

Wrath 171

Chapter 171:

Yet, he hadn't realized why he was so concerned about Janice's presence at Auburn Hospital.

Meanwhile, at the bustling Castle Shopping Center, the most renowned shopping complex in Efrery, Janice was meeting with Sierra.

Following her surgery, Janice had contacted Sierra, and the two quickly agreed on this lively spot for their rendezvous.

"Janice! I came straight over after lunch so I wouldn't be late. Aren't I amazing?" Sierra called out, practically bouncing as she hurried to Janice, her smile radiant.

Janice's gaze softened at the sight. Reaching out, she gently tousled Sierra's hair, a gesture filled with sisterly affection. Deep down, she couldn't help but wish for a sister like Sierra—someone lively, warm, and full of life.

"You're the best, Sierra. But rushing over like this, did you even have time to eat properly?"

"Of course I did," Sierra replied proudly, puffing out her chest. "Delilah was determined to spend at least a million today. She wouldn't leave the private room until she hit her goal!"

"A million?" Janice raised an eyebrow, her curiosity piqued. Sierra launched into a lively recount of their lunch at Forest Shrimp.

She had taken the lead in ordering for everyone. As the daughter of the distinguished Ramirez family, her refined palate and familiarity with gourmet cuisine made her the natural choice. Everyone trusted her selections without hesitation.

However, Delilah's reaction was far from pleasant. Her expression grew increasingly sour, especially as Sierra confidently announced each dish to the waiter. With every extravagant item added to the list, Delilah's face darkened further, her discomfort becoming impossible to hide.

As someone raised by the affluent Edwards family for over twenty years, Delilah was no stranger to luxury. She had tasted the finest delicacies the world had to offer. And precisely because of her experience, she understood just how excessive Sierra's choices were.

Blue lobster, premium sea urchin, top-grade tuna, and caviar that cost fifty thousand per small box...

While the other colleagues were wide-eyed with delight, Delilah's irritation deepened. Her polite smile began to waver as the list grew longer.

As the meal wrapped up, Sierra excused herself under the pretext of another appointment and left early. Before walking out, she made sure the bill, totaling over a million, was sent to Delilah.

Although Delilah had the financial security of the Edwards family behind her, she was known for her thriftiness. Spending such an outrageous sum on lunch for a group of insignificant colleagues felt like a sharp blow to her values and an insult to her sensibilities.

"Janice, what do you think of my little scheme?" Sierra's voice bubbled with pride as she lifted her chin, seeking validation from Janice. "Just picture it—Delilah squirming under everyone's expectant stares as she reaches for that bill. Oh, what a delicious moment that'll be!"

"Indeed." Janice's laughter held a note of satisfaction. "She's the type who'd eye someone else's dollar even with a hundred in her own pocket."

Sierra's expression softened as she wrapped Janice in a protective embrace. "Oh, Janice, you must have weathered quite a storm to see through her so clearly. That two-faced snake will get her comeuppance."

Warmed by Sierra's genuine concern, Janice felt her tension melting away. "Let's not waste another thought on irrelevant people. We're here to shop, aren't we?"

Chapter 172:

"Yes!" Sierra's enthusiasm burst forth, followed by a conspiratorial smile. "Though if I'm honest, today's mission is really about finding the perfect welcome gift for you, Janice."

“A gift for me?”

“Absolutely! Now come on!” Before Janice could protest, Sierra had seized her hand, pulling her eagerly into the mall’s gleaming interior.

As their laughter faded into the bustling shopping center, a sleek luxury van glided into the underground parking lot. Carman emerged, his designer outfit demanding attention despite his obvious attempt at anonymity.

His security detail materialized around him like well-trained shadows. Though his face remained hidden behind sunglasses and a mask, the tension in his shoulders betrayed his discomfort. Had anyone stripped away those barriers, they’d likely find his features twisted in barely concealed distress.

Yesterday’s beating from Vernon’s bodyguards had left his entire body aching, despite them avoiding his face. He’d wanted to take the day off, but the company insisted he attend this event.

His recent lack of hit songs meant he had no choice but to participate in such events to maintain his public presence.

“Yvonne, are the event’s security measures reliable?” Carman asked the woman beside him.

