

Wrath 381

Chapter 381:

Aiden remained silent, giving Janice ample time to process the information.

Janice had her eyes closed as her lips slowly curled into a bitter smile. She had long since given up on finding her family, but Aiden's unexpected news was shaking her resolve.

Had her parents, in fact, left her in order to protect her? Did they leave her at the orphanage because of the imminent danger waiting for them?

Janice used to hope that they had left her out of selfishness, but now, her world was turned upside down.

"How much do you know?" Janice opened her eyes and looked straight at Aiden.

He saw a hint of anger brewing beneath her gaze. "I'm still looking into the details. There were many parties involved in the incident in Cloverhill. It wasn't just one culprit; several factions joined forces in order to destroy the White family."

Janice nodded. "Thank you."

"You don't need to thank me. I owe you this much."

Janice frowned and gave Aiden a helpless look. "You don't owe me anything. Our marriage was built on mutual agreement. My saving you in the past is just a coincidence. I never expected any compensation for that."

"Be that as it may, I still want to pay you back." As Aiden said this, the gaze he fixed on her was burning again.

Janice bristled under its intensity, and she instinctively turned away to look out the window. "Suit yourself," she murmured.

Aiden raised an eyebrow at her reaction, but his mood definitely lifted.

Janice's attitude towards him was far from friendly, but at least she wasn't as cold and distant as before.

His next plan was to gradually earn her trust and get even closer to her.

"By the way, where are you staying now?" Aiden was aware that Janice had moved out of his place, but he had no idea where she was currently living.

"I haven't really thought about it yet." Janice took out her phone and began scrolling through a list. "I have several properties in Efrery. Let me see where I should stay for tonight."

Aiden's lips twitched. Was she trying to show off?

But then he thought of her real status, and he felt a keen sense of resignation. His position as a rich and powerful CEO was utterly useless in this department.

JE Consortium was a massive force in itself, with its influence reaching across various fields. If Aiden were to clash with Janice, even with his control over the Green family's assets and Forest Corp, his chances of coming out on top were still rather bleak.

Aiden sighed woefully to himself. He knew he needed to work harder, to become stronger than Janice somehow. He needed to be the kind of man who could protect her.

"Ah, this one will do." Janice sent Aiden the location.

Aiden's brows furrowed slightly. "Mount Cloudridge?"

“Yes. The scenery over there is very nice. It’s like going on a peaceful retreat.”

He blinked at her comment. “Isn’t it a bit early to think about a retreat?”

“Mind your own business.”

“I want to be involved in your life, though,” Aiden pointed out shamelessly with a mischievous smirk. “Won’t you need someone to keep you company when you’re old and retired? I’m the perfect candidate, if I do say so myself.”

Janice clicked her tongue and tapped the back of Aiden’s seat. “How did I not notice this shameless side of yours before? I think you should stick to your aloof and domineering persona. I’m not used to this version of you.”

“I only pretended to be disabled to keep my enemies at bay. Now that I have complete control over the Green family, I have no reason to be anyone other than myself.” He suddenly stepped on the brakes and turned in his seat to face her. “Besides, I can’t be aloof with you.”

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Janice was caught off guard, and she found herself frantically averting her eyes.

It didn’t escape Aiden’s notice, of course, but he chose not to pursue the matter. He shifted gears and continued driving.

They cruised smoothly down the streets as silence settled inside the car. Janice took a surreptitious glance at Aiden’s handsome profile and smiled unconsciously.

Soon enough, they arrived at the residential area at Mount Cloudridge.

It was an upscale neighborhood, and the villas were surrounded by lush greenery and the constant, soothing sound of nature. It was indeed the perfect place to retire.

"Thanks, Aiden." Janice got out of the car and turned away to enter her villa.

"Aren't you going to invite me in for a drink?"

"No!" Janice raised her hand and blew an exasperated sigh. "Please don't use these dated pickup lines on me, I beg you. Also, I think I need to remind you that your mother is returning to the country today. She should be home by now."

