

Wrath 411

Chapter 411:

But as he watched them walk away, his thoughts churned. White family? Which White family was Aiden referring to? And how were they connected to Janice?

Kenneth pulled out his phone and quickly typed a message to his confidant, asking him to dig into Aiden's recent activities and find anything related to Janice.

His eyes narrowed as he watched Aiden lead Janice away with assertive confidence.

To Kenneth, their divorce was more than just a fact; it was fate presenting him with an extraordinary opportunity.

Janice wasn't just any woman; she was exceptional, the kind of person who left an unforgettable impression. Once someone truly got to know her, it was impossible to be drawn to anyone else. That was her formidable charm.

For this rare chance at love, Kenneth resolved to give it everything he had. He would stop at nothing to win Janice's heart.

"Mr. Delgado, aren't you engaged to Miss Ramirez?" Nina sipped her drink gracefully, feeling relieved that her son had taken Janice away, sparing her a lot of pressure.

"You must have misunderstood. The engagement with Miss Ramirez was merely an agreement of convenience. We both realized we weren't compatible, so it was called off."

"Exactly! And honestly, I think it was for the best," Lesly chimed in, casting Kenneth a proud glance. She was eager to see her son's intentions succeed.

Nina raised a brow, her tone laced with subtle sarcasm. "Ah, you men. It's always the same excuse; 'we weren't suitable.' So convenient. And while you're certainly a remarkable man, I don't think you're right for Janice either."

Kenneth didn't flinch. Instead, he responded with a cool smile. "Suitability isn't something anyone else can decide. It's something that becomes clear with time. Just as Aiden spent plenty of time with Janice and still ended up divorced."

"You..." Nina's composure cracked, her tone sharper now. The mention of the divorce hit a nerve. It was a wound she and Aiden had yet to mend. Letting Janice go had been the most foolish decision her son had ever made, and she still couldn't fathom what had gone through his head.

"My son can be a bit blunt. Mrs. Green, please don't take it personally," Lesly interjected smoothly, her apologetic smile not quite masking the pride in her eyes.

Nina narrowed her eyes, picking up on the subtle satisfaction in Lesly's tone. Kenneth was quite impressive. As soon as Janice became single, he pursued her with all his heart, without any reservation. In contrast, Aiden was like a fool, lacking the romance necessary to woo a girl.

"Nina, these snacks are amazing. You should try them," Sierra suddenly piped up. Her cheerful tone and quick action broke the tension in the room. She discreetly stuck her tongue out at Kenneth, not wanting to see these two people she cared about hurt each other.

Kenneth caught her gesture and smiled slightly, acknowledging the unspoken message.

Meanwhile, Janice followed Aiden into an adjacent private room.

"Alright, Aiden. What have you found out?" She crossed her arms as she sat on the sofa, her expression composed. Aiden looked at her, feeling both amused and irritated by her relaxed demeanor.

"Janice, can't you be a bit more reserved? What is it about Kenneth that makes you smile at him like that?"

Janice blinked, clearly surprised. "Who I smile at is none of your business. Why are you suddenly so worked up?"

“Don’t you know?” Aiden shot back, his frustration bubbling to the surface.

“Why would I know?”

Aiden clenched his jaw, taking a deep breath in an effort to compose himself. “Fine, I’m jealous.”

“And then?”

Aiden felt his emotions bubbling to the surface. He had confessed his jealousy over Kenneth, yet Janice remained indifferent. Was she really this indifferent to him? No matter what he did, she seemed unaffected.

Chapter 412:

Aiden had spent most of his life focused on his career, surrounded by beautiful women who never truly meant anything to him. But Janice was different.

Aiden grabbed a bottle of water and took a casual swig, his movements exuding a kind of reckless charm that made Janice pause. For a moment, she found herself noticing how different he seemed—less rigid and serious, more relaxed, almost endearing.

“Let’s stick to business,” Janice said, clearing her throat and bringing the focus back. “If this was just an excuse to pull me away from the scene, then we’re done here.”

Aiden ran his hand through his hair, sitting down beside her and turning his gaze toward her. “I’ve discovered something. Not all the members of the White family are dead. One of them is still alive.”

“Who?” Janice asked. Stephen’s face briefly flashed in her mind.