She stood in her early thirties, projecting competence and intelligence in her gold-rimmed glasses and tailored suit.

“Don’t worry. Beyond the event’s security, we have our own people in place. You’ll be completely safe.”

Carman nodded, finding some comfort in her words.

After offending Vernon and losing all his endorsements, he’d angered many people. Who knew if someone might try to harm him when he least expected it? What a bunch of fair-weather friends! Their regret would be sweet once his next hit dominated the charts.

“Carman, I know these events aren’t your favorite, so finish that new song quickly. That track you recorded earlier? Barely passable—certainly not lead single material for your new album.” Yvonne adjusted her glasses, regarding him with professional detachment.

Behind his dark lenses, Carman’s face drained of color, though Yvonne couldn’t see it.

“I’ve been running low on inspiration lately...” The excuse died on his lips as he met Yvonne’s glacial stare.

“Don’t worry, I’ll have something ready in the next couple of days.”

“Alright.” Yvonne’s curt nod matched her tone. “It’s about time. The venue awaits.”

Frustration coiled in Carman’s chest like a trapped snake. His battered body protested at the mere thought. How was he supposed to craft a hit song in two days?

There was only one solution that had never failed him: complete isolation. Whenever his muse abandoned him, retreating into the solitude of his home had always been his salvation, sparking that magical burst of creativity that birthed hit after hit.

Sierra eagerly guided Janice into an upscale jewelry boutique. A smile tugged at Janice’s lips as she recognized the logo—a Freak Design branch.

“Janice, what are you up to?”

Chapter 173:

“Janice, I’ve commissioned a special necklace just for you.” Before Janice could voice any protest, Sierra had already swept into the store.

The Freak Design staff embodied refined elegance—each member handpicked for their poise and beauty, dressed immaculately in black suits with pristine white gloves. Their practiced smiles and graceful demeanor exuded pure professionalism.

At Sierra's request, an attendant reverently presented the necklace.

Janice studied the piece with appreciation; it was Leah's latest seasonal masterpiece, the crown jewel of their collection. She'd seen the preliminary sketches and had been impressed by their vision—the design perfectly captured youthful vibrancy while incorporating the trendy elements that defined Freak Design's current season.

"Janice, do you like it?"

Meeting her friend's eager gaze, Janice offered a warm smile.

"I like it."

She didn't want to dampen Sierra's enthusiasm and accepted the necklace without hesitation. She understood the likely motivation behind Sierra's gift—a response to the events of last night.

The unpleasant confrontation with Delilah over a necklace had left its mark, and Sierra, ever thoughtful, was trying to replace that sour memory with something beautiful and new. It was, without question, a deeply considerate gesture.

A delicate piano melody drifted through the air, catching Janice's attention. She glanced at Sierra, whose face still beamed with unbridled joy at Janice's acceptance of the necklace.

"Sierra, let me give you a gift in return."

"Huh?" Surprise flickered across Sierra's face before turning into eager anticipation. "Of course! What do you have in mind, Janice?"

“Come with me.”

Through the bustling mall, Janice led Sierra to its heart—the atrium, where a gleaming white piano stood sentinel. A brave soul was attempting “Twinkle,

“Twinkle, Little Star,” their hesitant notes floating awkwardly but earnestly through the space.

“Sierra, this is my gift to you.”

Sierra’s gaze fell on the piano, her lips immediately forming a playful pout. “Janice, I’m hopeless at the piano.”

Janice shook her head, a knowing smile playing on her lips. “I’m not giving you the piano—I’m giving you a melody.”

“A melody?” Sierra’s surprise bloomed into delight, her eyes sparkling with sudden understanding. “Janice, you play?”

“Uh-huh.” Janice approached the piano with graceful steps. “I feel inspired to compose something just for you, right here, right now. I hope it speaks to your heart.”

“Oh, this is wonderful! I know I’ll adore it!” Even without hearing a single note, Sierra knew that anything flowing from Janice’s fingers would be magical.

In Sierra’s world, Janice could do no wrong. Her friend’s actions were filtered through a lens of pure admiration and unwavering support.

“Pardon me, might I have a turn?” Janice’s voice was gentle as she addressed the current pianist.

