

Chapter 531 Leonel, Are You Threatening Me With Yourself

Late into the night, Edwin, instead of basking in newlywed bliss, found himself compelled to meet with Leonel.

He knocked on the door when he arrived.

Leonel appeared, weariness etched deeper into his features compared to Edwin's countenance.

Leaning against the doorframe with one hand, a cigarette poised elegantly between his fingers on the other, Edwin's gaze bore into Leonel's soul, each sizing up the other in silent appraisal.

After a fleeting moment of scrutiny, Leonel said softly, "Come inside."

Edwin, cigarette between his teeth, strode in, casting a glance at the red wine on the table and the pile of cigarette butts in the ashtray. Drawing conclusions about Leonel's recent hardships, he found some solace in it.

Pouring himself half a glass of red wine, Edwin took a sip and remarked, "Such fine wine treated like water from a tap, quite the waste, don't you think?"

Seating himself, Edwin leveled his gaze at Leonel and quipped, "Seems you've got a spat brewing with Alexis, and I'm the unintended pawn. What's your game, Leonel?"

Leonel reached for a cigarette, lighting it at a leisurely pace, a faint smile playing on his lips. "Alexis hold you in high regard, doesn't she?"

Edwin's stare grew icier, tinged with smoldering rage.

His ire seemed inconsequential to Leonel.

Leonel was aware that Edwin was obviously up to no good.

Not holding back, Edwin rasped, "Leonel, I've spent half a year figuring out the Smith family's labyrinth, on the brink of reaping the rewards, and you come in now?! Laura's carrying my child, and time's ticking. I've no bandwidth for tangling with the Smiths."

Leonel offered a smile and congratulations, and then sighed.

"I, too, yearn to be a father. With Alexis carrying my children."

Observing Leonel's nonchalance, Edwin's heart burned with anger, his wedding night becoming the last thing he cared about.

The designer furniture met its demise under Edwin's fury.

He spat words at Leonel, "Keep dreaming!"

Leonel, under the shimmering light, met Edwin's rage with eyes that seemed to flicker with determination.

He said bluntly, "Indeed, I dream of having children with Alexis every night!"

Edwin's patience wore thin, and a scuffle ensued.

"Alexis is a person! Not an object for your whims!" Edwin retorted.

"Hah! You, raised in the Fowler family, now turn against them!" he continued.

"You're nothing but an ingrate!" Edwin snapped.

"I am, indeed! If Alexis won't be with me... Then let's burn it all down together!" Leonel's voice resonated with madness.

"You lunatic! You wish!"

Edwin's frustration peaked, their struggle mirroring old conflicts, each blow landing with intent.

In the end, both collapsed to the floor.

Leonel's health wasn't in its pink, and Edwin, who had overexerted himself tonight, was also tired, so neither of them had an edge.

After a brief respite, Edwin rose shakily, venting his anger with kicks towards Leonel. "You scoundrel! Drown in your riches!"

Leonel groaned hoarsely.

As Edwin left, settling into his car, he delayed starting the engine, opting instead to light a cigarette.

Smoke rings spiraled out as he mulled over the recent events. He thought Leonel had lost his mind.

He returned to the hotel.

Laura, worried about him, hadn't slept yet and immediately got up from bed when the door opened. "You're back!"

Edwin's heart softened. Discarding his coat, he enveloped Laura in his arms soothingly.

Gently, he stroked the back of her neck, saying tenderly, "It's late, the baby needs rest."

Laura detected the scent of blood.

With a careful inspection, she asked softly, "Did you have a fight?"

Edwin gave a faint hum in response.

Fetching the first aid kit, Laura tended to his wounds after making him sit on the sofa.

Edwin, though preoccupied, remained patient. With a submissive demeanor, Laura was pulled onto his lap, his hand wandering under her nightgown, playful yet absent-minded.

"Behave yourself!" Laura protested.

Chuckling, Edwin leaned in. "You're too adorable, and I just can't resist!"

Her cheeks flushed red.

As she painstakingly treated his wounds, he embraced and teased her once more, making even her small nose turn red, calling him an animal in the end.

The more she pushed back, the more Edwin found himself intrigued.

Three days rolled by.

The impending signing of the intent contract between Leonel and the Smith family loomed closer.

Leonel patiently awaited Alexis.

