

Wrath 281

Chapter 281:

“Carman, just drop it,” Delilah replied, forcing a smile. “Janice isn’t the same person anymore. She’s got Aiden and JE supporting her now. We’re powerless against her. Remember how she also tarnished your reputation? Recently, Edwards Group was nearly crippled financially trying to cover the massive fines because of you.” At this, Carman’s eyes blazed with renewed animosity toward Janice.

Laurie’s brow furrowed, sensing something off. Delilah had spoken little, yet her words sharply fueled Carman’s anger against Janice.

She felt a wave of realization wash over her. It dawned on her that Delilah often played the victim, subtly steering their frustration toward Janice whenever conflicts arose.

Could it be...?

“Mom!”

At that instant, another man entered.

He wore black-rimmed glasses, presenting a scholarly demeanor that contrasted sharply with Lowell’s and Carman’s more rugged appeal. He appeared gentle, almost intellectual.

“Dotson, you’re here!” As soon as Delilah spotted Dotson, she jumped up and embraced him tightly. “I have missed you so much!”

A blush tinged Dotson’s cheeks, and amidst the crowd, he hesitated to hug her back. “I have missed you too. But what happened with Mom? Why did she collapse all of a sudden?”

“It was Janice,” Carman replied, coaxing Delilah to step away from Dotson.

Dotson's expression soured. "That bitch! Didn't we already expel her from our family? And she's still causing problems?"

"Dotson, mind your language," Laurie's voice carried a note of annoyance. She couldn't pinpoint why, but she felt uncomfortable hearing Janice spoken of in such terms.

"Mom, I'm only human, and I can get angry too," Dotson said sharply. "In the past, people like her would have been excluded and made into examples!"

Laurie suddenly felt overwhelmed. She had no desire to continue this conversation. "I'm exhausted. I need to rest. Everyone, please leave."

"Mom..."

"I said leave."

Dotson, Carman, and Delilah shared a look before silently exiting the room.

"Carman, Dotson, it seems like Janice has really hurt Mom this time." Delilah's eyes filled with tears as she bit her lip. "Maybe it's time for me to leave this family. Janice is causing all of this because of me, isn't she? If I go, maybe she'll stop."

"Delilah, don't talk nonsense!" Carman exclaimed sharply. "The more she causes us trouble, the more important it is that we stand our ground. We can't appear weak!"

"But—"

"Listen to Carman," Dotson added, his voice firm and decisive as he adjusted his glasses. "We need to create a strategy against Janice. So what if she's supported by the Green family and has JE's influence? That power isn't hers to keep; it won't last."

Chapter 282:

“Dotson, you’re the clever one. Have you thought of a plan?” Delilah asked, her tone eager.

Instead of responding, Dotson abruptly changed the subject. “Speaking of which, where’s Lowell? Mom’s in the hospital, and he’s nowhere to be seen?”

“Lowell’s been upset by Janice as well.”

“That bitch!” Dotson exclaimed sharply.

“Dotson, is it really okay to call her that?” Delilah asked, her voice filled with hesitation. Her timid expression stirred a sense of sympathy in both Dotson and Carman. To them, she appeared as a delicate flower, deeply hurt by Janice’s cruelty.

“What’s wrong with calling it as it is?” Carman countered. “Given all she’s done to tear our family apart, calling her a bitch is actually mild.”

“Exactly! I’m going to ruin her reputation publicly,” Dotson said, his eyes narrowing. His usually gentle features hardened into a fierce expression at that moment.

Despite maintaining a sorrowful look, Delilah felt a surge of joy inside. She was glad to see them destroy each other. In the end, she would gain the most.

Just then, Delilah’s phone rang. She checked the caller ID; it was Kenneth.

A spark of hope flickered in her eyes, her heart fluttering. Could Kenneth be calling to offer his support? Given Kenneth’s friendship with Lowell, it seemed logical for him to make contact.

Delilah quickly adjusted her demeanor, softening her voice to maximize her pitiful appeal before picking up. “Kenneth.”

