and cold with him, mostly not willing to make the effort to feed him. That was the first time in a long while that someone had taken such good care of him. Baber cherished it, biting into the bread Ellinor fed him, thinking it was the best thing he'd ever eaten!

"Ellinor."

Bartlett's voice rang out again, with a hint of amusement.

Ellinor wiped the breadcrumbs from Baber's mouth with a napkin, didn't look at Bartlett, and casually asked, "What's up?"

Bartlett said in a teasing tone, "This is a bit surprising."

"What's surprising? That Theo's coming back today?" Ellinor responded nonchalantly.

"No." Bartlett chuckled warmly, "I didn't think you would be so generous, accepting the child Theo adopted with another woman as if it were your own." Ellinor stopped feeding Baber, was silent for a moment, then turned to look at him and said, "I don't see him as my own child. But he's innocent, and my sympathy for him is genuine. Mr. Rex, any thoughts on this?"

Bartlett gave a small smile and said, "None. It's just that you pity Baber, and I pity you."

Ellinor furrowed her brows slightly, not understanding Bartlett's meaning. Just as she was about to ask him, Theo's voice drifted over.

"What are you feeling sorry for her about?"

Bartlett's face stiffened for a moment before he laughed it off. He looked at Theo, who had just entered, and said with a smile, "I feel sorry for Ellinor. She's about to have her own child but has to take care of another one."

"I'll take care of my wife; there's no need for others to worry." Theo responded, then sat down next to Ellinor, took Baber from her, and began to feed him. He said gently to Ellinor, "I'll feed him; you eat."

Ellinor didn't respond; she simply began eating her breakfast.

Bartlett shrugged, took a sip of his milk, and smilingly changed the subject, "Theo, have you settled everything abroad?"

Theo continued to feed Baber as he responded, "No, I just came home to spend some time with my wife. I'll deal with the rest later. Do you need me for something?"

Chapter 1102

Bartlett said casually, "Just a casual question, showing some concern"

Theo scoffed coldly, "After all these years, you're still the same, always having a thing for married women"

Ellinor was stunned after hearing Theo's words. She looked at Bartlett incredulously

What did Theo mean?

Was he saying Bartlett likes to steal other's women?

Bartlett seemed completely unfazed, saying with a smile, "I don't have that kind of habit. Theo, you should trust me, whatever happened before, I was always the passive one."

What happened before?

What? What?

Was there a **story** here?

Ellinor was curious. She looked at Bartlett and then at Theo, wanting to know what had happened between them.

Theo remained expressionless as Bartlett claimed he was the passive one. Seemingly too lazy to argue, he just continued to feed Baber the soup in his

arms.

Bartlett's deep-

set eyes squinted, and with a provocative tone, he said, "But this time, I don't want to hide it from you. I do have a thing for your wife?"

Ellinor choked on her milk, "Cough, cough."

Was Bartlett out of his mind?

Theo remained calm, his cold eyes glancing over, "You dare touch her?"

Bartlett chuckled, "Why are you so worked up? Theo, you don't strike me as someone lacking confidence. Are you truly afraid I steal Ellinor?"

Theo

gave him a cold stare, then looked at Ellinor, his gaze full of confidence, then back at Bartlett, "If you want to steal her, it won't be that easy. Even as a friend, I hope you don't test my patience."

Bartlett laughed lightly, "Oh? Have you three ever really considered me a friend?"

The three?

The three Bartlett was referring to must include Theo, Jonah Wyton, and Kemp Larion, right?

Ellinor was even more curious, her eyes shining as she watched the two men, waiting for more.

However, Theo remained silent, not denying Bartlett's suspicion.

Meaning, he admitted that the three of them never really considered Bartlett a friend.

Bartlett didn't

seem surprised by Theo's admission; he just laughed sarcastically, "Since you three never considered me a friend, do I still need to follow the rule that a friend's wife is off-limits?"

Theo's eyes narrowed, and the atmosphere instantly changed.

Ellinor could feel the tension between the two men; she suddenly worried they might start fighting.

At that moment, Balfour Howard's voice broke the awkward silence.

"What are you guys doing? Not eating? What are you talking about?"

Balfour, leaning on his crutches and unstable on his feet, walked in with the assistance of Quinton.

Seeing Balfour's strong will despite his disability, Ellinor was a bit surprised, and her brows furrowed slightly in displeasure.