Chapter 174:

The stranger looked up, momentarily stunned into silence by her striking presence. “Of course.” He hastily vacated the bench. “Thank you.”

Janice settled onto the bench, her fingers gliding tenderly over the black and white keys.

It had been ages since she'd last touched a piano, but today, moved by Sierra's gift of the necklace, she felt inspired to compose something special for her.

Janice drew a steadying breath before meeting Sierra's gaze.

Through Sierra's phone lens, a masterpiece was being framed: Janice perched at the pristine white piano, her white gown flowing like liquid moonlight. The scene exuded an almost ethereal quality—a maestro in her element, poised to command the keys.

"Beautiful, absolutely beautiful," Sierra breathed in wonder. "How did Janice become such a vision of grace? She's not just stunning—she carries herself with such poise. It's mesmerizing."

Passersby found themselves arrested mid-step, drawn by the magnetic presence of the elegant woman at the piano. The air hummed with anticipation as they gathered, waiting for the first notes to break the silence.

The first note rang out like a crystal bell in the silence. Then Janice's hands took flight—ten fingers dancing across black and white keys in a mesmerizing ballet, conjuring a cascade of enchanting melodies.

"This sounds absolutely incredible!"

"I've never encountered this piece before. Could it be her own creation?"

"Remarkable! She must perform at concert halls with skill like this!"

Though the gathered crowd weren't musical experts, they possessed enough sensitivity to recognize the exceptional nature of the piece unfolding before them. Every note spoke of masterful artistry.

Sierra had already succumbed to the music's spell, her gentle humming intertwining with the melody.

The composition flowed like an emotional tide—rising and falling, building and cresting, each phrase laden with unspoken meaning. From somber depths, it gradually ascended until it finally broke free, soaring into an infinite expanse of possibility.

As she hummed along, tears began streaming down Sierra's cheeks.

In that moment, the purpose behind Janice's musical gift crystallized in her heart. Though wordless, the piece spoke volumes, its emotional resonance striking chords deep within her soul.

Sierra, naturally vibrant and free-spirited, had felt suffocated under the weight of her family's expectations, forever yearning to spread her wings.

The composition traced her journey—from crushing oppression through desperate struggle, finally erupting in a triumphant crescendo that sang of hard-won freedom. Sierra found herself caught between laughter and tears, overwhelmed by the revelation that someone finally saw into the depths of her soul.

Backstage, Carman paced in the shadows, his mind a storm of anxiety and creative frustration. What should he do about the new song? If isolation hadn't sparked inspiration, what hope remained?

Then, piercing through his dark thoughts, came the piano melody. His eyes widened with sudden recognition. "That melody... It's hauntingly familiar! Could it possibly—"

He closed his eyes, surrendering to the music's embrace. The notes washed over him like rain on parched earth, every cell in his being drinking in the sweet melody as if starved for its nourishment.

Chapter 175:

"Carman, it's your turn," Yvonne urged.

Carman's eyes flew open as he seized Yvonne's hand, electricity coursing through him. "Yvonne, I've found it—the inspiration for my next song! This will be the one, I'm certain. I have to leave now."

Before she could protest, he vanished like smoke in the wind.

“Carman!” Yvonne’s frustrated call echoed down the empty corridor, but he was already gone, consumed by his creative fervor.

On stage, the host was already announcing Carman’s performance. Yvonne pushed her glasses up with a weary sigh and stepped into the spotlight. Someone had to salvage this situation.

If Carman managed to channel this inspiration into something truly exceptional, salvaging this PR nightmare would be worth every headache. But failure would mean more than embarrassment—it would trigger contract violations and devastating financial penalties.

Yvonne exchanged a silent, meaningful glance with the host.

The host smiled at the audience and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, we offer our sincerest apologies for this unexpected hiccup. It appears Carman is experiencing some technical difficulties. Shall we continue with our spectacular lineup of performers?”

As the event pressed forward, the host’s warm stage persona melted away backstage. His features hardened into granite as he confronted Yvonne. “Perhaps you’d care to explain exactly what’s going on here?”

“I deeply regret to inform you that Carman had to depart due to an emergency situation. He won’t be able to perform, so please help calm the fans down,” Yvonne announced, maintaining her professional composure with a practiced smile.