“Delilah, you’re fired. Come in tomorrow to clear out your desk.”

Delilah was stunned, her eyes widening in shock. The comforting words she anticipated never materialized. Instead, she was blindsided, knocked off balance by the unexpected and harsh reality.

Delilah was lost in thought, puzzled by Kenneth's unexpected decision. While the plagiarism investigation lingered, a conviction hadn't yet been determined, and any repercussions would typically be delayed.

However, Kenneth had sent a termination notice with surprising haste, suggesting someone urged him to expedite her dismissal. Could Janice be behind this, or maybe Leah from Freak Design?

Noticing her distress, Carman and Dotson quickly voiced their concern. "Delilah, what's bothering you?"

As Delilah turned to face them, tears welled in her eyes—not from pretense this time, but from genuine despair. Kenneth's decision dashed her hopes of ever growing closer to him.

"Kenneth has just fired me." Her voice quivered, overwhelmed by a wave of emotions. "After all my hard work, how can I deserve this?"

Carman and Dotson glanced at each other, stepping in to offer comfort.

"Delilah, hold back your tears. We're here for you," Carman reassured her.

"And don't forget about Lowell. He knows Kenneth from school. Maybe he can persuade Kenneth to reconsider," Dotson added, optimistic. The brothers pondered how best to comfort their visibly upset sister.

Chapter 283:

Yet, Delilah seethed with bitterness. If only Lowell had been more proactive, she wouldn't be facing such indignity. Now, he secluded himself daily, thwarting her chances to connect with Kenneth. What use was his friendship with Kenneth if he couldn't even secure her some time alone with him?

Delilah's mounting frustrations and complaints spurred Carman and Dotson to redouble their efforts to placate her, eventually helping her find some calm.

Returning home, they arrived to find Connor engaged in a phone conversation in the living room.

His manner was unusually compliant, his expressions filled with ingratiation, prompting shared looks of bewilderment among them. It was out of character for their father to behave so submissively.

“Mr. Mendoza, your assistance is crucial at this juncture,” Connor said with a flattering smile. “Should the Edwards family weather this storm, we will not forget your generosity. Yes, I’m clear on that. Offering you seventy percent of our profits in return is fine to me. I will be there tomorrow in person to finalize our agreement.”

Once he disconnected, Connor exhaled deeply and collapsed into a chair, clearly drained.

Conceding seventy percent of the profits was a tough call but necessary to secure Edwards Group’s stability. The perception of financial instability could lead to actual insolvency. The reputation of a business often held the key to its survival, more so than its immediate financials.

During the bidding conference, he didn’t just fail to secure a project; he also suffered a blow to his reputation, becoming the butt of jokes among prominent firms. Who would trust a company that couldn’t even manage a competent bid proposal to successfully oversee a project?

The partnership with Mendoza Group was crucial to demonstrating Edwards Group’s viability.

Spotting the three at the doorway and remembering his earlier conversation, Connor’s face betrayed a flicker of shame.

“When did you all arrive?” he asked.

“We just got here,” Carman responded with an uneasy smile. “Mom’s better, but she’ll be under observation in the hospital for another day.”

“Good.” Connor nodded. “And you, Delilah?” Noticing the redness in her eyes, concern crept into his voice. “Has it been tough for you recently?”

Delilah couldn't hold back any longer and rushed into Connor's embrace, her voice filled with distress. "Dad, I'm heartbroken. Kenneth has just dismissed me. This time, Janice not only falsely accused me of plagiarism but is trying to isolate me completely. Does she think she can bully me just because the Greens support her and she's friends with Leah?"

Connor's expression turned grim. "Janice really knows no limits. Don't worry, Delilah. I'll ensure justice is served. The contact you provided, Mr. Mendoza, has just confirmed his commitment. He's ready to collaborate with Edwards Group. His support will fortify our foundation significantly."

"Really?" Delilah's face brightened, her eyes sparkling as she gazed at Connor, her excitement noticeable. "Dad, as long as our family prospers, nothing else matters to me." It seemed Nellie had handled the arrangements effectively.