Chapter 1103

Balfour was finally there

über Bartlett. As Balfour walked in, the smirk on his face faded. He laughed and teased, "Balfour, it's been years, and it's the first time I've seen you like

Balfour shot him a glance and said, "Seems like you're really in for a treat today!"

Battett chuckled, getting up to help him. Come on, Mr. Howard, take a seat. Seeing you hurt like this, it really gets to me.”

Bafine sorted but didn't turn down Bartlett's help.

Elinor observed Bartlett's attitude towards Balfour and began to think.

It seemed that, like Colin said, Bartlett and Balfour were pretty tight. They even joked around, unlike the sharp tension between Bartlett and Theo.

And the relationship between Thee. Jonah, and Kemp seemed even closer. They often joked around.

Before Elinor thought they were all childhood friends. She didn't expect there to be cliques among these guys!

When Balfour was about to sit down, his eyes landed on Elinor. He frowned, “You came here alone and didn't even tell me?”

Elinor shrugged it off, taking a sip of her soup. I didn't tell you, but you found out anyway, didn't you?”

Balfour said, “You're really making people worry, you know?”

Before Xena and Patricia had attacked Elinor. How dare she meet Xena alone?

He heard about Elinor's purpose for going there, which was to discuss Baber's custody with Xena, but he was still angry about her reckless behavior.

If something had happened, it would have been too late for regrets!

Elinor wasn't happy about Balfour's immediate criticism and accusation, “Mr. Howard, did you get something wrong? First of all, I didn't come here on my own. I've already told your execs. Secondly, I didn't tell you because there was no need. Although I used to work at the Howard Group for a while, you've fired me! Now I'm not your subordinate. I don't need to report my whereabouts to you, do I?”

Balfour was at a loss for words. He always saw her as a little sister, but she didn't see him as a big brother.

In Elinor's heart, he might not even be as good as a stranger, right?

Every time he thought about those, Balfour would feel bitter and guilty.

Although he was angry he had no right to blame Elinor. After all, he was wrong in the way he treated his sister!

When Elinor responded like that, Balfour softened his tone. “Elinor, as your brother, I'm not blaming you. I'm just worried about you...”

Elinor scoffed. You don't need to don't remember having a brother like you! Mr. Howard, I hope you can understand your position in the future and stop

merely in my affairs.”

Balfour said nothing

Barden had never seen the proud Balfour being criticized so straightforwardly. He found it quite amusing.

He had noticed that Balfour's attitude towards Elinor was a bit different. At first, he wondered if Balfour had a crush on Elinor.

But as far as he knew Balfour wasn't into cute little girls like Elinor.

Later, through observation and deduction, he figured out that Elinor might be Balfour's long-lost sister!

Probably only a sister could make Balfour so downcast and submissive.

Balfour "I thought you came to the villa specifically to find me and to treat me well! Now it seems it has nothing to do with me!" Bartlett joked.

Chapter 1104

Balfour shot him an annoyed glance and said, "Buzz off! If you want to hang out here, go ahead, if not, beat it! You know, if you shut up, no one would think you're mute!"

Bartlett shrugged and smirked, "Look at you, Mr. Howard, you sure know how to talk back to me, but when it comes to Elinor, you turn into a scaredy-cat!"

Balfour's expression turned serious, reaching for his cane to give him a good whack.

Seeing that, Bartlett quickly stood up and shrugged again, "I'm full. I'm going to take a stroll outside. You guys take your time!"

With that, he hightailed it out of there.

Only then did Balfour toss his cane aside, letting out a sigh.

Elinor could tell that Balfour and Bartlett got along like a house on fire, with no pretense of politeness there.

Frustrated at his powerlessness when it came to his own sister, Balfour turned his unhappy gaze to the silent Theo and asked, "When did you get back?*

After feeding Baber, Theo wiped the little one's mouth with a napkin, answering casually, "Took a red-eye back this morning."

Balfour's face was grim, "You're quite something, leaving pregnant Elinor alone at home while you gallivant around overseas!"

Theo's expressionless face furrowed slightly, seemingly aware of his lapse but helpless to do otherwise, "Things were a bit hairy abroad. I didn't want to drag her around with me either."

Balfour remained poker-faced, "I hope you were really busy working; don't let me find out you've done my sister wrong."

Theo retorted coldly, “You’re overthinking this, Mr. Howard. You might want to sort yourself out first. Ellinor hasn’t even acknowledged you as her brother yet.”

Balfour said nothing.

