

Wrath 1051

Chapter 1051:

“If Queen is involved, then yes, the impossible might just become possible.”

Trenton knew all too well what Queen was capable of. There was a time when their country’s official network faced a relentless cyber onslaught from multiple nations, and Queen had single-handedly repelled them all, securing a place in history.

If a mind like Queen’s were to delve into AI development, then maybe—just as Janice claimed—they could spark a revolution, reshaping industries and setting the pace for the future of AI worldwide.

“Mr. Truman, despite Queen’s notable abilities, she remains a mystery—difficult to manage. If she were to betray us at a critical moment, the consequences could be disastrous,” Calvin warned.

Trenton furrowed his brows, considering the risk.

Queen’s access to advanced technology posed a significant threat to any ruling authority.

“Be assured, Mr. Truman, Queen’s loyalty to her homeland is unshakeable,” Janice said with conviction.

“Even though you are familiar with Queen and have paid a high price for her services, it doesn’t give you the right to guarantee her loyalty,” Calvin countered, his skepticism clear.

The tension in the room was palpable—Janice’s promise felt fragile.

“What if I am Queen?” Janice said, her eyes sharp with confidence.

Calvin let out a laugh, his eyebrows shooting up in surprise. “Now you’re calling yourself Queen? You’re already known as JE, MO, and RAIN, and now you want to add Queen to that list? Do you really think we’re that gullible? No one can master so many top-tier technologies at once.”

“Perhaps your perspective is too narrow,” Janice replied with a light laugh.

She turned her steady gaze to Trenton. “If I’m already recognized as JE, MO, and RAIN, isn’t it possible that I could be Queen as well?”

Trenton’s gaze sharpened as he studied Janice. Her confidence was undeniable, making him wonder if she truly possessed such extraordinary skill.

“Aiden,” Janice called.

Obediently, Aiden took out a smartphone and handed it to her.

“Watch closely. Within a minute, I’ll penetrate the national satellite network,” she said.

“Using just that smartphone?”

Skepticism filled the room. Previously, countless experts had attempted to breach the satellite system’s formidable firewall, but none had succeeded.

The firewall, with its complex, multi-tiered security, had repelled every attempted intrusion.

Now, Janice was taking charge, insisting that a smartphone was all she needed to complete the task—a claim that seemed almost unbelievable.

“Proceed,” Trenton said, giving Janice the nod of approval.

The room was filled with a mixture of disbelief and anticipation as Trenton authorized Janice's daring attempt against the formidable security system.

Janice's fingers flew across her phone's screen, her rapid movements mesmerizing the onlookers.

At that moment, Finley received an urgent call.

"We're experiencing an assault on our satellite system by an unknown assailant." Shock crossed Finley's face as he turned to look at Janice. She was orchestrating the attack.

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"Mr. Hoffman, this attack is far worse than anything we've ever simulated. It feels like we're up against the full force of an entire battalion. Already, more than half of our 108 layers are compromised, and we might lose the entire firewall in under a minute. Could this be the combined effort of the world's top ten hackers?"

With a grim smile, Finley realized the gravity of the situation. Janice alone was behind this formidable assault.

Was this woman truly a genius?

Her list of achievements was already extraordinary, and now she displayed a mastery of technology powerful enough to threaten entire governments.

Finley's regard for Janice deepened. "Mr. Truman!"

Trenton raised his hand, interrupting Finley, and watched Janice intently. "That's enough, Miss White."

Janice stopped and faced Trenton. "Are my capabilities clear to you now?"

Trenton's response was accompanied by a warm smile. "With 108 layers to our firewall and you breaking through more than fifty, it would indeed be quite the scandal to see it fully compromised. Let's end this demonstration here and save a bit of face."

"Understood." Janice stopped her actions and handed the phone back to Aiden.

She remained silent, waiting for Trenton's verdict. She had shown enough strength; now it was up to him to decide whether to confront her or to leverage her abilities for the nation's benefit.

"Since taking on this role, my only focus has been to maintain the stability of our nation." Trenton let out a soft sigh. "Janice, I understand your feelings and respect your choices, but..."