Aiden's eyes widened, as if he had just realized the impending trouble on his horizon.

"So you might want to spend the next couple of hours or so thinking of a way to appease your mother," Janice suggested.

Aiden looked at her, who had a smug grin on her face, and was torn between frustration and resignation.

She was the root of all this trouble, yet she was leaving him to deal with the fallout. At least in this sense, she really was a bad woman.

"Mark my words, Janice. One day, you'll be her daughter-in-law again." With that, Aiden jumped back in his car and sped away.

He understood the principle of not rushing things well enough. When it came to stubborn, independent women like Janice, an avant-garde approach would only make her more evasive.

No matter. They had plenty of time ahead of them.

Janice stood at the edge of the driveway, her gaze fixed on the fading taillights of Aiden's car. A small smile tugged at her lips.

She pulled out her phone and dialed Prescott. "I need a deep dive on the White family in Cloverhill. Leave no detail uncovered."

Without waiting for a reply, Janice ended the call and headed towards her villa.

Meanwhile, Leah had managed to steady herself, but the pallor of her face betrayed the deep scars left by Leonidas. His very name, even after all these years, was enough to pull her into a vortex of dread.

“What did Janice want from you?” she asked.

Prescott, adjusting his glasses, hesitated for a moment, his expression puzzled. “She wants me to investigate the White family in Cloverhill. Thoroughly, no stone left unturned.”

“The White family in Cloverhill?” Leah echoed, her tone filled with confusion. “Weren’t they wiped out years ago? Why would Janice suddenly care about them now?”

“I don’t know. Janice’s mind works in ways we can’t always understand.”

Leah gave a nod. It was true; Janice’s intelligence was unmatched, and her plans were always calculated. Questioning her motives felt like trying to solve a puzzle without all the pieces.

Suddenly, the ear-piercing sound of brakes brought them both forward in their seats, their bodies jerking violently against the restraints.

“Costello, what the hell are you doing?” Leah demanded, his irritation flaring.

“There’s someone in the road,” Costello replied, his voice low and tense.

Leah and Prescott exchanged uneasy glances before looking ahead.

Bathed in the car’s headlights was a figure standing eerily still. Leah’s breath caught in her throat as her eyes locked on the man. Her body began to tremble, a wave of fear crashing over her.

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"It's him. He's back."

The man didn't move. His long trench coat swayed lightly in the night breeze, his hands buried casually in his pockets. Dark, disheveled hair framed a face that bore a faint, chilling smile. Madness flickered in his eyes, and the cruel curve of his lips hinted at malice barely contained.

Costello stepped out of the car, his gaze icy and unwavering as he locked eyes with the man standing before him.

"Hi, Costello. It's been a while," the man greeted, his voice gravelly and dripping with mockery.

Costello didn't bother with words. Without hesitation, he lunged forward like a bolt of lightning, his movements precise and deadly.

The man instinctively stepped back, trying to maintain distance. But Costello was relentless, closing the gap in a heartbeat.

With a powerful swing, Costello's iron-like fist crashed into the man's chest.

The man grunted, crossing his arms just in time to absorb the blow.

The impact sent him staggering back several steps, his boots scraping against the gravel.

Despite being forced backward, the man's smile widened, a sinister, almost maddened grin spreading across his face.

Costello glanced at his arm, a sharp sting drawing his attention. Blood trickled from a fresh cut, a slash so precise it almost went unnoticed in the heat of the moment. Somehow, during their brief exchange, the man had managed to draw a knife and strike him.

“Costello! Are you okay?” Leah’s panicked voice broke through the silence as she and Prescott rushed out of the car.

They knew Costello’s strength better than anyone; he had taken on dozens of opponents without breaking a sweat. And yet, this man had managed to injure him in the blink of an eye.

Despite the obvious disparity in strength and size, the outcome had tipped unsettlingly in the man’s favor.