The Mendoza family, though not among the top four families, maintained a strong position in the construction industry. Their alliance with Mendoza Group would open doors for Edwards Group to significant development projects in the western suburbs. While it might not elevate the Edwards family above their rivals, it would solidify their standing within the industry.

Chapter 284:

"Delilah, this achievement is thanks to you. Without your network, I couldn't have reached Mr. Mendoza," Connor said, his tone warming as he looked at Delilah with a mix of thankfulness and pride. "Many businesses compete for Mr. Mendoza's partnership. Without your intervention, Edwards Group wouldn't have had a chance."

"Dad, please don't say that. We're family. I'm committed to doing whatever is necessary for our success," Delilah responded, her voice tinged with a mixture of sorrow and determination, as if playing the martyr. Seeing her so resolute, Connor's heart ached. He believed Delilah had sacrificed a great deal to develop this connection. "Delilah, you really are the luck of our family."

"Exactly! And we won't let Janice and her antics slide, for Delilah's sake!" Carman added enthusiastically. "She's merely exploiting borrowed influence. United, we'll ensure she faces the consequences of her actions sooner rather than later."

“Dad, where’s Lowell?” Dotson suddenly asked, his eyes sweeping the room. “Shouldn’t he be here with us?”

“He’s been locked in his room for days. It seems he’s completely given up.” Connor exhaled heavily.

“I don’t have sympathy for his self-pity. Delilah was publicly shamed by Kenneth, and it’s time for Lowell to confront him,” Dotson said, adjusting his glasses with a crisp click. “Kenneth had no justification for dismissing Delilah. His actions have not only humiliated her but also tainted our family’s honor.”

“Kenneth has overstepped.” Connor’s expression darkened, his voice chilling. “Does he think our family can be pushed around so easily?”

“Dad, it’s okay,” Delilah said, shaking her head while managing a sorrowful smile. “If my departure can diminish Janice’s hostility and protect our family, I’m willing to bear this burden.”

“Absolutely not! We cannot let this go unchallenged.” Connor’s hand crashed down on the table. “Kenneth will have to account for unjustly firing you. It’s a direct insult to us!”

“This isn’t about Kenneth.” A raspy, cold voice suddenly pierced the tension.

All eyes turned to the staircase where a disheveled man stood, his eyes hollow and red.

“Lowell?” Carman gasped, hardly recognizing their once poised and self-assured family member.

The man before them was barely recognizable as Lowell. His hair was wild, his beard ragged, and his wrinkled clothing painted the picture of a man who had reached his lowest point.

A stunned hush fell over the room. Could his downfall really have been this severe?

Lowell made his way down the stairs, his presence filling the room with heavy, oppressive energy. His bloodshot eyes and troubled expression created a noticeable sense of discomfort among those present.

“Lowell, what are you saying?” Connor’s voice was the first to cut through the silence. “How can this have nothing to do with Kenneth?”

Lowell’s lips curled into a strange smile. “Because I’m the one who told Kenneth to fire Delilah.”

“You did what?” Everyone stared at Lowell in disbelief. Delilah’s breath hitched, her eyes widening as though seeing Lowell for the very first time.

Chapter 285:

This couldn’t be real.

Lowell, the brother who always doted on her, had been the one to push Kenneth into dismissing her? And now, standing before her with that unhinged demeanor, he seemed like a stranger—almost deranged.

“Lowell, this has to be some kind of joke, right?” Delilah stepped forward, her hand reaching instinctively for his sleeve. But Lowell recoiled as though she carried a contagious curse, panic etched across his face. “Don’t touch me.”

“Lowell.”

“You’re a demon, Delilah! You’ve torn this family apart with your schemes! You drove Janice away!” Lowell’s voice cracked with fury, his expression darkening further. “Everything is your fault. If it weren’t for you, Janice wouldn’t have been kicked out. She wouldn’t have humiliated me in front of everyone. This mess is all because of you!”