If Ellinor hadn’t acknowledged him, he didn’t even have the right to lecture Theo.

Balfour glanced helplessly at Ellinor, hoping she would understand his feelings as her brother.

But Ellinor ignored him, focusing on her breakfast, occasionally glancing at the child in Theo’s arms and chatting with him.

Baber, having eaten his fill and feeling an unprecedented sense of security, started to feel sleepy.

Having stayed awake all night for fear that Ellinor might leave and not daring to seek her out behind his grandma’s back, he then felt his eyelids growing heavy, struggling to stay awake.

Seeing Baber’s state, Ellinor, having finished her meal, reached out and said, “Mr. Blanchet, Baber’s sleepy. Hand him to me. I’ll take him back to the room – for a nap! You should eat something too!”

But Theo didn’t hand the child over, softly saying, “I’m not hungry. I’ll take him back to the room to rest. You should eat more; how could soup be enough?”

Before Ellinor could say anything else, Theo had already stood up, cradling the child, and turned to leave.

Before Theo arrived here, he had Collin keep a close eye on Ellinor, not letting her eat any food from the Howard family. Since he was there then, he had Collin supervise the Howard family’s kitchen.

The ingredients for today’s breakfast were all personally bought by Collin from local villagers’ homes, and the cooking was also overseen by him in the kitchen. So, all of it was perfectly safe.

Chapter 1105

So, Theo had no worries, letting her eat her fill.

Seeing Theo leave with the kid, a faint smile appeared on Ellinor’s face.

She still felt a little hungry. Well, no harm in eating more!

The back-kitchen chefs at Howard Mountain Villa were top-notch, and the breakfast hit the spot.

However, her main beef was that she wasn’t alone. Balfour was sitting across from her, watching her eat. And it was really getting on her nerves.

Balfour saw Theo leaving with Baber and squinted his eyes slightly. Being a cool cucumber, he quickly caught on. That was an opportunity Theo had created for him to spend some alone time with his sister and have a chat.

Theo seemed even more aloof than him, but sometimes he could be understanding.

Maybe he was considering Balfour's role as an uncle-in-law and preparing for possible future scenarios!

"Ellinor, anything else you fancy? I can have it made for you." Balfour asked with concern.

Ellinor, however, wasn't too pleased. She furrowed her brows and looked at him warily, "Enough! Mr. Howard, I appreciate the gesture, but please don't refer to yourself as my brother. Thanks for your cooperation!"

Balfour sighed, "Alright, I'll try my best!"

While munching on her bread, Ellinor suddenly remembered something and asked, "Mr. Howard, did Bartlett have any beef with Theo, Jonah, or Kemp before?"

Hearing Ellinor's question, Balfour was taken aback, "Why do you ask?"

Ellinor said, "Oh, you walked in just as they seemed to be having a bit of a tiff. It sounded like they had some sort of fallout before. Mr. Howard, do you know anything about it? Can you spill the beans?"

While Balfour wasn't exactly best buds with Theo, Bartlett was his friend, and it wasn't his place to badmouth his friend.

"Ellinor, you're a girl! You don't need to poke your nose into these men's business!"

Ellinor's face, which had previously been eager to know the truth, turned bored. She huffed and stopped paying any attention to Balfour.

Seeing that, Balfour felt helpless and somewhat at a loss. Ellinor had just initiated a conversation with him, and he seemed to have ticked her off again.

He hesitated for a moment and decided to let Ellinor in on the past, but before he could open his mouth, Xenia's crying could be heard from outside.

"Mr. Blanchet, considering the years of friendship between Patricia and you, could you help me get Patricia out of prison? I promise, Patricia won't interfere with you and Mrs. Mendoza anymore. Please, I beg you..."

Then, Theo's cold voice sounded, "The emotional relationship between Patricia and me was a scam you orchestrated. We don't actually have any friendship. Mrs. Howard, out of respect for you as my elder, I try not to say much. Don't push me to say something unpleasant."

"Mr. Blanchet, but my daughter Patricia is really innocent; she loves you so much..."

Theo said, "I've already been lenient by not holding you two accountable for deceiving me. What more do you want from me?"

Chapter **1106**

"No way! Mr. Blanchet, Patri really loves you; she would do anything for you, really...*

Hearing the commotion outside, Ellinor got up to investigate, finding Xenia on her knees in front of Theo, pleading for her daughter, tears streaming down her face.

