

## Chapter 612 Challenge

Maxine's sly, unsettling grin made Katrina's skin crawl, but she had no choice but to kneel in silence. In Maxine's presence, she always felt so small.

"Katrina, this is your chance to prove yourself," Maxine said, her eyes sharp and her tone cold. "If you succeed, your place as the heir to the Griffiths family will be secured. But if you fail, you have no right to blame me for showing no mercy." She paused long enough for the weight of her words to settle. "As the head of this family, my duty is to choose the most deserving successor. So, will you take on this challenge?"

Katrina's heart thudded like a drum in her chest. She tried to hold Maxine's gaze, but the words nearly choked her.

She understood just how dangerous this challenge could be—failure didn't just mean disgrace, it could mean death. Turning away now meant surrendering her right to the throne right then and there. She wouldn't let that happen. Losing her claim was unthinkable. She had waited for years, her heart set on becoming the leader of the Griffiths family. She would never let that opportunity slip through her fingers—not while she could still fight.

Conflicting emotions threatened to overwhelm Katrina, leaving her torn between the fear of failure and the pull of her ambition.

Maxine didn't press Katrina for an answer, instead letting the moment stretch. An heir to the Griffiths family, after all, needed the composure to face impossible decisions, not act on impulse.

Jules, despite Maxine's affection for him since childhood, never forgot that he was adopted. He kept his head bowed, knowing his place in this matter.

When the silence had lingered long enough, Katrina straightened her back and fixed her eyes on Maxine. "I'll do it. I accept the challenge."

Maxine kept her face unreadable, the only shift a faint lift of her brow.

"Have you really thought things through?" she asked, her tone flat.

"I have," Katrina replied, her voice gaining strength. "You always told me that a real heir never backs down. I refuse to be a coward."

Maxine appreciated this answer. A faint hint of approval flickered across her face. "Well said, Katrina. Your choice does not disappoint me." Yet, in the next breath, her voice changed, turning sharp and cold. "I should warn you, this challenge is anything but simple. The odds are stacked against you, and failure could cost you your life."

"I have no fear," Katrina answered, her voice firm with resolve. "For this challenge, I am prepared to risk everything, even my own life."

Katrina's resolute, no-turning-back bearing pleased Maxine all over again.

Maxine reached out, her hand settling on Katrina's head in a gesture that looked gentle but carried no comfort. Just as quickly, her tone turned sharp. "Katrina, your challenge is simple. Eliminate Elliana."

Shock rippled through Katrina. She hadn't expected the challenge to be killing Elliana. But it wasn't a daunting challenge.

True, their attempt to claim Elliana's life the other night had failed, but that was more a result of poor planning and the grand error of underestimating Elliana. Elliana had blindsided everyone with that fierce display, but their failure was less about her strength and more about their own arrogance. They'd gone in without a proper plan, and Cole showing up at the worst moment tipped the odds in Elliana's favor. If not for that, they would have come back victorious. Next time would be different. With enough people and a real strategy, finishing the job wouldn't be difficult.

A sideways glance caught Jules with his mouth slightly open, like he couldn't believe what he'd just heard from Maxine.

No reaction crossed Maxine's face. She remained unreadable, offering no explanation.

The truth was, Maxine had already deduced that Elliana was anything but ordinary—there must be shocking secrets lurking beneath her surface, for geniuses were never meant to be mundane.

Yet, even after getting burned once, Katrina and Jules still couldn't fathom Elliana's true caliber. Their cluelessness indicated their lack of wisdom and perceptiveness. Maxine decided to let experience teach them instead of spelling it out.

"Is that really all about the challenge?" Katrina asked, her voice shaking between disbelief and hope.

Maxine's lips curled into a quiet smile. "Yes, that's all," she responded. As she spoke, she produced a weighty, obsidian ring—the legendary Onyx Signet. Anyone who possessed it controlled the entire Serpent Society.

A flash of hesitation crossed Katrina's face. The Onyx Signet's significance spoke for itself. Only the rightful leader was meant to wield it, and she wasn't sure she was ready.

Maxine pressed the Onyx Signet into Katrina's hand. "Starting now, every resource and every member of the Serpent Society is yours to command," she said. "Use whoever you want. Make your own decisions. You don't need to report to me. You have one month to finish Elliana. Succeed, and I'll hand you the reins of the family." Her eyes gleamed with an unsettling amusement. "But fail, and Elliana will become the heir instead."

Shock hit Katrina and Jules like a punch to the chest. For a moment, neither of them moved. Elliana was a stranger by blood—a child of Rita and Arthur, not a drop of Griffith's lineage in her veins. How could Maxine entertain the notion of giving Elliana the family legacy?

Maxine offered no explanation. Instead, her cold stare landed on Jules. "If Katrina fails, your value as her partner will be rendered obsolete."