"Mr. Truman, you need not worry," Janice reassured him. "The White family also desires national stability. We will seek justice for our family's tragic loss in a fair way."

"Understood." Trenton acknowledged her with a nod. "It's getting late. Everyone, please leave."

"Mr. Truman!" Gilmore began to protest, only to be silenced by Finley's stern look.

"Very well, we'll leave," Gilmore agreed, his voice tinged with reluctance as he left with Calvin.

Both knew well that while Trenton had intervened to prevent Janice from using unconventional tactics against the Welch family, he would not stand in her way if she chose to pursue legitimate action against them.

"Janice, the Payne family has decided to pull out of the Hillford project." Minnie approached Janice with a smile. "But don't expect the Welch family to back down so easily. You might want to brace yourself for some resistance."

“No need to worry. Since I’ve chosen to take on the project, I have my own ways of handling whatever comes my way,” Janice replied with an easy smile, seeing right through Minnie’s attempt to curry favor.

The power she had displayed earlier was enough to make even Trenton tread carefully, leaving the Payne family with no choice but to abandon any lingering hostility. Instead, they saw an opportunity to align themselves with her.

The rivalry between the Payne and Welch families would soon be history. The true war was about to begin—a clash between the Welch family and the White family. And it would be anything but a fair fight.

On the top floor of Promisun Tower, only two figures remained—Finley and Trenton.

“Sir, Janice is a serious threat,” Finley said, his voice tinged with unease. “She hacked into our satellite system like it was nothing, and this...”

Chapter 1053:

“I get your concern, Finley. But Janice is a remarkable young woman,” Trenton replied, a faint smile playing on his lips. “Maybe our nation’s future rests in her hands.”

Finley stiffened, caught off guard. He wasn’t convinced. The idea that a single person could shape the fate of an entire nation felt absurd.

“You don’t realize just how powerful she is,” Trenton continued. “If she wanted, she could erase the Welch family in a single night. Yet she hasn’t.”

Finley faltered, the weight of Trenton’s words settling in. “Janice is strong, sure, but the Welch family isn’t exactly weak...”

“The Welch family?” Trenton let out a cold chuckle, his usual composed expression hardening. “They’re nothing. Just a group of entitled fools, propped up by old money and an overinflated sense of power. But against Janice? They’re hopelessly outmatched. Janice holds back because she chooses to. She values stability over vengeance. If she didn’t, the Welch family would already be history, and we wouldn’t even be having this conversation.”

After their recent exchange, Trenton was certain—Janice was a woman of unwavering loyalty and integrity. This country was her home, and she would never bring destruction upon it.

Finley saw the truth as well. If Janice had truly wanted to erase the Welch family, she could have done so the same way they had wiped out the White family years ago—striking overnight, vanishing abroad, and leaving them powerless to retaliate.

But she hadn't. Instead, she allowed them some semblance of dignity.

Even today's discussion had unfolded according to her design. If the White family hadn't been powerful, they never would have been granted this meeting. Janice's strategic foresight exceeded anything they had anticipated.

"From this moment forward, no one is to aid the Welch family. Anyone with prior ties to them must remain neutral," Trenton ordered firmly. "Their fate is theirs to determine."

"Stephen, do you need me to step in for the Hillford project?" Janice asked as she sat in the car, calling her brother. "Mr. Barker has been threatened by the Welch family. I've got a handle on the situation. Just give the word, and I'll take care of it for you."

Stephen was caught off guard. In such a short time, Janice had already uncovered everything. Admiration stirred within him, fueling his resolve. "I've got this, Janice."

"Oh?" Janice arched an eyebrow, unsurprised. She knew Stephen was determined to prove his worth—that he wasn't just a burden to the White family.

"Yes. You have bigger things to handle. Leah mentioned your AI project is critical and needs your full attention. Let me take care of this."

“Fine.” Ending the call, Janice exhaled, a small smile tugging at her lips. “My brother has quite the resolve.”

At least he wasn’t the type to sit back and enjoy the rewards without effort. He would step up and play his part in strengthening the family. Maybe this was the essence of the White family’s resilience—no one accepted mediocrity, and everyone pushed themselves to be better.