Ellinor squinted. Sometimes Xenia *just* didn't get the picture. Why would she think pleading with Theo would do any good?

Throughout the entire thing, Theo remained cool as a cucumber, just looking down at her with a gaze filled with indifference and disgust.

"Mrs. Howard, your daughter made her bed; now she has to lie in it. Unless she owns up to her mistakes and changes, no one can help her."

Xenia let out a couple of sobs, and when she realized it was no use, she wiped her tears and changed her tune. Mr. Blanchet, since you're so cold-hearted, just give Baber back to me!"

Theo raised an eyebrow in mock surprise. "Give him back to you? He's my legally adopted child. Why should I give him to you?"

Xenia stood up, dusted herself off, and said as if she had the moral high ground, "Mr. Blanchet, you only went abroad with Patri to help her adopt this child. It was agreed between you two that the child would be solely Patri's. You wouldn't have any responsibility or custody rights. Isn't that right?"

While Baber didn't understand every word, he could sense the tension in Xenia's tone and clung tightly to Theo, afraid his dad would hand him over to his grandma.

Theo patted the child in his arms, reassuring him not to worry, then responded to Xenia calmly, "Mrs. Howard, you're not wrong. Your daughter did pretend to be my lifesaver, coercing me into helping her adopt this child. We did agree on custody.

But everything has to be legal. Now that the child's adoptive mother is in jail, I, the legal adoptive father, have naturally become the primary guardian. It's not your turn yet, is it?"

Xenia knew she was in the wrong, but she wasn't ready to give up her bargaining chip, Baber. "Mr. Blanchet, you make a good point, but you're a man. You don't know how to take care of a child. Baber would be better off with his grandma, don't you think?"

"Even though he's a man and might not know how to take care of a child, his wife, I, his wife, can definitely help!" Ellinor slowly walked over and stood by Theo's side.

Xenia was taken aback. "You help? How good can a stepmother be to a child?"

Ellinor smiled slightly. "Even if I'm a stepmother, your daughter is not his biological mother, is she? And it's pretty clear Baber doesn't want to be with you. Mrs. Howard, can't you see it? If you and your daughter really cared for him, he wouldn't be clinging to Mr. Blanchet so tightly, would he?"

Xenia was left speechless, grinding her teeth and glaring at Ellinor. "I'm discussing the child's matters with his adoptive father. It's none of your business. Please don't interrupt!"

“If she can’t interrupt, can I?” Balfour, leaning heavily on his crutches, limped over. “You insist on keeping Baber by your side. Is it because you think you can take good care of him?”

Xenia was startled when she saw Balfour, her confidence faltering. “Balfour, you’re here too?”

Balfour

limped over and stood next to Ellinor. “Xenia, my grandpa sent you here to reflect on your actions. But from what I see, you don’t seem to be planning **to do** that. And you want the child to stay with you?”

Xenia had always been somewhat afraid of Balfour, “But... but Baber is Patri’s child. He’s my grandson...”

Balfour scoffed, “You’ve had Patri thrown in jail. What do you plan to turn Baber into? Do you think the Howard family would agree to let you raise him? Even if my grandpa and grandma agreed, I would never let you screw up Baber!”

“You’re all trying **to** drive me to my death! Patri was taken away, and if I don’t have Baber, what’s the point of living? I might as well just die!” Unable to refute him, Xenia flew into a rage and made a beeline for a nearby pillar.

Seeing that, the servants **of** the Howard family, who had been standing by, were scared out of their wits and rushed to stop her.

Chapter 1107

Hearing Balfour’s order, the servants of the Howard family, who were originally going to rush up to stop her, stopped and retreated.

Balfour sneered sarcastically, “I really want to see whether a woman who pursues wealth and power by any means, has the courage **to** actually die.”

Seeing no one coming to stop her, Xenia could only slow down, gently hit the pillar, and then pretend to faint.

Seeing that, Balfour signaled Quinton to check.

After checking Xenia’s breath, Quinton replied to Balfour, “The lady should be okay; she just fainted.”

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A look of disgust flashed in Balfour’s eyes, “Alright, have her carried back to her room; don’t embarrass us here!”

Several servants stepped forward to carry away the pretend-fainted Xenia.

Balfour said to the remaining servants, “Don’t worry, she’ll be fine. From now on, no matter how she makes a scene here, just ignore her until she calms down.”

The servants responded in unison, “Yes, Mr. Howard!”