“I’m fine,” Costello muttered, shaking his head, his gaze locked on Leonidas. He seemed oblivious to the blood trickling steadily down his arm.

“Fine? You call this fine?” Concern for Costello momentarily overshadowed the fear gripping her. Leah spun on her heel and rushed back to the car to fetch the first-aid kit.

“Prescott, hold his arm up.”

“On it.”

Leah’s hands moved quickly, expertly wrapping the wound to stem the bleeding. Costello remained stoic, his eyes never leaving Leonidas.

Leonidas stood in the same spot, watching their every move with a detached, almost amused expression. The faint smile on his lips never faltered, but he made no further advances.

“Leonidas, why did you come back?” Leah finally spat, unable to suppress her anger any longer.

Leonidas tilted his head slightly, his eyes gleaming with twisted amusement. “Leah, aren’t you happy to see me?”

“Happy?” Leah clenched her fists so tightly that her knuckles turned white. “A monster like you? I’d rather see you dead.”

“Oh, Leah, such cruelty!” Leonidas feigned shock, spreading his arms wide with exaggerated flair. “After all, we grew up together in the same orphanage. I thought we’d have some connection. But here you are, so cold, so heartless.”

“Enough with the theatrics. Leonidas, what do you really want?” Prescott interjected, his tone sharp as a blade.

“What could I possibly want? I simply dropped by to say hello.” Leonidas stroked his chin, pretending to ponder. “Where’s Janice?”

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“You think you’re worthy of seeing Janice?”

“Leah, do you remember how you and the others set me up? Handed me over to that foreign couple? Do you know how ‘grateful’ I am to you guys?”

Leonidas’ eyes suddenly burned with intensity, his demeanor becoming increasingly unstable.

He began to laugh, his body shaking with the force of it, his eyes alight with madness.

“After I went with them, they started torturing me, carving marks all over my body. They even let me live in a kennel, treating me like a dog. It was unforgettable.”

Leah stumbled back a step, her earlier defiance melting into pure terror.

The way Leonidas spoke and laughed wasn’t the voice of a victim. It was the voice of someone who had thrived on the horror.

“You know, the couple taught me so many twisted ways to torment others. It was only fair to thank them for their invaluable lessons, don’t you think? So I ended their lives while they were blissfully asleep.”

Leonidas brushed his hand against his forehead, his lips curling into a crazed, unsettling grin.

“Ah, what a night that was. I gave them back every trick they pulled on me, keeping them barely alive so they could watch themselves bleed out. Their desperate screams and pitiful begging still echo so clearly in my mind.”

Dropping his gaze to his hands, Leonidas let out a low chuckle. “Really, I should be thanking you. Without your conniving plans, how else would I have stumbled upon such a delightful family? They showed me what true happiness looks like.”

“You’re insane!” Leah clenched her teeth tightly, fighting hard to mask the fear creeping into her expression.

Even Prescott, standing close by, couldn’t hide the slight tremor in his frame. The horrors Leonidas described were gut-wrenching, but the unsettling delight with which he shared them was far worse.

Costello stepped forward, his eyes flashing with danger. “Leave now, or you’ll regret it!” he growled.

Leonidas threw a glance his way, a mocking sneer spreading across his face. “Costello, I’d have thought you’d picked up a thing or two after spending so much time around Janice. But here you are, still playing the fool.”

Before anyone could stop him, Costello lunged straight at Leonidas.

Sensing the deadly intent, Leonidas didn’t take any chances this time. He pulled out two daggers, quickly getting into a defensive position.

“Stop right there, Costello!” Leah’s sharp, commanding tone brought Costello to an abrupt halt.

He froze mid-motion, turning to Leah with a puzzled expression.

“Can’t you see? He’s baiting you on purpose.” Leah’s sharp mind had quickly unraveled Leonidas’ intentions. “He’s trying to push your buttons, make you lose your cool, and then take you out when you’re vulnerable.”

Costello was not only blunt but also had a short fuse, easily getting angry.