He reckoned that Alexis couldn't remain aloof to Edwin's plight. He had recently tied the knot but had to neglect his marital duties, working endless hours at the firm. Surely, she must be aware.

But after three days, Alexis hadn't made contact.

Leonel sat in his office, his countenance slightly grim.

His secretary entered, saying softly, "Mr. Douglas, Miss Smith has arrived and wishes to see you."

Vanessa?

Leonel replied nonchalantly, "Send her in."

Moments later, Vanessa entered.

This wasn't their first encounter, but their interactions had been scarce. Vanessa had found it hard to believe Leonel, an adopted child of the Fowler family, would invest in the Smith family. Besides, as the contract signing drew nearer, Leonel displayed no signs of retreat.

Vanessa, having her own agenda, chose to seek an audience with him.

She had dressed particularly elegantly today.

But Leonel was in no mood to appreciate it.

He seemed preoccupied until Vanessa called out multiple times, jolting him back to reality. "Apologies, Miss Smith, what were you saying?"

Vanessa gazed at the business magnate before her.

She was flipped.

True, she harbored affection for Edwin, but over the past six months, Edwin had put her through the wringer.

He'd already wedded another woman and even started a family.

Now, Vanessa wanted a potent ally. She had set her sights on Leonel, who was both handsome and affluent. Despite lacking a powerful lineage, she aimed to have a hold over him.

Vanessa took the initiative. "Lunchtime is approaching. Would Mr. Douglas fancy joining me for a meal?"

Leonel eyed her pensively.

Vanessa's intentions were transparent.

Rather than being drawn to Leonel himself, she seemed more intrigued by the wealth he carried.

But Leonel wasn't taken with her.

He was about to decline when his phone rang, and he picked it up.

After hanging up, he said impassively, "Alright then! There's a French restaurant across the street. Would Miss Smith do me the honor of accompanying me?"

Vanessa felt a tinge of excitement.

She had her own plans to discuss with Leonel.

This man before her was capable and ruthless. Love was no longer on her agenda at this stage of life. She believed Leonel could be the right match for her—most importantly, she could use him to crush Edwin, making him rue his past decisions.

At the French restaurant, Leonel seemed preoccupied while Vanessa kept rambling about her plans.

Leonel smiled absently. "Was your approach with Edwin the same?"

Vanessa's face turned red...

The man in front of her saw right through her facade.

Leonel idly toyed with his lighter, a faint smile lingering on his lips. "Edwin doesn't fancy assertive women. He prefers them a tad more submissive, a bit gentler."

Laura was tailor-made for him.

Delicate, stunning, and compliant.

Leonel had met Laura only a few times but found her quite endearing—the sort suited to be a homebound partner. She was actually quite like Cecilia in a way.

Vanessa blurted out, "Do you also prefer such women, Mr. Douglas?"

Leonel cast his gaze downward. "I prefer them a bit more untamed!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the very wild one herself entered the restaurant. Alexis glanced at Leonel as she strolled past and, naturally, at Vanessa too.

It was then that Vanessa comprehended why Leonel had invited her for lunch.

And why this particular venue.

It was for Alexis!

Instantly, she felt ill at ease, lowering her voice. "Alexis is a strong, assertive woman as well, not much different from me!"

Leonel remained silent.

He felt comparing Alexis to Vanessa was an insult to Alexis.

Alexis wouldn't latch onto a man for his wealth over a meal, nor would she contemplate marrying someone solely for a semblance of pride.

Leonel suddenly could see why he was drawn to Alexis.

Alexis possessed numerous qualities that others lacked.

Born with privilege, she never settled for anything less; she always liked the previous incarnation of Leonel, not the tainted one he'd now become.

This realization subtly shifted his mood.

Alexis didn't return his glance; she was engrossed with a client, an elderly lady.

Post a brief repast and business banter, she escorted her guest out and turned back to settle the tab.

However, Leonel had already taken care of it. Alexis pondered for a moment, and then approached him. "Thanks!"

Leonel sat up straight.

Even in Vanessa's presence, his gaze towards Alexis bore the unmistakable intensity of a man looking at a woman.

Alexis nodded subtly. "Do you have a minute?"

Leonel reached for his wallet and pulled out a few hundred-dollar bills.

He placed them on the table and said to Alexis, "Let's roll!"

Alexis furrowed her brows slightly, glancing at Vanessa, and then remarked, "No need! It's just a quick talk!"

But Leonel insisted.