“Emergency?” The host’s voice dripped with disbelief. “Yvonne, you’re one of the industry’s finest managers, and Carman’s no rookie. Surely he understands the weight of contractual obligations?”

“Trust me, nothing short of an absolute crisis would have pulled him away so abruptly.” Yvonne sighed. “Rest assured, our company will shoulder full responsibility for this breach. We’re prepared to negotiate compensation and extend our sincerest apologies to the organizers. However, we need your expertise in managing the crowd’s expectations.”

The host's brow furrowed as he cast a wary glance at the audience. Already, waves of discontent rippled through the crowd. Carman's name echoed through the venue like a thunderous chant, threatening to drown out the ongoing performances. Anyone in the industry knew the passion of Carman's fanbase. One wrong move, and this powder keg of emotions could explode, derailing the entire event.

"Well then!" The host exhaled dramatically, wearing the expression of a man about to walk into battle. "This might just be the ultimate test of my hosting abilities. But remember, whatever happens next is beyond reproach."

"You have my word," Yvonne murmured, adjusting her glasses with a grateful nod to the host.

Her next hurdle loomed ahead—appeasing the organizers. That was merely a matter of numbers. After all, any obstacle that could be overcome with money was hardly an obstacle at all. The real thorn in her side was Nolan Fletcher, the event's distinguished guest of honor.

Nolan was originally scheduled to perform a classic song with Carman. Now, with Carman's sudden departure, the collaboration couldn't proceed.

The gravity of the situation weighed heavily on Yvonne's shoulders. To slight someone of Nolan's caliber—a maestro whose compositions had shaped the very landscape of modern music—could cast a long, dark shadow over Carman's career.

Chapter 176:

"Has anyone seen Mr. Fletcher?" Yvonne's eyes darted around the venue, confusion creasing her brow as she searched in vain.

"Mr. Fletcher was quite angry when Carman failed to appear. But then, he claimed to hear some enchanting piano music and simply vanished," someone from the organizing committee explained.

Relief washed over Yvonne like a cool breeze. Nolan's absence meant room for damage control, a chance to salvage this precarious situation through careful negotiation.

“Yvonne, what’s the situation with Carman now?”

“Carman’s fans, I’m very sorry to bring you some unfortunate news,” the host’s resonant voice cut through the speakers. “Carman has just received an urgent message that his father lies critically ill in the hospital. At this very moment, he rushes to be by his father’s side. Due to these extraordinary circumstances, Carman cannot continue his participation in this event. Let us all join together in prayer, hoping his father finds the strength to overcome this trying time.”

A twitch played at Yvonne’s lips as comprehension dawned. Broadcasting such an intimate family crisis—a father’s critical condition—before this vast sea of fans was a bold stroke indeed. Now she understood perfectly why the host had insisted on immunity from blame for whatever words left his lips.

“Yvonne, is this true?” The organizers crowded around her, their faces painted with shock and disbelief as they sought answers. Her lips twitched again, a subtle betrayal of her inner conflict. Though hesitation weighed heavy in her heart, she managed a silent nod, becoming an unwitting accomplice in the host’s elaborate fiction.

“Mr. Edwards, I hope you’ll forgive this necessity. My hands are tied,” she whispered under her breath.

Remarkably, the outlandish excuse had worked its magic on the crowd. The earlier storm of discontent turned into a sea of bowed heads and clasped hands, as fans fervently prayed for Connor’s wellbeing. She could only imagine Connor’s reaction if he witnessed this scene. He’d probably be quite overwhelmed.

Janice’s graceful fingers coaxed the final, lingering note from the piano keys, letting it float in the air like a whispered secret. In the sacred silence that followed, she turned to find her solitude had been quietly invaded—a circle of mesmerized onlookers had gathered around her.

An enthusiastic round of applause erupted from the crowd. As if awakening from a trance, they showered Janice with vigorous clapping and cheers.

“That was exquisite, truly a marvel!”

“Miss, could you grace us with another tune?”

“I’ve never before experienced a piano performance, and I must say, it was utterly captivating. Your live rendition took my breath away!”

The onlookers expressed their admiration loudly, offering their praises for Janice without restraint.

Sierra made her way through the crowd, flinging her arms around Janice in a tight embrace.