Back in the day, his powerful presence among his peers made him an easy target for Leonidas’s taunts, pushing him into making poor decisions.

Whenever Costello lost his temper, it was always Janice who managed to bring him back to his senses.

“Costello, Janice isn’t here to keep you in check. You can’t afford to act on impulse now,” said Leah.

Costello shot a glance at Leonidas before lowering his murderous intent and stepping back to stand by Leah’s side.

“Now, that’s interesting.” Leonidas arched an eyebrow, idly twirling his daggers in his hands. “Well, I didn’t expect the big fool to actually listen to you now, Leah. That takes all the fun out of it.”

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“Leonidas, I’m not sure what kind of past you’ve had, but if you think you can get anything out of making a move here, you’re wrong,” Leah said firmly. “We’ve had our conflicts in the past, but that’s ancient history. Why not let it all go?”

Leonidas burst into laughter. Without warning, he grabbed the blade of his dagger and pressed his hand against its sharp edge. The blade cut deep, and blood began to pour from his palm. His eyes, cold and maniacal, betrayed no sign of pain.

“But I enjoy messing with you guys. After being abroad for so long, I’m getting bored. If I don’t find some fun, I might just go mad.”

“You’re unbelievable!”

“Don’t worry.” Leonidas slipped his daggers back into their sheaths, then extended his tongue to lick the blood from his palm. “I’m just here to announce myself today. The real game? That’s going to unfold bit by bit. That’s where the real excitement begins.”

“Take him down, Costello!” Leah suddenly commanded, seizing the opportunity while Leonidas was busy putting his daggers away.

Without hesitation, Costello charged forward like a runaway horse, closing the distance between him and Leonidas in a flash.

For a split second, Leonidas hesitated, his instincts pushing him to dodge to the side. But as he narrowly avoided Costello’s punch, Leah’s kick came in low and fast.

His eyes widened in surprise—he hadn’t anticipated such skill from her.

The impact of Leah’s kick slammed into him, sending a shockwave through his body.

He grunted in pain, but a dark grin spread across his face as he took the hit and grabbed Leah’s leg in retaliation. “Well, I didn’t expect you to have gotten better over the years. Shame though, your skills are still pretty basic.”

Leah’s eyes fluttered as she struggled to free herself, but Leonidas’ grip was like iron, locking her foot in place. Right at that moment, Costello’s fist came down with all its force.

Leonidas didn’t even blink. He absorbed the punch with a grimace and, without hesitation, pulled out a dagger to slice at Leah’s leg.

Leah’s face turned ashen as it hit her—Leonidas was so fixated on her that he completely disregarded Costello’s blow. His obsession was terrifying.

Just when it seemed like the situation couldn’t get worse, a figure suddenly appeared out of nowhere and delivered a powerful kick that sent Leonidas’ dagger flying from his hand.

Leah stood frozen for a moment, staring at the newcomer in disbelief.

“Braylen?”

It was, without a doubt, Braylen.

Braylen’s expression was calm but unyielding, his icy gaze fixed on Leonidas.

In the chaos of the earlier confrontation, Leah had broken free, quickly finding herself shielded by Costello.

“It’s you,” Leonidas said, his brows furrowing as his eyes locked on Braylen.

“Leonidas, it’s been a while.”

Leonidas snorted, his lips curling into a sneer. “So, you’re involved with these people now?”

Braylen’s eyes flicked briefly to Leah and the others before settling back on Leonidas. “That’s right. Leonidas, let’s end this here and now. Walk away, for old times’ sake. But if you’re looking for trouble, I’d be happy to oblige.”

Leonidas’ sharp gaze narrowed as he sized Braylen up. He knew this man well, a skilled mercenary. If Braylen had joined forces with Costello, the odds would turn heavily against him.

“Fine.” Leonidas turned to Leah, his lips twisting into an unsettling smile. “Leah, don’t get too comfortable. Our game has just begun. Enjoy the peace while it lasts.”

With that, he spun on his heel and disappeared into the darkness.