Delilah stood frozen, his accusations slamming into her like a cold wind.

Was Lowell holding her responsible for everything?

If that were the case, it didn’t matter much. After all, Lowell was already useless. As long as he didn’t uncover the ultimate truth, she could still smooth everything over.

“Yes, Lowell,” Delilah murmured with a bitter smile. “It’s all my fault. I’m just the adopted daughter. I have no right to be here. Perhaps it’s best if I leave and let Janice come back.”

She gazed at Lowell, her eyes filled with sadness. “If my leaving will help you heal, I’ll go this very moment.” Without waiting for a response, she turned and hurried upstairs.

“Delilah!” Carman’s voice rang out as he grabbed her arm, halting her. “What are you doing? Lowell’s lost his mind, and now you want to follow suit?”

“Exactly!” Dotson stepped in, blocking her path. “Lowell might be losing it, but you’ve got Carman and me. We’ll stand by you.”

The sharp crack of a slap echoed through the room. Connor had struck Lowell, the force sending him stumbling.

“You ungrateful brat! If you want to act insane, do it behind a closed door!” Connor’s voice was thick with fury. “Delilah has given so much to this family, and you can’t see any of it? Do you even realize the only reason Edwards Group has ties to Mr. Mendoza is because of her? Instead of reflecting on your failures, you throw all the blame at her feet. Is this what being a brother means to you?”

“You’re all blind!” Lowell spat, clutching his face, his voice shaking with anger. “Think, Dad. Why did all these problems start as soon as Janice came back?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Carman snapped. “Janice is trying to reclaim her place, to push Delilah out!”

“No!” Lowell’s voice grew louder, more desperate. “It’s Delilah! She’s the one manipulating everything—turning us against Janice! And have you even stopped to consider how much Janice has done for this family since her return?”

The words hit Carman like a thunderclap.

Memories of Janice playing piano beside him surfaced unbidden. Thanks to her, he'd rediscovered melodies that had revitalized his career.

But was it inspiration, or something else? Was Janice intentionally guiding him to remember those tunes so he could pass them off as his own?

Chapter 286:

His music career had thrived thanks to Janice's discreet support.

"Dad, I've been thinking a lot lately. Why were my past proposals so perfect, but this one turned out to be a mess?" Lowell's bloodshot eyes glared at his father, bitterness in every word. "It's because Janice revised all those proposals. Every time I hit a wall, she quietly stepped in to fix them. Someone who has given so much to this family—how could she ever try to sabotage Delilah just to gain attention?"

Connor's face darkened, his eyes hardening with denial. "Is that all?"

"Why can't you see it?" Lowell's voice rose in desperation. "Delilah is nothing but a manipulative liar! She orchestrated everything to get Janice kicked out—" Again, Connor's hand struck Lowell's face sharply. "Say another word against Delilah, and I'll slap you again." Lowell froze, shock flooding his expression as he stared at his father. How could this be the same man who had always been so reasonable? How could he be so blind? Then, as the rage faded, a realization took its place. Hadn't he been just as blind not long ago?

His pride had refused to acknowledge how much of his success was built on Janice's quiet support.

It took days of reflection for him to finally see the truth. After Janice returned, she had never tried to steal the spotlight. She had always worked quietly, helping the family without complaint.

She had even protected his pride, helping him in silence without asking for recognition.

And what about Delilah? What had she ever done for the family? Aside from crying and playing the victim, had she contributed anything?

Each time Delilah clashed with Janice, there was never any solid proof—just tears and a pitiful act. Yet somehow, that was all it took for everyone to side with her and treat Janice cruelly.

“Dad, we were wrong,” Lowell said, his voice trembling as blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. His eyes welled with tears. “We mistook glass for diamonds. We drove out the real family!”

Connor struck him again, but Lowell barely noticed the pain as he spiraled deeper into frustration. “Dad, do you remember the allergy incident? Dr. Carter confirmed that Delilah isn’t even allergic to mango. Yet she accused Janice of trying to harm her!”