“Thank you, Janice,” she murmured, her voice muffled by the tears she had shed during the performance. “Thank you for truly understanding me. This gift is exactly what I needed. Your music has filled me with new courage.”

Janice responded by tenderly stroking Sierra’s hair, offering words of comfort in a soothing tone. “The fact that you’re here today is proof of your courage, Sierra. Keep pressing forward and never look back.”

“Okay,” Sierra whispered back, her expression solidifying into resolve stronger than ever as she wiped away her last tear.

Chapter 177:

Janice held a quiet sigh within herself. For Sierra to have aligned with Delgado Jewelry today, she must have endured a significant sacrifice. Such a decision wouldn’t come lightly, especially considering the strict and traditional upbringing within the Ramirez family.

“Beautiful lady, what an enchanting performance!” A middle-aged gentleman approached Janice with a gracious smile. “Absolutely mesmerizing! It’s the most captivating performance I’ve witnessed this year. The last time I was so deeply moved was during a royal court banquet where RAIN performed. I thought nothing could come close, but today, I witnessed a performance that could rival RAIN’s.”

“RAIN? Who is that?” Sierra inquired, her eyes wide with curiosity.

Nolan glanced at Sierra, his eyes lighting up with admiration. "RAIN is a luminary among music creators globally. Her mastery extends across different instruments, and she's endowed with an exceptional knack for composition. Many of the melodies that resonate worldwide are born of her genius."

"Why haven't I heard of her before?" Sierra mused aloud, a touch of embarrassment in her tone as she lightly scratched her cheek.

Nolan gave her a playful eye roll. "Well, that's likely because you don't immerse yourself in the musical world, and also because RAIN maintains a very discreet presence. She stays out of sight in public. At the last royal banquet, she wore a mask to keep her identity a mystery."

As he spoke, his gaze drifted towards Janice, a flicker of recognition sparking in his eyes, hinting at an unspoken connection.

Janice arched an eyebrow, scrutinizing the middle-aged man with a more discerning gaze. It struck her why he looked so familiar. He had been at the last royal banquet.

At that grand affair, the royal family had invited her to showcase her musical talent, and her performance had garnered widespread acclaim. Nolan, it appeared, had been among the audience that evening.

"Beautiful lady, may I ask when you started learning the piano? And could you tell me who your master was?" Nolan's voice carried a hint of urgency as he posed the questions, his curiosity piqued.

"I'm actually self-taught, and I consider myself merely an amateur," Janice responded, her lips curling into a coy smile as she spun a small fib.

Amateur?

Nolan's astonishment was palpable, his expression turning from surprise to incredulity. If she dared to call herself an amateur, then he might as well be a child banging on the piano.

"I understand that modesty is highly valued in your culture, and while humility is a virtue, excessive modesty might come across as insincere," Nolan said sincerely. "Would you mind if we share our contact details? It'd be nice to collaborate in the future."

"We've only just met. Perhaps another time would be more appropriate."

A hint of disappointment flickered across Nolan's face, yet he maintained his respect for her decision. "By the way, could you tell me the name of the piano piece you just performed?" Beside him, Sierra's face brightened with anticipation, her eyes eagerly fixed on Janice.

With a thoughtful glance at Sierra, Janice replied, "I composed this piece especially for you, so let's name it 'Reborn.'"

"Reborn?" Sierra echoed, her eyes gleaming with excitement and admiration. "I love that name."

"Was this piano piece your own creation?" Nolan asked, his voice laden with astonishment as he stared at Janice. The level of artistry in the piece was such that it could have been mistaken for the work of a seasoned maestro. Yet here it was, the creation of a young woman.

Chapter 178:

Her musical prowess was not merely impressive. It bordered on the miraculous.

A thought struck Nolan as he considered her talent. Yes, there was someone else he knew of with such extraordinary gifts—RAIN.

Nolan's face grew more serious, his gaze more scrutinizing. "Do you doubt me?" Janice asked, her eyes narrowed in a challenge.

Nolan blinked and returned to his senses. He shook his head earnestly and said, "Don't get me wrong. I am simply amazed that someone as young as you is able to compose such a high-quality piece. I must admit, I was stunned for a moment there."