“A little boy, likely your brother. But he disappeared without a trace. Braylen is still investigating his whereabouts. I should have the results soon,” Aiden replied.

“You already know he exists, so why is it so difficult to find where he is?” Janice asked curiously.

“Because, on paper, this boy is dead. However, based on the details we’ve managed to uncover, I suspect his death was faked. Whoever wiped the records and kept him hidden all this time must be someone with significant power.”

“Really?” Now this piqued Janice’s interest. To be able to hide the existence of a child from the enemies of the White family... This was no small matter at all. But if the Chadwick family actually had such power, then why were they struggling to break into the ranks of the top four families?

“I’ve been looking over the deaths of the White family, and your brother’s death stood out in particular.”

“Wait!” Janice cried out, her eyes widening with disbelief. “Are you out of your mind? You investigated over a hundred deaths? Why are you even doing all this?”

Aiden propped one hand on the sofa and cupped her cheek with the other. He leaned closer, pinning her down against the cushions.

“I told you—I don’t miss a single detail when it comes to you. Everything I do is to prove that I am serious about you.”

Janice’s heart caught in her throat. Aiden actually had a knack for doing and saying the most subtle things that tugged at her heartstrings. But he was unusually childish when confronting Kenneth.

“I do know, Aiden. I can feel it.”

“Yes,” Janice nodded, her gaze dropping downward and landing on his lower abdomen. “Your reactions are a little obvious. But you know, maybe now isn’t the best time.”

Aiden almost jumped out of his seat. The cool CEO vibe he had been exuding just a few seconds ago vanished into thin air as his face turned beet red.

Janice couldn't help but burst into laughter. "You really are pure and innocent, aren't you? A small touch is all it takes... Don't tell me you've never..."

"Stop laughing!" Aiden snapped, his ears burning.

What the heck was wrong with this woman? How was she even able to stay calm in such a situation? And to have the gall to tease him about it?

"Ahem." Janice cleared her throat, deciding not to tease him further. However, the matter of Aiden's virginity was now permanently etched in her mind.

"So, what sort of data did you use to verify your suspicion?" Her teasing tone had given way to a more serious one, and when she looked at Aiden again, she was all business.

Aiden shifted in his seat and straightened his back. He was back to being professional, too. "Height and weight."

"Just those two?" Janice frowned, clearly skeptical. "It's been so long, most of the records are probably incomplete at this point. How can you possibly confirm anything for certain?"

"Like I said, it started with a suspicion."

Aiden took a moment to organize his thoughts before he laid out the details of his investigation for Janice.

Chapter 413:

Needless to say, the massacre of over a hundred people had been gruesome. It was a bloodbath in the White family, and all the direct descendants had lost their lives. Some of their extended relatives managed to escape, but most of them perished.

Despite this, reports of the tragedy were scant. Someone had intentionally erased traces of the incident in an attempt to minimize its exposure to the public.

Using his connections, Aiden was able to acquire the official reports of the police investigations that followed. In the files, most of the victims were recognizable by their features, with one glaring exception—the eldest son of the White family. His face had been so severely disfigured that it was practically impossible to identify him.

That was the one main thing that had planted doubts in Aiden's mind.

It was a mass murder; why would the killers go through the trouble of mutilating only one body? It left two possibilities.

Firstly, someone might have been jealous of the victim's good looks and ruined his face on purpose. Secondly, there might have been an important secret that called for the victim's identity to be concealed.

Aiden dismissed the first possibility right away and focused his efforts on the second. He proceeded by examining the eldest son's most recent medical records prior to his death.

It was then that certain discrepancies in the data were revealed.

Minor differences here and there were to be expected, but in this victim's case, they were significant enough to warrant a whole new investigation if they were brought to the authorities' attention. All in all, Aiden was pretty confident that the disfigured corpse did not belong to the White family's eldest son.

"The boys were both six years old at the time of the last medical examination and the time of death. However, one weighed 20 kilograms, while the other weighed 30. One was 100 centimeters tall, the other 119. What do you think? Were these boys the same person?"

Janice stared at Aiden with newfound admiration. "I have to admit, you would make a great detective!" She raised her hand and gave him a thumbs-up.

Aiden hummed, clearly pleased by her compliment. "So, do you know the boy's name?"