As soon as Leonidas was gone, Leah's legs buckled, and she nearly collapsed.

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"Leah, are you okay?" Prescott rushed forward, steadying her.

"I'm fine," Leah said, though her voice was shaky. She looked up at Braylen, her expression filled with gratitude. "Thank you. If you hadn't stepped in..."

Braylen waved her off with a slight shrug. "Just doing my job. Mr. Green sent me to watch over you."

"Aiden?"

"Yeah."

Leah exhaled sharply, frustration creeping into her tone. "I didn't realize Aiden cared so much about Janice. This is unexpected."

It was clear that Aiden's concern for Janice ran deep. The mere possibility of Leonidas' appearance had been enough for him to dispatch Braylen to ensure her safety.

"But I'm curious, how did he know Leonidas would show up midway?" Leah asked, her brow furrowed in confusion.

"I'm not entirely sure," Braylen replied, scratching the back of his head. He certainly wouldn't tell them that Aiden's decision had been driven more by a desire for some alone time with Janice than genuine concern. But knowing Aiden, it was unlikely he had overlooked the possibility of Leonidas' sudden appearance.

Leonidas was nothing if not unpredictable, a ticking time bomb who could strike out of nowhere. Ambushing them after delivering a gift was entirely in character for someone like him.

Braylen reported every detail of Leonidas' appearance to Aiden without sparing anything.

Aiden's eyes narrowed. His instincts had been right; Leonidas had appeared, just as he feared.

Thankfully, Braylen had arrived in time. Leah might have been seriously hurt without him, which would have unsettled Janice. Aiden clenched his fists at the thought; he couldn't stand seeing the woman he loved upset.

"Mr. Green, your parents are waiting for you in the living room," a servant said as Aiden stepped through the door, bowing slightly.

Aiden let out a resigned sigh, mentally preparing himself as he made his way inside.

"Aiden! What are you trying to do?" Nina stood abruptly upon seeing him, her finger pointed accusingly. "I've gone abroad for just a few days, and look what you've done! And you didn't bother to tell me? Do you even consider me your mother anymore?"

"Mom, I didn't want to stress you out," Aiden said, trying to sound calm, though he knew it wouldn't appease her.

"Stress me out?" Nina marched toward him, her anger boiling over as she grabbed his ear.

"Ouch, Mom! Take it easy!"

"Take it easy? You've got some nerve worrying about yourself now!" Nina's voice grew louder as her frustration erupted. "I want Janice back! Imagine my shock when I come home to find out you've divorced her, and she's already moved out! Unbelievable! You married her just to secure your grandfather's shares, didn't you? You're impossible, Aiden!"

"Mom, I know I was wrong," Aiden admitted, his tone low and filled with regret. "It wasn't until after the divorce that I realized how much I had messed up. I regret it deeply, and I'm doing everything I can to make it right."

Nina eyed him carefully, her stern demeanor softening just a fraction. With a sigh, she released his reddened ear, though the disappointment in her gaze lingered. The room fell silent, heavy with tension.

Those present exchanged subtle glances, surprised. Aiden, who was usually cold and distant, was now showing a rare vulnerability—a warmth they never thought he possessed.

“You say you want to make amends. What’s your plan?”

“I’m going to win Janice back.”

Nina sighed and sank back into her seat. “Why didn’t you cherish her when you had the chance? Why does it always take losing something to understand its value?”

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She glanced at the pile of shopping bags stacked by the wall. “Do you see all these? I bought them all to make her happy. And now she’s gone. Aiden, let me make this clear: if you don’t bring Janice back, I’ll use my veto power to strip you of your status as heir.”

Aiden blinked in surprise, the weight of her words sinking in. A bitter smile tugged at his lips. It seemed his mother valued Janice more than her own son now.

“Don’t worry. I’ll bring Janice back, no matter what.”

Nina’s anger began to fade as she saw the determination in his eyes.

Alcott finally spoke, his tone laced with reproach. “Aiden, what happened with Bart?”