Aiden chuckled, giving Janice’s cheek a playful pinch. “Well, he is your brother. That stubborn determination runs in the family.”

“I didn’t have a choice.” Janice sighed, shaking her head with a bittersweet smile. “I grew up alone, with no one to lean on, so I had to become my own support. And now, there are people who depend on me. If I weren’t strong, how could I have come this far and ensured stability for those who trust me?”

Aiden’s chest tightened with sympathy. Even with all her power, Janice bore an immense weight on her shoulders.

Chapter 1054:

Unlike her, he had a head start, thanks to the empire his grandfather had built. But Janice? She had forged her own path, creating everything from the ground up.

A gentle smile played on Aiden’s lips as he softly caressed Janice’s face, his fingers tracing down to her chin. “I regret not being there when you needed me most. From this point forward, you have my full and unwavering support. You don’t have to be on guard all the time anymore.”

As Janice looked up and met Aiden’s gaze, her eyes shimmering with warmth, a small smile formed.

“Indeed, having you by my side now lightens the burden.” She leaned in and kissed Aiden lightly on the lips, the brief touch making his heart flutter.

“Still, I can’t detach myself from the AI project. It demands my direct supervision.” Janice’s gaze hardened with determination. “After completing this project and the Hillford project, the White family’s influence will surpass the Welch family within a year. Then, every one of them will regret what they’ve done to the White family.”

“A year, huh?”

Aiden’s voice was wistful, and Janice instantly understood his thoughts.

“How about we cancel our prior agreement?”

“There’s no need to end it.” Aiden shook his head. “I won’t go back on my word. Besides, we’re already together now, aren’t we?”

“Indeed.”

Some might see their goal of surpassing the powerful Welch family within a year as unrealistic, but for Janice and Aiden, it seemed almost easy. Armed with formidable resources, the downfall of their enemies was not a question of possibility, but merely of timing.

Stephen ended his call with Janice, his expression clouded with concern.

“Stephen, you said you wanted to handle this yourself. Do you already have a plan?” Wendy asked softly, tracing her fingertip across Stephen’s furrowed brow in an attempt to soothe him.

“Clearly, Mr. Barker was threatened by Bart and Delilah. Yet only Delilah briefly left the venue, while Bart remained. How could she have intimidated Mr. Barker all by herself?”

Stephen’s mind replayed the moment Delilah quietly slipped away just as Ethan went backstage. Understanding what happened during that time held the key to solving the mystery. However, their investigation of the security footage had yielded no results.

Of course, he could ask Janice for clues right now, but that would make him seem incompetent, which was why he resolved to investigate personally.

“Let’s head to the hospital,” Stephen said with resolve. “I need to speak with Mr. Barker myself.”

“I’ll accompany you.” Wendy nodded quietly, her demeanor softening into that of a devoted companion. Gone was her characteristic whimsy—when it came to Stephen, the real Wendy always emerged.

Ethan had been admitted to a private room at Andromache Hospital. While his condition wasn’t critical, the public was told he was simply resting. He declined all visitors, maintaining strict isolation—except for Minnie, who was granted an exception.

Minnie entered Ethan’s room with composed grace. “Mr. Barker, could we talk?”

Ethan averted his gaze, his former confidence replaced by a sense of guilt, as if he wished he could simply disappear.

Minnie noticed his discomfort but chose not to comment. Instead, she approached the bedside table, picked an apple from the fruit basket, and sat down, methodically peeling it.

Chapter 1055:

As Ethan observed her, his thoughts wandered. The idea of this once-unattainable beauty now quietly preparing fruit for him felt surreal—like a scene from a dream.

“Mr. Barker, may I call you Ethan?”

“Of course.”

“I remember you from our school days.”

“Really?” Ethan turned to Minnie in surprise. “You noticed me back in school?” He sounded doubtful.

Back then, Minnie had been the school's shining star, admired for her looks, intelligence, and charm—all the boys had looked up to her. In contrast, Ethan had done well in his studies and sports, but was hardly remarkable. Minnie's words seemed more like a polite gesture than a meaningful acknowledgment.