“Oh, come on. This is Janice we’re talking about. She’s more than capable!” Sierra was practically glowing with satisfaction. Although Nolan’s compliment was directed at Janice, Sierra beamed and took pride in it as if it were her own.

“Well, I have a request,” Nolan said awkwardly. “I wonder if you ladies can indulge me.”

“What is it?” Sierra asked curiously.

“You see, I will be holding a concert soon. I would love to play this piece, if that’s all right. I just think it would be wonderful if more people got the chance to hear such amazing, ethereal music.”

Sierra balked at such a request.

This piece was Janice’s gift to her. If it was shared with the public, then it would no longer be hers alone. She turned to Janice with a questioning look.

“This piece is yours now, Sierra. The decision is yours to make.” Janice made it clear that the music in question had been created for Sierra. Sierra alone had the power to decide what to do with it.

Sierra took a deep breath before looking back at Nolan.

He was rubbing his palms together nervously. Throughout his whole music career, he had always been on the receiving end of countless favors. It was already embarrassing enough that he had to make such a request to two young women, especially given his status. But the piece he had just heard was nothing short of heavenly, and the artist in him genuinely wanted to share it with more people.

“I don’t consider myself a generous person,” Sierra began. “This piece belongs to me, and I never intended for other people to enjoy it. However...”

Nolan was initially disheartened by her words, but he immediately perked up when he heard the last part. “However?” he prompted hopefully.

“I believe that there are a lot of people out there who may be going through the same things I did. It would be nice if this piece could give them the strength and courage they need.”

“I need to overcome life’s challenges, just like it did for me.” A warm smile bloomed on Sierra’s face. “I agree to your request. Please share Janice’s music with the world.”

“Wonderful!” Nolan clapped his hands in delight. “Please allow me to express my sincerest gratitude. And on behalf of everyone who will hear this in the future, thank you very much.”

After settling some minor details regarding Nolan’s performance of the piece, they bid each other farewell and parted ways.

Nolan rushed back to his place without making any stops. He needed to study the piece and practice playing it as soon as possible. But beyond that, there was also one thing he needed to confirm.

Even on a global scale, there weren’t many pianists capable of composing a top-tier piece. Someone of this caliber—he couldn’t help but associate Janice with RAIN.

Chapter 179:

If his speculations were true, had he actually just met RAIN in person?

Goodness gracious! What an incredible honor that would be.

Meanwhile, Sierra was over the moon. She had just received a very meaningful gift, and at the same time, she was confident that she had made the right choice.

“Go on, Sierra,” Janice said, her voice soft as she slowly stirred her coffee. They had found a café to take a rest.

Sierra had just settled in her seat, but she instantly tensed up at Janice’s words.

“We’re friends, aren’t we?” Janice prodded, her gaze filled with gentle reassurance. “Friends should be honest with each other.”

Sierra let out a bitter laugh. “Janice, you’ve noticed, haven’t you?”

“You’re terrible at pretending everything’s fine. Did something go wrong with your family?” Janice asked.

Sierra gazed at Janice, her expression a mixture of surprise and resignation, as if Janice’s perceptiveness had stripped her of any pretense. “Last night, I had a fierce argument with my mom. I told her I wanted to work. Initially, she seemed supportive, even suggesting that I join our family business to gain some experience, claiming it was time I did.”

She shook her head with a wry smile. “But I knew it was just another form of confinement. Within the walls of the family business, I’d merely be a puppet, seeing only what she allowed and doing exactly as she dictated. I’d be trapped, ultimately marrying someone of her choosing, all for the sake of our family’s interests. In the past, I might have complied, playing the part of the compliant daughter. But last night, I chose defiance. I made a stand and proposed working at Delgado Jewelry instead.”

Janice absorbed every word, her silence a testament to her empathy for Sierra’s plight.

“Last night, I shouted at my mother for the first time ever. I felt like a runaway train—unstoppable, fierce, completely out of control. Looking back now, I find it unbelievable that I could do something so crazy. But the sensation was exhilarating. I managed to break free from that house in the end. But my mother cut off all my financial support.”

Sierra cast an uneasy glance at Janice, her voice tentative. “Janice, are we in the same predicament now? Could you perhaps take me in?”