Janice tensed up as she asked the question that had been eating at her. Depending on Aiden's answer, Stephen might really be her long-lost, biological brother.

"Fabian White."

The name Aiden uttered caused Janice to freeze, a flicker of disappointment crossing her face before she could hide it.

Noticing her reaction, Aiden frowned and asked, "Janice, that reaction... Does it mean you already know something?"

Janice met his gaze. She had intended to keep her thoughts to herself, but given all that Aiden had done for her, pushing him away now seemed too harsh.

Taking a deep breath, she began to share what she knew about Stephen and the theories she had formulated. Aiden listened intently, his expression turning grave. "Your suspicion that Stephen could be linked to the White family isn't far-fetched. Firstly, his last name is White. Secondly, the Chadwick family's resources could explain the covert support."

"Aiden, do you really think Stephen could be part of the White family?" Janice's eyes searched Aiden's for reassurance.

Though she had resolved to let go of her obsession with familial connections, the possibility still unsettled her. She thought she was done hoping, but maybe it was just the Edwards family she had let go of. Deep down, she still yearned for a sense of family.

Aiden placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder, his gaze firm. "Don't doubt yourself. Your theory is plausible. And if Stephen changed his name to escape his past and his enemies, it wouldn't be unheard of."

As Aiden spoke, Janice felt her confidence growing.

“The next step is to obtain a DNA sample from Stephen and compare it with yours. If the test confirms a blood relation, Stephen is your only family member in the world.”

Only...

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The word hung in the air, heavy with meaning. But at least this time, it offered Janice hope. It meant she might still have family.

“Relax, Janice.” Aiden brushed a stray strand of hair from her face, his voice calming. “I’ll have Braylen oversee the DNA test. In the meantime, try to relax. How about we go out and unwind a bit?”

“Unwind?” Janice blinked, taken aback by his words.

Aiden’s smile waned, becoming self-conscious as he gazed out the window. “When we were married, I wasn’t much of a husband. I never took you shopping, let alone out for fun. So now, I want to make up for that. I know things are different, but please don’t shut me out. Let me try.”

Janice observed him silently, noting the effort he was putting into bridging the gap between them, even without seeing his face. It was unusual to see Aiden, always so composed, lower his guard in this way. Was this his approach to reconciliation?

Janice didn’t answer immediately, leaving Aiden to stand awkwardly, hands in his pockets, as he tried to conceal his anxiety. Suggesting a casual outing like shopping was already a stretch for him.

“I don’t feel like shopping.”

Janice’s response was unexpected. Aiden turned sharply, his usual poise slipping.

“You don’t? Then what about dinner? Or a movie?”

“Aiden, have you ever been to an amusement park?”

“An amusement park?” Aiden was taken aback, shaking his head in confusion.

Janice sighed, stepped closer, and took his hand. “Come on. We’re going to an amusement park.”

Before Aiden could object, she was pulling him towards the door. He looked down at their intertwined hands, his heart lifting. At this point, he was ready to follow her anywhere, even if it meant flying across the world.

Rainbow World, the largest amusement park in Efrery, buzzed with the sound of families and children laughing. Yet today, Janice and Aiden were here too, oddly blending in with the crowd.

Aiden looked around at the lively scene of kids playing and felt slightly out of place. His usual businesslike demeanor couldn’t mask a touch of embarrassment. In his mind, amusement parks were for children, not somewhere a businessman like him would typically be seen.

“Janice, aren’t we a bit old for this place?” Aiden asked tentatively.

“If you think it’s inappropriate, you’re free to leave,” Janice replied nonchalantly.

Aiden was momentarily taken aback, but he quickly composed himself, his expression resolute. “No. If you’re okay with it, then so am I.”

His earnest response drew a laugh from Janice, visibly relaxing her.

“Aiden, today I’m going to give you the childhood you missed out on.”

“What?” He was puzzled.

Before he could further question her, Janice was already pulling him toward the towering roller coaster.

Aiden didn't fully grasp what had just happened until he was fastened into his seat and the safety belt clicked into place.

"Janice, I've heard roller coasters have a pretty high accident rate. Are we sure we need to go for something this extreme?"

"Oh? Is the mighty head of the Green family feeling nervous now?" Janice teased, her eyes narrowing slightly as a mischievous smile played on her lips. "You know, you can back out now..."