But as Minnie continued, Ethan's perspective began to shift.

"Ethan, given your talents, it was impossible not to notice you," Minnie said, handing him the peeled apple with a gentle smile. "Your humble origins don't define your worth. We don't get to choose our beginnings, but we do choose our paths forward."

Ethan accepted the apple from Minnie, his eyes flickering with emotion, a wave of inner shock passing through him.

Minnie's presence and her attempt to reassure him left Ethan confused. Why would she offer comfort in this situation? Yet her sincerity was unmistakable, making it clear that her intentions were genuine.

"Ethan, I may not know everything you've been through, but I hope you don't lose yourself along the way. You were once truly exceptional." Minnie stood up, as if she'd said all she needed to. "The Payne family is pulling out of the Hillford project and stepping away from the competition. That means everything I've said today comes from the heart—no hidden agendas. I just don't want to see a great talent end up with regrets."

Ethan's fingers tightened around the apple, his throat constricting. There was so much he wanted to say, yet the words wouldn't come.

"Take care and get some rest. I'll be going now." With that, Minnie turned and made her way to the door.

"Minnie," Ethan called out.

She paused, turning back to meet his gaze.

“Thank you,” he said sincerely.

Minnie blinked in surprise before a small smile curved her lips. Then, she turned and walked out.

As her silhouette disappeared, Ethan released a deep sigh, as if shedding a weight he hadn’t realized he was carrying.

Just then, a knock sounded at the door.

Ethan frowned. Had Minnie come back?

Before he could say a word, the door swung open.

Two figures stepped inside, both vaguely familiar.

“Mr. White?” Ethan gasped.

Stephen and Wendy strode forward, stopping in front of him. Ethan’s brow furrowed. “How did you get in? I gave strict orders—no one enters without my permission.”

“Our apologies, Mr. Barker,” Wendy said with a calm smile. “We have an urgent matter to discuss, so we had to take a more unorthodox approach.”

Outside, the bodyguards lay sprawled on the floor, unconscious. With Wendy’s expertise, the guards had never stood a chance—she had taken them down effortlessly.

Chapter 1056:

Ethan’s expression darkened as he prepared to scold them, but Minnie’s words lingered in his mind. He exhaled and said, “You’re here for the project, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” Stephen took a deep breath, his expression sharpening as his demeanor shifted. In that moment, he truly embodied the leader of the White family, radiating authority.

Ethan regarded Stephen with mild surprise. The young man had seemed approachable earlier, but now he exuded a completely different aura.

“Mr. Barker, I’m not here to threaten you or cause trouble.” Stephen dragged a chair over and sat down, while Wendy quietly took a seat beside him, leaving the lead to him.

Though Stephen’s expression remained neutral, an unspoken pressure filled the air. He didn’t need to voice a single threat—his mere presence was enough to put Ethan on edge.

“Mr. White, knocking out my guards doesn’t count as causing trouble?”

Stephen shrugged. “The situation was urgent, so I acted on impulse. But don’t worry; I’ll make amends.”

Ethan’s voice dropped to a serious tone. “What exactly do you want?”

“I have a proposition.” Stephen picked up an apple, rolling it absently in his palm. “You’re unwell and unable to oversee the project, so why not open it up for online bidding? How does that sound?”

Ethan’s eyes narrowed. This was a clear move to push him out of the project. If he stepped back and let go of direct involvement, the Welch family’s threats would lose their leverage over him.

“It’s not as simple as you think.” Ethan’s gaze sharpened, his tone turning cold. “You might have some idea of the situation, but I can’t just walk away from this project.”

“Is that so?” Stephen stopped rolling the apple and lifted his gaze to meet Ethan’s.

Ethan shifted uncomfortably under Stephen's piercing gaze. It was hard to believe this man was just an actor, not a seasoned strategist.

"Mr. Barker, don't be so quick to refuse." Stephen's smirk deepened. "All you need to do is feign illness for one more day and wait for the news. After that, the path forward will be clear to you. I trust you're a man of integrity, one who wouldn't act against the public's best interests."