Sierra gave her the puppy-dog eyes. “Janice, I’m homeless now. Surely you wouldn’t let me roam the streets, right?”

Janice rolled her eyes, realizing that this was Sierra's true intention all along. "Sierra, if you had the courage to flee from the Ramirez family, you should've been ready for the consequences. Are you using this as a reason to stick around me?"

"Janice, your cleverness never ceases to amaze me!" Sliding in beside her, Sierra threw an arm over Janice's shoulder playfully. "You know, it was your daring nature that lit a spark in me. Last night, you were incredible! It was the first time I witnessed my mother utterly dumbfounded. In that brief moment, her vulnerabilities became clear to me. That gave me the courage to stand up for myself."

"Impressive." Janice nodded, a trace of respect in her voice.

"You possess a courage that your sister lacks."

"Really? My sister seems so capable, and here I am, feeling like I can hardly do a thing."

"You possess the courage your sister could only wish for," Janice responded, giving Sierra a look of warm understanding, as if she were gazing at a sibling of her own. "Plus, you're incredibly sharp."

Chapter 180:

"Janice, you have such a knack for making people feel good. Go on, I could listen to your compliments all day."

Janice rolled her eyes again, then grasped her coffee mug and took a leisurely sip. The aroma of the coffee wafted up, the rich and slightly bitter flavor sharpening her thoughts.

Without a doubt, Sierra was exceptionally intelligent. Choosing Janice as her first contact after her bold escape clearly showcased her sharp intuition and her knack for pinpointing exactly who would stand by her side in times of need. Moreover, Sierra's potential move into the Green family would certainly make the Ramirez family pause and reconsider their next steps.

Janice allowed herself a small, knowing smile. The Ramirez family stuck to tradition, yet Sierra was always the wild card, an anomaly that fascinated her. So, Janice took it upon herself to bring Sierra back to the Green family.

“Janice, what’s happening here?” Nina asked, her brow furrowed in confusion as she glanced between Janice and Sierra.

“Hello, Mrs. Green, you look lovely today,” Sierra greeted Nina warmly. Her words, sweet as summer honey, instantly painted a smile across Nina’s features.

“Nina, Sierra is my friend. She’d like to stay with us for a while. If it’s any trouble, we could find accommodations elsewhere,” Janice explained.

“Nonsense! Why even consider renting when the world out there can be so unsafe for two young women? Our home has room to spare, and another soul would only add to its life. Truth be told, I’ve grown quite fond of Sierra; her company would be a delightful addition.”

Though Nina had readily welcomed Sierra’s stay, a shadow of concern crossed her face. “But if Sierra takes refuge here, her mother...”

“Nina, might I have a word?” Janice gave her a wink before drawing her aside to illuminate the situation.

“Isn’t this rather rash of Sierra?” Nina’s brow furrowed as she cast a worried glance at Sierra. “I know Leonie’s ways all too well. Sierra may have fled, but Leonie is allowing this rebellion. She believes it will send Sierra crawling back with apologies on her lips. But Sierra seems much happier and more at ease now that she’s left the Ramirez family. I suspect Leonie’s carefully laid plans may not unfold as she envisions.”

“So, you’ll need to handle Leonie,” Janice’s lips curved into a meaningful smile.

Nina arched an eyebrow, struck by the protective tone in Janice’s voice. “You seem to have quite a soft spot for Sierra.” Janice’s gaze drifted towards Sierra, her expression melting into something tender and wistful. “I’ve always yearned for a sister like her.”

The words hit Nina like a physical blow, her chest tightening as memories flooded back—Janice’s exile from the Edwards family, two decades of crushing solitude, and the cruel irony of her eventual return,

only to face indifference before being cast out once more. Two betrayals, one after another... How much could one heart endure before breaking?

"Janice, you've been through so much." Nina sighed, clasping Janice's hands in her own, her voice thick with emotion. "Don't worry, I'll handle Leonie. You know I'll always have your back."

"I don't agree," Aiden interjected as he was wheeled in by Braylen. His face was stern as he cast a cold glance at Janice. "Do we let just anyone move into the house?"

"Aiden, what are you saying?" Nina's voice carried a note of exasperation. "Sierra is delightful company and a dear friend to Janice. Offering her temporary shelter is hardly cause for concern."