Aiden turned to him, his gaze icy. “Dad, you already know. Bart faced the consequences of his actions.”

“Nonsense! He’s your brother! How could you treat him that way? Even if he made mistakes, he deserved a chance to make amends.”

“Do you actually believe Bart would give up his position of power to you?” Aiden’s sneer was thick with scorn as his eyes met Alcott’s.

Alcott’s face grew tense, as if his most guarded secret had been uncovered. “What are you implying? I have never harbored ambitions to lead,” he snapped back, casting a wary glance at Nina.

Nina narrowed her eyes, scrutinizing him closely. “Alcott, have you really plotted with that bastard against Aiden? Now it makes sense. Your sudden generosity, proposing a foreign trip, was just a trick to remove me from the shareholders’ meeting, to avoid my veto.”

Her expression softened as she connected the dots.

At first, she had been worried, but upon seeing her son safe and sound, she relaxed, realizing he had successfully overcome the crisis.

“Aiden, why did you keep it from me?” Worry creased Nina’s face as she gently held Aiden’s cheek. “I know you don’t want me to worry, but if anything happened to you, what would I do?”

Aiden responded with a reassuring smile. “See, I’m all right, aren’t I? It’s Bart who is in trouble now.”

“Aiden...” Alcott called out.

Suddenly, Nina’s hand struck Alcott’s cheek with force, the slap resounding through the room.

“Alcott, have you come to prefer that illegitimate son? If so, I’m prepared to divorce you, and you can acknowledge him as yours legally.”

Nina’s stern words left no room for argument.

Alcott was shocked; he had intended to confront Aiden, but Nina’s stark words halted him.

However, resentment quickly welled up inside him.

He was supposed to be the heir, but why had his father favored Aiden over him? Could he truly be so lacking?

"Mom, please calm down," Aiden pleaded, leading Nina to the sofa and rubbing her back soothingly.
"Actually, Dad was deceived."

"He was deceived?" Nina's brow furrowed as she turned to Aiden, perplexed.

Aiden cast a look at Alcott, whose face bore a mix of anger and disbelief.

"To seize control of Green Group, Bart had secretly convinced most of the shareholders and allied with the Ramirez family."

Aiden's declaration caused Alcott's eyes to widen, yet there was more to come. The ensuing disclosure completely dismantled Alcott's composure.

"And that's not all. Bart has sold all of his shares, aiming to ruin the Green family completely."

"No, that can't be true!" Alcott's complexion paled as he shook his head repeatedly, struggling to maintain his composure.

Aiden's smile was tinged with disgust. "Dad, can you continue to lie to yourself? Bart never cared for you. To him, you were merely a tool. Of course, you can doubt what I said. Feel free to verify the facts yourself."

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Collapsing into a chair, Alcott felt a crushing weight of realization; deep down, he knew the truth and saw no need for further investigation.

Bart had always been the picture of obedience, so what had driven him to madness? Was he truly willing to sell his shares just to destroy the Green family?

Aiden walked up to him, looking down. "You're still Dad to me because you didn't directly cause me harm. It was Bart who planned that car accident."

"What are you saying? Bart planned the car accident? But..."

"But you hadn't taken him in back then, huh?" Aiden cut in, his expression one of mocking disbelief. "Had I not been left crippled, would you have considered bringing him back?"

Alcott was swayed by the revelation, understanding he had been deceived by his illegitimate son the whole time.

Bart had masterminded the entire scheme, deepening the divide between him and Aiden. With Aiden out of the way, Bart had paved his return to the Green family.

"Alcott, what a complete fool you are!" Nina's voice dripped with scorn. "How did I ever marry such a fool? Now it's clear why your father overlooked you and entrusted Aiden with leadership and gave me the veto power. He could see that his own son was profoundly foolish."

Alcott bowed his head, lost for words. He was overwhelmed by a sense of defeat, as if physically slapped. He had never considered himself naive, but confronted with the harsh reality, he was forced to face the depth of his foolishness.