Stephen then took a bite of the apple, his expression calm yet assured. "It's quite sweet. You should have one too. But be quick—an apple left out too long after peeling loses its flavor." He cast a brief glance at Wendy.

Wendy caught the signal and stood up beside him.

"Take care, Mr. Barker. Get some rest. We won't keep you any longer." With that, Stephen and Wendy turned and left.

Ethan's frown deepened as he watched them leave, an unsettling wave of uncertainty washing over him.

The rumors had painted Stephen as nothing more than an actor propped up by Janice's influence—a mere figurehead with no real authority. Yet their brief exchange left Ethan with an entirely different impression. Stephen seemed to be the one truly pulling the strings.

Ethan mulled over Stephen's cryptic words. "Why tell me to wait just one more day?" A nagging thought crept in—was something major about to unfold?

Just then, Ethan's phone buzzed.

His eyes narrowed at the caller ID before he answered.

Chapter 1057:

"Mr. Barker, enjoying your rest?" Bart's voice came through, sharp and completely lacking courtesy.

“Who is this?” Ethan’s tone was cold and demanding.

“Already forgotten what happened at the bidding?” Bart sneered. “Did you really think faking illness and stalling the process would get you out of this?”

Ethan’s pupils contracted as the memory of the restroom incident resurfaced, sending a surge of anger through him. “Did you send that woman?”

“Bingo.” Bart’s voice dripped with smug satisfaction. “You’re new to this position. If a scandal like this got out, do you think you’d last?”

Back then, Ethan had been trapped in the restroom with Delilah. She had thrown herself at him, disheveling her clothes to create the illusion of an assault. Moments later, a man barged in, snapping incriminating photos.

The man had blackmailed him—ensure Overden Group won the bid, or the photos would go public.

With his career and reputation at stake, Ethan had been forced to comply. But as pressure mounted from all sides, he faked a fainting spell to buy time.

Now, Bart was tightening the noose, pressing him to guarantee Overden Group’s victory.

“I want to wrap up the bidding as much as you do,” Ethan said gravely. “But if things spiral out of control, the higher-ups will start digging. And when that happens, it won’t just be me under scrutiny—you’ll be right there with me.”

Bart paused, silence stretching between them before he finally spoke. “Alright, what’s your plan?”

“Let’s wait,” Ethan exhaled. “Give me a day to recover. I’ll figure out a way to secure the bid for Overden Group without raising suspicion.”

“Fine. I’ll be expecting good news,” Bart replied icily. “But don’t even think about playing games. If I catch you scheming, those photos will be everywhere before you know it. Oh, and I hear you have a soft spot for Minnie. Imagine her reaction when she sees those photos.”

Bart let out a dark chuckle before ending the call.

Ethan slammed his fist into the mattress, his eyes burning with frustration. Years of relentless effort had finally earned him this position, bringing him closer to Minnie—only to find himself caught in someone else’s scheme.

If the scandal surfaced, everything he had built would crumble in an instant.

He reached for his phone, ready to call his staff, but Minnie’s words echoed in his mind. With a heavy sigh, he set it down again.

If I throw away my integrity just to hand Overden Group the win, Minnie will never see me the same way. He let out a wry chuckle, shaking his head. Guess I’ll see if the White family can back up their confidence.

Meanwhile, Stephen pulled out of the hospital parking lot, city lights flickering against his windshield as he headed home.

Wendy glanced at him curiously. “Stephen, what exactly did you mean when you spoke to Ethan back there?”

Stephen offered a self-deprecating smile. “To be honest, even I’m not entirely sure. But the moment I stepped into that role, something just clicked.”

“Oh?” Wendy arched an eyebrow, her interest piqued. “And what exactly clicked?”

“Media influence.” Stephen’s gaze sharpened, his tone growing serious. “Bart has Ethan in a chokehold, so he won’t turn against them easily. But if we leverage media influence, we can amplify the stakes of this bidding war.”

Chapter 1058:

“Media influence?”

“Exactly.” A confident grin spread across Stephen’s face. “I might just be an actor who lives by performance, but I understand the true power of media. Even the most powerful families can crumble under relentless public scrutiny.”