“Enough!” Delilah’s sharp cry pierced the air, her face streaked with tears and resentment. “Lowell, why do you hate me so much? Fine, I’ll go! Is that what you want?” She turned to rush up the stairs.

“Delilah!”

Carman and Dotson quickly followed, blocking her path.

“Let me go!” Delilah sobbed, her eyes desperate. “If I stay, Lowell will completely lose it. I can’t let that happen, even if he misunderstands me. I just want him to be alright.”

“Stop pretending, Delilah!” Lowell shouted, his voice trembling with anger. “I looked into it. The pudding Janice bought wasn’t mango. But you claimed it was mango—to frame her and turn us against her.” At last, the truth came out.

Delilah’s face went pale, her knees buckling as she collapsed to the floor.

As she fell, she forced a bitter smile. “Lowell, if this helps you, say whatever you want about me.”

Chapter 287:

Damn it! Lowell had finally discovered the truth. Now, all she could do was feign fainting to get out of this.

“Delilah!”

As Delilah suddenly collapsed, Carman and Dotson were too stunned to consider whether Lowell’s earlier claims were true. They quickly lifted her and rushed her upstairs.

“Daryl, call Bartley,” Carman ordered. Daryl, panicked by Delilah’s fainting, immediately followed the order and called Bartley.

Connor snapped out of his daze, his gaze hard and cold as he fixed his eyes on Lowell.

“Dad, are you finally thinking clearly? Our family has fallen apart because of Delilah! The person who truly cares about this family is—I—”

Before Lowell could finish, Connor delivered a brutal kick to him.

Lowell curled on the floor in pain, staring at Connor in disbelief. In Connor’s eyes, there was only a chilling indifference and raw anger.

Lowell’s heart sank in defeat. He had failed. He couldn’t make his family see the truth.

“Lowell, from this moment on, you will remain in your room to reflect. You’re not to leave until you stop spouting nonsense,” Connor roared. “Someone, take him back to his room. He’s not allowed out without my permission.”

Several servants hurried over, lifted Lowell, and escorted him upstairs.

Lowell laughed hysterically, tears running down his face.

“You’ll regret this! Janice, I’m sorry! I failed to protect you. I’m no better than an animal. I drove my own sister away!”

Connor pinched the bridge of his nose, attempting to relieve the throbbing headache. The mounting stress had already taken its toll, and Lowell's outburst only intensified it.

Leaning back on the sofa, he stared at the ceiling in blank despair.

How had this family fallen apart like this?

Once, Edwards Group had been thriving. If Lowell had stayed on the right path, he would have eventually taken over the entire company. Carman could have excelled in his music career, Dotson could have made a name for himself in literature, and his wife could have gained recognition in the design world.

But now, Lowell had lost his mind. Carman had been driven out of music. Laurie's reputation in design was ruined. Only Dotson had avoided the worst.

Still, Connor couldn't shake the feeling that the worst was yet to come.

Could it be...?

"Sir, have some water to calm yourself," Daryl interrupted his thoughts, offering a glass of water. "There's been too much turmoil at home lately. You need to take care of your health."

Connor snapped back to reality, nodding at Daryl. "Daryl, if Janice had grown up with us, things would be different now. Don't you think?"

For a moment, panic flickered in Daryl's eyes, but she quickly smiled. "I believe this is all fate. The heavens brought Delilah into your life. She's been a source of joy and laughter in this home. But ever since Janice returned, this family has been full of conflict. Honestly, I can understand her feelings—having her life stolen for so long must leave her heart in turmoil. Thankfully, Delilah is kind-hearted and hasn't harmed Janice. If she wanted to, she could have done much worse."

Chapter 288:

Connor paused, reflecting on Daryl's words.

It was true.

Delilah, brought up in privilege, possessed the confidence and poise that came with it. If she had truly wanted to target Janice, she could have easily made Janice's life miserable in countless ways.

However, Delilah hadn't done that. Instead, she had shown remarkable patience. It was Janice's relentless scheming that had disrupted the once-harmonious atmosphere of their home.