"Aiden! I was wrong!" Alcott's face twisted with regret as he looked at Aiden, guilt washing over him. "My jealousy took control, and I caused you so much pain."

He turned to Nina, his voice shaky with remorse. "Nina, you were right all along. I've been a fool. From now on, I'll back our son with all my heart, and I swear I'll never let my jealousy cloud my judgment again."

Aiden and Nina remained expressionless, their gazes cold and detached.

Though Alcott's tearful apology seemed sincere, neither of them was gullible enough to believe words spoken in such a charged moment.

Nina rose and walked upstairs. "Alcott, you'll be sleeping in the guest room tonight. And from now on, don't even think about sleeping in my bed."

"Nina!" Alcott cried out.

Aiden watched his mother walk away and sighed. She was too kind, too forgiving.

Whether Alcott's apology was real or not, it was clear Nina wasn't going to push for a divorce any longer. As for Aiden, he hadn't fully severed ties with Alcott—not out of loyalty, but because, despite the jealousy, the man hadn't gone too far yet.

Still, if Alcott ever crossed that line, not even the bond of blood would spare him.

Alcott spent the night in the guest room, his silence leaving it unclear whether guilt or a genuine effort to prove his sincerity kept him compliant.

The following morning, Janice awoke feeling refreshed and well-rested.

Even though it was her first night in the villa, she wasn't one to fuss over unfamiliar beds. Years of living a nomadic life had taught her to forgo such luxuries.

She stretched lazily, the soft fabric of her nightgown tracing her silhouette in a way that hinted without revealing too much.

Turning to the expansive floor-to-ceiling windows, she estimated the time from the soft morning light streaming in—likely close to nine.

"Looks like I slept longer than usual."

Picking up her phone, she noticed two unread messages from Leah.

“Janice, I saw Leonidas. He’s more unhinged than ever. What’s the plan?”

“Janice, I know you’re probably still asleep, but I’m scared! Costello fought against him, and he actually lost. If Braylen hadn’t shown up just in time, it could have turned really ugly.”

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Janice’s eyes narrowed, a cold, sharp glint flickering in their depths.

Leonidas was as erratic and dangerous as ever. First, a dramatic gift to announce his return, and now an ambush on Leah during her journey home.

“Aiden had Braylen tail him?” she murmured.

That twist caught her off guard.

Letting out a small sigh, she loosened her posture and dialed Leah’s number.

“Janice! Finally, you’re up.” The phone barely rang once before Leah answered.

“Leah, please don’t tell me you’ve been up all night.”

“Janice, I’m really frightened.”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

Janice spoke in a steady, soothing tone, her words carrying reassurance that immediately eased Leah’s anxious heart.

“We were only kids back then. All we could manage was to force him out of the orphanage,” Janice said, her tone sharp and resolute. “But now? If he so much as touches any of you, I’ll make him regret it.”

“Have Prescott track his movements.”

Janice understood that Leonidas was a looming threat. Without a clear idea of where he was or what he was planning, he could strike out of nowhere again—just as he had the night before.

Keeping tabs on him wasn’t just smart; it was necessary to shift from reacting to acting.

“I already had Prescott start digging the moment we got back,” Leah admitted. “But Leonidas is incredibly skilled at covering his tracks. Even Prescott hasn’t been able to pinpoint his location.”

Janice frowned slightly, realizing how messy the situation was becoming. “For now, get some rest. You’ve been up all night worrying, haven’t you?”

“I just needed to hear you say everything would be okay first.”

Janice let out a small sigh, her lips quirking into a faint smile. “Are you feeling better now?”

“Yeah. Goodbye, Janice.”

Janice exhaled deeply after ending the call.

As she was about to get up and start her day, Prescott called.

“Prescott, what is it?”

“Janice, you wanted me to investigate the White family from Cloverhill, correct? I’ve got most of the details and figured I’d update you.”