Wendy nodded knowingly. She had seen firsthand how media influence could make or break a reputation. As Stephen’s agent, she’d navigated more than her share of high-stakes situations.

“Wendy, get in touch with White Whale Entertainment. Have them draft a press release and rally as many online influencers as possible,” Stephen instructed. “I want the bidding documents for the Hillford project made public.”

Wendy’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Stephen, that’s brilliant. By putting everything out in the open, you’ll force their hand—there’s no way they can maneuver around this.”

“Exactly. We have the upper hand—solid funding, a comprehensive plan, and tremendous development potential.” Stephen drew a deep breath, a restless energy simmering beneath his calm exterior. “Once the public sees our bid, they’ll recognize the future we’re offering for Hillford. Faced with the choice to thrive, no one will settle for less—unless someone presents an even better plan, which we both know won’t happen. And if it comes down to influence, the media will inevitably side with us.”

Wendy studied Stephen, her admiration growing. Many dismissed him as just an actor, someone dabbling in business. Yet in a matter of moments, he had crafted a strategy that could upend the entire playing field. He was so much more than a handsome face.

Stephen’s potential seemed limitless. The moment he stepped into a role, he didn’t just act—he embodied it, strategizing as if he had lived that life for years. That rare ability made him truly unique. The prospect of the coming media storm sent a thrill through her. This would be a spectacle worth watching. In her heart, she was certain they were bound to win.

Bart lounged on the sofa, his eyes closed, an air of relaxation and satisfaction about him. Below, Delilah reclined in a suggestive pose, her clothes slightly disheveled.

Catching sight of Bart's contented expression, she shot him a seductive look. Delilah knew exactly what she was doing—aligning herself with Bart promised her a future filled with luxury and status. Having experienced hardship before, she was determined never to slip back into that life. The prospect of comfort was too enticing to let go.

Their moment was abruptly interrupted by the loud buzzing of Bart's phone. Visibly irritated, he answered. "This had better be important," he warned.

"It's bad news! White Group just released their bid proposal for the Hillford project. It's everywhere online!"

"What?" Bart jolted upright, accidentally pushing Delilah aside in his haste.

"Bart, what are you doing?" Delilah protested, rubbing her forehead and shooting him a look of annoyance.

"Quiet," Bart snapped. He ended the call and immediately opened his social media app, quickly finding the trending topic about White Group's bid proposal.

He clicked on it and was instantly taken aback by the details—the sheer scale of the offer and the ambitious key projects, now on display for everyone to see.

The comments section only fueled his frustration, making his hands tremble with anger.

"Bart, what's wrong?" Delilah asked, noticing his agitation.

“Look at this.” Bart handed her the phone.

Chapter 1059:

Delilah took it, her curiosity quickly turning to shock as she read through the content. “What are they thinking? Making their bid public? Aren’t they worried about backlash?”

“Backlash?” Bart scoffed. “Do you really think anyone in Cloverhill can challenge them? Neither the Payne family nor the Welch family has the strength to compete.”

Delilah paused, scanning the proposal’s key points again. “You’re right.” The trillion-dollar offer and the comprehensive project plans left no doubt—White Group was presenting an overwhelming challenge to the other families.

“Now, with unanimous public support for White Group’s proposal, the development department will likely favor them.”

Delilah glanced at the comments section again, a surge of excitement rising within her.

“White Group has showcased incredible strength with this proposal. If realized, it will significantly boost Hillford’s economy!”

“The economy there is currently languishing, but it could soon lead the region!”

“Absolutely astounding! The White family, newly arrived in Cloverhill, has demonstrated such capability!”

“Officials, are you paying attention? White Group’s proposal must be chosen! Otherwise, it surely points to corruption.”

“Bart, what’s our move now? Even with leverage over Ethan, he might not be able to choose us under these circumstances.”

Bart rubbed his temples, frustration evident on his face. He knew that even if Ethan caved under public pressure and accepted their proposal, a thorough investigation would inevitably follow—and it would implicate them.

Just then, Bart's phone rang again.