"You've done so much for the family, Daryl," Connor sighed. "You've watched Delilah grow up, and you know she's been through a lot recently. Please keep looking out for her."

"Of course, sir," Daryl responded with a nod. "I'm just worried Janice won't stop coming after her."

"She won't be causing trouble for much longer," Connor said, his eyes narrowing as a cold smile curled on his lips. "After tonight, everyone will hate her."

Meanwhile, Janice was online, chatting with Nina, who was enjoying a vacation in Aerith. The fun and scenic photos Nina had posted since her arrival showed she was having a blast on the trip.

"You and Aiden should go on a honeymoon once he secures the shares, Janice," Nina wrote. "You two got your marriage certificate without a wedding ceremony, which is improper. Maybe I should throw one for you when you return from your honeymoon."

Janice couldn't help but smile bitterly. By the time Nina returned from her trip, she and Aiden would likely be divorced. She could only imagine how angry and upset Nina would be.

Of course, all that anger would be aimed at Aiden, while she would receive Nina's sympathy and support.

"Alright," Janice replied, not wanting to dampen Nina's mood during her trip. "Anyway, Delgado Jewelry is hosting a banquet tonight. I'll be attending with Aiden, so I need to get ready."

Nina replied, "Right, have fun! I'm off to dinner with Alcott tonight. Talk to you again later."

Janice had just put down her phone after exiting the chat with Nina when another message popped up. It was from Prescott.

She arched an eyebrow. A message from Prescott at this hour meant something interesting must have happened.

"Janice, I just got word that Lowell caused a scene at home, claiming Delilah was to blame for all the mess—and not you," Prescott wrote.

Janice tilted her head curiously. Had Lowell finally come to his senses? Who would have thought that isolating himself for days would lead him to realize who the real troublemaker was?

"Will you forgive him, Janice?" Prescott asked.

Janice smiled bitterly as she typed her reply. "Does forgiving him erase my suffering at their hands?"

It took a moment before Prescott's response came through. "That's a relief. I was worried you might let up and ask me to help Lowell."

Janice shook her head. She couldn't care less what the Edwards family was planning with this sudden turn of events. Their foolishness would be their downfall anyway.

Chapter 289:

"One more thing—Edwards Group has partnered with Mendoza Group. Should we do anything about it?" Prescott asked.

The news didn't surprise Janice. Instead, it confirmed where Delilah's newfound confidence was coming from. "No, we'll just sit back and watch the drama unfold."

Just then, a knock came at her door.

Janice put away her phone and opened the door to find Aiden sitting in his wheelchair.

"I've prepared evening gowns for you. You might want to try some on," he said flatly, and Janice curled her lips into a smile.

"It's just a simple company banquet, Aiden. Aren't you being a bit too rigorous about it?"

"It doesn't matter. You're my wife. You can't look too shabby."

"Fine, then take me to them," Janice replied with a cheeky smile, clasping her hands behind her back as she walked briskly toward him.

Her smile caught Aiden off guard. He caught the subtle scent of her elegant perfume as she drew near, making him blush slightly without even realizing it.

Janice hadn't realized just how seriously Aiden was taking the celebration banquet.

As soon as she entered the fitting room, a team of stylists rolled out racks upon racks of evening gowns.

Red, blue, yellow... The colors were so vivid they could've formed a rainbow. The quality of the dresses was exceptional, including some of her own designs.

"Are you serious, Aiden?" Janice turned to him, suspicion in her eyes as he followed her in. "Given our history, don't you think this is a bit excessive?"

Aiden remained nonchalant, playing with the bracelet on his wrist. "It's all for the Green family's pride."

Janice rolled her eyes and flipped him off. "Right, all for the Green family's pride. Here I thought you actually wanted me to look stunning."

Aiden lowered his gaze, and his fingers twitched before he regained his calm. "Try them on. I've already bought all of them. Choose whichever one you prefer."