Then, Balfour turned his gaze to Ellinor next to him, “Ellinor, you weren’t scared just now, were you?”

Ellinor shrugged, “No. I’m used to her drama.”

Balfour gave a helpless smile, "Then just ignore her; let's go back and continue our breakfast!"

Ellinor waved her hand, "I've lost my appetite; you can go eat. I'm going back to the room with Mr. Blanchet!"

Although Balfour wanted to chat with his sister for a while, since she said so, he couldn't refute anything and nodded gently, "Okay, you guys go!"

Ellinor turned to Theo and said, "Let's go, Mr. Blanchet!"

Theo, holding Baber, followed Ellinor back to the room.

Not long after returning to the room, Baber fell asleep. Perhaps knowing that he would not be left behind again, he slept particularly soundly.

Theo, who had flown back overnight, was also very tired and rested next to Baber for a while.

Ellinor looked at the two sleeping people on the bed, her eyes unconsciously showing tenderness.

Although she was still a little dissatisfied with Theo, she had to admit her concern for him. She went over and covered both him and Baber with a blanket.

Chapter 1108

Next, Ellinor started packing her stuff.

After a night at Howard Mountain Villa, it was about time to head home.

And since Theo had also shown up, if all went well, they should be able to take Baber home without a hitch.

That would mean she'd accomplished what she went there for. There was no need to linger.

☯ ☯ ☯ ☯ ☯ ☯

As she was packing, her phone rang.

Not wanting to disturb the two sleepers, Ellinor grabbed her phone and stepped out of the room to take the call.

It was Chase Larios on the line. The usually laid-back guy sounded pretty busy, "Boss, where are you?"

Ellinor answered honestly, "I'm at Howard Mountain Villa What's up?"

Chase responded, "Howard Mountain Villa? Where's that? Send me your location. I need to see you. We need to talk."

Seeing Chase being so cautious, Ellinor felt it must have been something important, maybe not something he could discuss over the phone.

"You don't need to come here. I'm heading back today. Meet me at Twilight Bar tonight."

Chase replied, "Alright! Ida and I will be at Twilight Bar waiting for you."

After hanging up, Ellinor felt a bit uneasy. It was rare for anything to get Chase that serious. She was worried something big might be going down.

She put down her phone and turned around, only to find Theo leaning at the door, his deep eyes fixed on her.

Ellinor was taken aback, frowning, "Why are you up? Why not sleep a bit more?"

Theo squinted slightly, "Who were you talking to on the phone? Why did you sneak out to take it?"

Hearing that, Ellinor was a bit peeved and shot him a glare, "It was Chase. I stepped out so I wouldn't wake you and Baber! Is there a problem?"

Theo walked over and lifted her chin, asking seriously, "Do you keep in touch with Chase often?"

Ellinor answered straightforwardly, "Yes! I've told you, he's like family to me. He is a very important friend. Of course, we keep in touch."

Theo scoffed, "No blood relation, and you call him family? You might see him as family, but he might not see you the same way."

Ellinor frowned unhappily, "What are you getting at? Are you doubting my relationship with Chase again?"

Theo, holding her chin, his fingers lightly grazing her smooth cheek, said, "I'm not doubting you, but I have no reason not to doubt him. For a man who's always trying to contact someone else's wife, it's normal to question his motives."

Ellinor glared at Theo, quite upset, "You have time to doubt others; why not take a good look at yourself first, Mr. Blanchet?"

Hearing the sarcasm in her words and her addressing him as Mr. Blanchet, Theo's brow furrowed, "Look at myself? What have I done to upset you?"

Chapter 1109

Ellinor shoved off the big hand on her face, grumbling, "You know exactly what you've been up to; do I really need to spell it out?"

Theo raised an eyebrow, trying to recall what he might have done but was clueless.

"Did I piss you off again? I just got back and wanted to kiss you. I even held back when you didn't want to! What else did I do?"

Hearing him bluntly say "wanted to kiss you," Ellinor's cheeks flushed slightly, but her annoyance didn't fade.

Since it had come to that, she decided to lay it all out.

"Theo Blanchet!" It was rare for Ellinor to call out his full name.

Typically, she only did this when things got serious, to which Theo immediately responded, "I'm here."

Ellinor stared at him, asking, "While you were abroad, did you stay with any other women?"

The question caught Theo off guard. He thought for a moment, then it clicked, "So, you're mad about that? I was wondering why you've been so cold!"