He gestured to Vanessa and then grasped Alexis' arm, leaving the restaurant.

Vanessa remained seated by herself.

She struggled to control her breathing, cursing inwardly. Leonel was such a cad! Worse than any man she'd ever encountered! He was stringing the Smith family along while pandering at Alexis' feet.

A genuine rogue, a fucking scoundrel!

But she didn't dare offend him, as she couldn't afford to. Leonel was the only hope of the Smith family, their savior!

Outside the restaurant, Alexis gently pulled her hand away from Leonel.

He stood there silently, observing her every move.

After a moment's pause, he swung open the car door, inviting her to step inside.

Alexis hesitated briefly before accepting the offer and slid into the black Range Rover.

Once inside, Leonel reached for a cigarette but reconsidered with Alexis inside.

He put it away with a sigh. "For Edwin?" he inquired, looking at her intently.

Alexis gazed ahead, taking her time before speaking softly. "Leonel, our problems have nothing to do with Edwin! You reckon using Edwin to sway me back into your arms?"

"Yes!

And now, will you concede?"

Alexis slowly turned her head, her eyes slightly reddened.

Leonel locked eyes with her without wavering.

Alexis' voice tensed. "I don't bow to threats, not from anyone, not even you! You're no exception!"

Silence enveloped them momentarily. "Have you ever thought, if my Dad and Edwin's step in, your strongest cards would crumble? All the big shots in Duefron would band together against you. What tale will you spin for your investors then? Fancy ending up in a cell or jumping from a

rooftop?"

Unexpectedly, Leonel laughed.

He then whispered softly, "I couldn't care less if I'd lose it all."

Alexis' lips quivered.

Leonel leaned in close, whispering into her ear, "Alexis, you're right. I'm not dangling Edwin like bait. It's me I'm throwing into the fray!"

Alexis' slender throat bobbed up and down.

She couldn't forget how Leonel's mother met her end— jumping from a towering building.

That streak of madness ran in Leonel's blood.

She hadn't noticed it before, but now it was crystal clear.

Leonel was a genuine lunatic, a risk-taker!

"What if I refuse?" Alexis managed to utter.

A faint smile played on Leonel's lips. "Then I've got nothing left to lose! Alexis... Truth be told, those years together, I was mighty content."

His youthful rebellion cost him their bond.

No matter how many times he professed his love for her, she wouldn't believe it.

Life would not have been as difficult, Leonel reasoned, if he had never known her.

But they had happened, and there was no going back.

They were so well together that they could have even gotten married. If only that night he hadn't struck her, perhaps they would've had a child...

He faintly smiled, allowing Alexis to step out of the car.

Alexis finally erupted, "Leonel, you're deranged! Do you think you can scare me?! Your life or death doesn't weigh an ounce on my mind!"

"Really?" His smile lingered faintly.

Alexis slapped him, imprinting a five-finger mark on his fair face.

But Alexis cried.

The person she despised most in her life was Leonel!

He was at fault, the one who betrayed their love, who abandoned her for another, yet he dared to use himself as leverage...

In a fury, Alexis struck him several more times.

Leonel seemed unfazed, simply observing her tenderly.

Alexis' voice choked as she said, "Let me out of the car!"

This time, Leonel didn't comply. He refused to let her go and pulled her into an embrace, pressing her against the steering wheel. Cupping her face, he drew closer.

"Alexis, you still carry a torch for me, right? You're suffering just like I am, aren't you?"

Her eyes red with tears, he planted a kiss on her.

It was far from a picturesque moment.

The kiss wasn't really blissful.

But Leonel paid it no mind; it had been ages since he'd felt her touch, kissing her fervently...

Alexis couldn't push him away.

She was ensnared in his embrace, holding on to him like someone in their final struggle.

"Alexis! Forgive me!"

His voice was seductive and husky, murmuring into her ear.

Alexis listened in a daze.

When he eventually let her go, she sat beside him, smoothing the shirt he'd disheveled. Afterward, she opened the car door and left.

As the door closed softly, Leonel closed his eyes, probably thinking of his next move.

After a moment, he phoned his assistant. "Set up a meeting with the Smith family. We'll ink the intent contract come morning."

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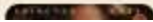
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The assistant warned, "Mr. Douglas, taking on both the Fowler and Evans families isn't exactly a smart move."

It was akin to courting disaster!

Leonel's tone was casual. "Just do as I say!"

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