"It's Ethan."

A sense of dread washed over Bart; the timing couldn't be more exact. It had to be about the bid.

"Mr. Barker, what's the issue?" Bart answered the call, trying to sound casual. "Aren't you supposed to be resting? What brings you to call at this hour?"

"You've seen what's happening online, right?" Ethan's tone was serious. "What's our next move?"

Bart narrowed his eyes, recognizing Ethan's attempt to shift the pressure. "Yes, I'm aware. I'm working on a plan."

"I want to support you, but things are getting out of hand. If I push for your bid, I'm afraid..."

"I understand your concerns. Just give me a bit more time, and I'll come up with a solution. If I can't, I won't drag you into this."

"Alright. I'll speak with the higher-ups, but I can only buy us so much time."

After ending the call, Bart cursed under his breath, barely resisting the urge to throw his phone in frustration.

“Bart, I think Ethan’s feeling pretty smug right now. Even with the photos, it seems pointless,” Delilah remarked.

Bart remained silent, his hands clasped under his chin as he pondered their next move. Having been released from prison by the Welch family and installed as CEO of Overden Group, he understood exactly what was at stake. If he failed to secure the Hillford project, Mateo would have no reason to continue supporting him.

Winning this bid was the only way to prove his worth.

Chapter 1060:

“Delilah, keep things under control at the company. I need to meet with the Welch family.”

“Alright.”

Ethan scrolled through the trending topics on his phone, a mix of astonishment and admiration flickering in his eyes. He had never imagined Stephen could flip the situation so effortlessly. Although the photos were still in their hands, the shifting circumstances meant they dared not make any reckless moves. For now, he had a chance to slip free without facing unbearable pressure. But living under the constant shadow of blackmail was not a long-term strategy.

Suddenly, sharp raps on the door jolted him from his thoughts. Ethan’s brows knitted together. Who would come knocking at this hour? “Come in.”

The door swung open.

“What are you doing here?” Ethan’s eyes widened for a split second before narrowing.

“Mr. Barker, you know us?” Janice’s lips curled into a warm smile, as light and effortless as a spring breeze, free of any malice.

But beside her, Aiden carried an aura so cold it was almost suffocating, making direct eye contact feel like staring into a storm. Ethan instinctively shifted his gaze back to Janice.

“Miss White, you’re the talk of Cloverhill these days. How could I not know you?” Ethan let out a dry chuckle, shaking his head. “Let me guess—you’re here about the bidding?”

“Partly.” Janice settled onto the nearby sofa with effortless grace. “But I’m more interested in your current situation.”

“My situation?” Ethan’s brows lifted before he let out a short, bitter laugh. “I’m doing just fine. No need for your concern.”

“Wouldn’t you like to erase those photos for good?”

“What?” Ethan’s pupils shrank as his gaze snapped to Janice. Did she already know everything?

“Mr. Barker, don’t underestimate me. Bart was careful, but no secret is completely airtight. If you truly want those photos destroyed and to free yourself from their grip, I can help,” Janice offered.

Ethan hesitated, his mind racing, before finally asking, “And what do you want in return?”

“I need you to release a statement.”

“A statement? What exactly are you getting at?”

Janice’s smirk lingered as she exchanged a brief look with Aiden. Aiden retrieved a document from his briefcase and handed it to Ethan. “See for yourself.”

Ethan accepted the document, skepticism evident in his eyes. But as he scanned its contents, his expression grew serious. “You’re planning to upend everything?”

“Precisely.” Janice crossed her legs, exuding both elegance and unshakable confidence. “There’s no guarantee the Welch family will take the bait on their own. That’s why I need your help to give them the necessary nudge.”

Ethan fell silent, lost in thought. His gaze flickered back to Janice, recognizing that beneath her graceful appearance was a commanding presence. The document she held was a meticulously designed trap, perfectly poised to topple the Welch family.

“Alright. I’m in,” Ethan said at last, his voice grave. “But you’d better make sure every single photo is erased—permanently.”

“You have my word. I never go back on a promise.” There was something in her tone that left no room for doubt. Ethan believed her.