Seeing him dodge the question, Ellinor got even more pissed, "If you know why I'm mad, then why not just come clean? If you dare lie to me, either keep me in the dark forever or be prepared to cut ties with me!"

Seeing Ellinor so serious, Theo got a bit nervous. He reached out, pulling her into his embrace, "Why would you say something that scares me like that?"

Ellinor tried to break free but failed, so she landed a punch on him, "I'm serious, I'm not joking! If you lie, we're done!"

Ellinor's fist hit his chest, causing him pain. But he didn't let go, instead he held her tighter and whispered, "No, I was just **on** a business trip. I didn't stay with any other women! I wouldn't dare!"

Though his words were filled with affection, Ellinor's gaze turned icy.

"Are you lying to me? Before you came back, I clearly heard a woman's voice when you were on the phone! And one day, a woman picked up your call, saying you were sleeping! What woman has the right to be in your room when you're sleeping? Dare you say you didn't stay with any other women?"

Ellinor felt disappointed. If Theo had told her the truth, she might have believed his explanation.

Maybe some female friend or colleague from out of town had to spend the night at his place due to some unavoidable circumstances, and nothing happened.

But he flat-out denied it, which was a blatant lie!

Seeing Ellinor's face darken, Theo rubbed his temples, quickly explaining honestly, "You're right, I was sleeping, but not at home; it was at the office out of town.

Handling overseas matters is tough, so I had to work overtime that day, stayed in the office overnight, and didn't go back to my place.

The one who picked up my call was a secretary there; she happened to hear the phone ringing when she was tidying up the office, so she answered.

I meant to call you that day and explain, but you didn't pick up, and I forgot.

Due **to** my tight work schedule, I couldn't find time to properly contact *you*. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to resist coming back to you if I did, so I've been resisting checking my phone.

Sure enough, after your call yesterday, I missed you so much that I immediately flew back.”

Chapter 1110

Ellinor stayed silent, thinking to herself, “Is this for real?”

The man pulled her into a tight embrace, his chin resting lightly on top of her head, brushing against her hair, “I finally made it back, and you won’t even give me a peck? Do you have any idea how hard it’s been for me to hold **back?**”

The sincerity **in** the man’s voice made Ellinor’s heart waver, and she chose to believe him.

“Next time you go out, can you give me a heads up? I worry about you too, okay?”

With that, she lifted her head, yanked at his tie, and stood **on** her toes, leaning in for a kiss.

Caught off guard by her sudden move, the man was speechless for a moment, a smirk forming on his lips. He cradled the back of her head with his hand, greedily reciprocating her kiss.

Feeling light-headed

from the passionate kiss, Ellinor found herself being led by the man, a stark contrast to her initial assertiveness!

Unbeknownst to the two lovebirds, someone was watching them from a distance.

Howard Mountain Villa was home to a variety of plants, most notably the pink trumpet trees.

Dean was fond of those trees, so there was at least one in every garden as a decorative piece.

Balfour and Bartlett were standing by one of the pink trumpet trees nearby, observing the intimate scene between the **couple**, each with their own thoughts and expressions.

Balfour had never liked the Blanchet family,

let alone Theo, his business rival. But seeing his sisters head over heels for the man, he was both frustrated and helpless.

He watched the scene unfold, a surge of protectiveness welling up within him, and the urge to intervene almost overwhelming.

But he knew he had no right to interfere; his sisters didn’t even recognize him as their brother!

Bartlett was watching the scene intently—the sight of Ellinor standing on her toes to wrap her arms around Theo’s neck. His eyes were filled with a hazy darkness and a tinge of jealousy he had never felt before.

He had never been

interested in any woman as much as he was in Ellinor. From the moment he met her, he was drawn to her and made a move.

It turned out that she was involved with Theo.

He knew he shouldn't get any closer to her, but he couldn't help himself. Every time he saw her, he couldn't help but want to strike up a conversation. Even knowing that Ellinor didn't like him, even being repulsed by him, he couldn't help himself.

He thought that a girl like Ellinor wouldn't be very fond of Theo either. But the scene in front of him made him realize that Ellinor was in love with Theo. A girl who loved her freedom like Ellinor wouldn't stay with a man unless she was in love with him.

Just like a bird who wanted to fly, no tree could keep it grounded.

Bartlett had always been the apple of girls' eyes; he was never short of female companions, and he had ample dating experience. But he had never experienced the feeling of being genuinely in love with someone.