Janice walked over to the gowns, skipping past her own designs. While they were top-tier, she had grown tired of them after seeing them so many times.

Noticing her disregard for JE's creations, Aiden raised an eyebrow. "Don't you like JE's designs?"

Janice replied without hesitation, "They're made by my best friend, so I've seen them too often. They don't excite me anymore."

"Remove all of JE's dresses," Aiden ordered the staff, surprising even Janice with his quick decision. To an outsider, it might have seemed like he was completely at her beck and call.

The stylists, ever professional, cleared out all of JE's designs without hesitation.

There were quite a few of them. Aiden had likely assumed that, as JE's best friend, Janice would cherish the designs. However, reality didn't match his assumptions.

After much deliberation, Janice finally chose a light blue gown. Its flowing hem billowed like soft clouds, and the delicate lace detailing on the sleeves and neckline added an air of ethereal sophistication.

The gown was impeccably tailored, accentuating Janice's elegant figure flawlessly. Its understated embellishments emphasized her natural beauty.

"How do I look?" Janice asked, twirling gracefully in front of Aiden.

Chapter 290:

For a moment, Aiden was spellbound, his gaze fixed on her as if she were a celestial being gliding through the clouds. Her soft smile radiated warmth, melting the cold reserve within him.

“Aiden?” Janice leaned closer when he didn’t respond. Her stunning face suddenly magnified in his view, jolting him back to reality.

“You look beautiful,” he said, his voice quieter than usual.

Janice arched an eyebrow, a playful grin tugging at her lips. “Aiden, don’t tell me you were actually mesmerized. Then again, I can’t blame you. Women as elegant and breathtaking as me are a rarity. It’s only natural you’d want to steal a few extra glances.”

Aiden’s expression darkened, though a flicker of amusement lingered in his eyes. “Janice, you’re the very definition of a narcissist.”

“When you have the right qualities, everything falls into place.” Janice twirled around, her lips curving into a self-assured smile. “You have quite the eye, Aiden. This dress, Cloud, is the crown jewel of Christian’s international collection. Though many have tried, few can truly display the dress. And yet, you got it for me.”

She clicked her tongue. “It occurs to me that you seem to understand me better than most.”

Aiden reclined slightly, his gaze unwavering. “I simply knew you’d command attention in the evening gown, so I bought it for you.”

Janice arched an eyebrow but held her silence. Turning back to her reflection, she studied herself once more before declaring, “This is the one. Remove the others.”

“Mrs. Green, your discerning taste matches your grace,” the fitting assistant remarked with genuine warmth. “In all my years in this profession, I’ve never seen anyone embody a gown’s essence quite like you do.”

“Absolutely! We’ve dressed countless dignitaries, but no one has captured the spirit of this dress quite like you,” another assistant added enthusiastically.

Their admiration rang true, devoid of any artificial flattery.

“Feel free to keep praising,” Janice replied with a gentle smile. Despite her elevated status, she carried herself with an inviting warmth.

The fitting assistants visibly relaxed, their earlier reserve melting away into animated conversation.

“Mrs. Green, for the banquet, I’d recommend a subtle makeup palette to complement this gown.”

“Precisely! Heavy makeup is a crutch for the insecure. With your natural beauty, Mrs. Green, anything too dramatic would only diminish your radiance.”

“I know just the makeup artist for this. Would you like me to arrange an appointment?”

Aiden sat in contemplative silence, observing their exchange. A sense of peace washed over him as he watched Janice’s radiant smile, unaware that his typically stoic expression had softened into one of gentle contentment.

“Is the makeup artist a man?” he interjected suddenly, his question cutting through the pleasant atmosphere. The assistants were startled, suddenly reminded of Aiden’s commanding presence.

“Yes, a man,” one replied.

“Get a female one,” Aiden stated, his tone brooking no argument.

Janice let out an amused laugh. “Aiden, does the artist’s gender really make any difference? Surely skill is what matters most?”

Aiden shifted in his position, resting his chin thoughtfully on his hand while giving her a meaningful glance. “You’re my wife.”