Janice arched a brow, impressed by Prescott’s speed and thoroughness. “Let’s hear it.”

“Twenty years ago, the White family was at the pinnacle of Cloverhill’s elite—untouchable, or so it seemed. Then, out of nowhere, everything fell apart. It’s rumored they angered the wrong people because the other major powers in the city ganged up on them. Their company shares were driven into the ground, and their personal lives unraveled just as quickly. Within two years, the family crumbled completely. The head of the family and his wife died during the fallout, both under tragic circumstances. The wife had just given birth before she passed away not long after.”

Janice’s fingers tightened around her phone as an unreadable glint sparked in her eyes. “And the baby? What happened to the child?”

“That’s the one detail I couldn’t uncover.”

Prescott was upfront. Despite his thorough investigation, the child’s trail had completely disappeared.

It reminded Janice of Aiden—his precision and how far he’d push for answers. Who else would even consider questioning local residents about events that had happened many years ago?

Most people would dismiss the idea entirely, believing such memories to be too faint or unreliable to hold any value. Still, Aiden uncovered critical pieces of the puzzle, proving once again how resourceful he truly was.

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Prescott asked, “Janice, why are you suddenly interested in the White family? We’ve never been involved with them.”

“It’s a personal matter,” Janice replied curtly, cutting Prescott off before he could probe further. “By the way, are there any members of the White family left now?”

“No, not anymore. Almost all their direct descendants have perished. I can’t fathom who they could have crossed to meet such a tragic fate. I’ve accessed many classified files, but there’s no record of the force that obliterated the White family. The only lead is the word ‘Welch.’”

Welch? Could that be the Welch family? But as far as she knew, there was no notable family by that name in Cloverhill.

Rubbing her temples, Janice realized this mystery required deeper investigation—there was undoubtedly a significant secret at play.

“Prescott, pursue the ‘Welch’ lead. Check for any obscure families and see what you can unearth.”

“Understood.”

After a moment of silence, Prescott spoke again. “Janice, has Leah reached out to you today?”

“Yes, she has.”

Relief washed over Prescott at her response. “That’s reassuring. She must’ve mentioned Leonidas. She was petrified yesterday, probably didn’t sleep at all, and has been waiting to hear from you.”

“She’s likely asleep by now.” Janice smiled. Their bond was like that of family; they knew each other’s quirks and habits well.

“Keep tabs on Leonidas. Let me know immediately if anything comes up.”

“Will do.”

Ending the call, Janice exhaled deeply.

Glancing at the clock, she noted it was nearly ten. The conversations with Leah and Prescott had consumed more time than she'd realized.

Just as she stood to freshen up, the doorbell rang.

Janice frowned. This was her first time staying in this villa; no one should know she was here.

She ran her fingers through her hair leisurely, then took her time getting ready. Despite the persistent ringing, she didn't rush.

Ten minutes later, Janice finally approached and opened the door.

To her surprise, it was Nina, and she wasn't alone. Aiden was with her.

Janice's mouth twitched, a pang of regret passing through her thoughts. She shouldn't have let Aiden drive her home yesterday. Now they were right at her doorstep.

"Mrs. Green, you're back in the country!"

"Janice! Why did you suddenly move out? Even if you and Aiden are divorced, you didn't have to leave!" Nina's face showed genuine concern as she took Janice's hand and walked inside.

Overwhelmed by Nina's enthusiasm, Janice found herself being ushered along.

Aiden, trailing behind with several bags, smiled as he watched the interaction.

"Mrs. Green..."

"Janice, can you still call me Nina?" Nina's frown conveyed her disappointment. "Even though you and Aiden aren't together anymore, I've always seen you as a friend. Calling me Mrs. Green feels so formal."

“Well...” Janice hesitated, feeling uneasy. Nina’s spontaneity and unpredictability had always taken her by surprise.

“Janice, can you?” Nina’s expression softened into a pout. Janice was a soft touch for pouting—she found it impossible to resist, whether it was Leah or Sierra using that tactic. She always