"What's there to fear?" Aiden straightened up, forcing a serious expression as his pride wouldn't allow him to back down. "Let's not forget, I've been through warzones, dodging bullets and bombs. If I wasn't scared then, why would I be terrified of some..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the roller coaster started its climb. Bit by bit, the train crept upward, reaching for the sky as if preparing to shoot them straight into the clouds.

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"Here it comes, Aiden! If you're scared, don't hold back—just scream it all out!"

"Scared? Me? I'm not... Ah!"

The roller coaster dropped without warning, hurtling towards the earth at a dizzying speed. The sudden, gut-wrenching weightlessness crashed over Aiden like a tidal wave, silencing him mid-thought.

Gripping the safety bar with all his strength, the fear he had fought so hard to hide shattered through his composed facade, spilling out in a cascade of uncontrollable screams.

"Ha-ha!" Janice laughed without a hint of fear, her expression brimming with joy. It was as though every twist, turn, and drop was in perfect harmony with her spirit.

The wind whipped through her hair, and her lively eyes sparkled under the sunlight. When Aiden stole a glance at her, time seemed to pause for a fleeting moment. Her dazzling smile had a way of dissolving his fear.

This woman truly was his anchor. No matter how terrifying or nerve-wracking the moment, her radiant smile had the power to steady his heart, as long as she was right there by his side.

“Aiden, you’re such a colossal idiot, you know that?”

“What?” Pulled out of his thoughts, Aiden blinked in bewilderment as Janice’s words registered. A mental string of question marks trailed in his head. “Janice, what on earth are you saying?”

“If you don’t understand, just let it go.” Janice lifted her arms high, her face glowing with excitement as she prepared for the final loop.

Aiden’s eyes locked onto the enormous loop ahead, and his body stiffened instinctively. He clung tighter to the safety bar, sinking further into his seat.

The difference between them couldn’t have been more obvious.

Janice, as fearless as ever, welcomed each twist and turn with open arms. Aiden, for all his poise and composure, found himself succumbing to the sheer force of the ride. When the ride came to a stop, Janice stepped off effortlessly.

She turned to see Aiden staggering in her direction, his legs unsteady and shaking.

Janice couldn’t help but laugh. “Who would’ve thought the man who holds the power to shape destinies could be so shaken by a mere roller coaster? Honestly, it’s a sight worth remembering.”

Aiden shot Janice a sharp look, inhaled deeply to regain his composure, and muttered, “I’m only human, not some invincible god. But thanks for pointing that out.”

“Fair enough.” Janice stepped closer and slipped an arm under his to steady him. The teasing glint in her eyes softened as she looked at him. “Seeing you like this makes you seem more human. Like someone with actual flesh and blood.”

Aiden furrowed his brow, casting her a puzzled look. “Was that meant to be a compliment?”

“That depends on how you want to see it.” Janice gave a casual shrug, her tone light and nonchalant.

Aiden glanced at her hand resting on his arm, the warmth of her touch sinking into his skin. Even through his frustration, there was an undeniable comfort in her presence.

He’d faced countless challenges in his life—dangerous missions, near-death experiences, and more. And yet, somehow, this roller coaster had shaken him more than he cared to admit. Maybe it was his deep respect for life that made fear grip him so tightly. Still...

Aiden’s gaze lingered on Janice, his mind turning over thoughts. Behind her infectious laughter and vibrant energy, she must have endured her fair share of struggles to carry herself with such optimism.

“Here, drink this.” Janice passed him a bottle of water with an easy gesture.

Aiden accepted it with a quiet thanks. He took a few sips, allowing the cool liquid to settle his nerves. After a brief moment to gather himself, he settled back into his usual calm and composed state, as if nothing had happened. Janice sat down next to him and turned her head with a smile that played at the corners of her lips.

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“What are you staring at?” Aiden, sipping his water, glanced over at her with a raised eyebrow.

“Just admiring a handsome guy,” she replied with a casual shrug. “Is that a problem?”

His heart raced for a moment, but he managed to keep his expression steady, not letting on how her words had affected him. “Well, since you clearly have great taste, I guess I’ll allow you to appreciate me for a while.” Was something beginning to simmer between them?

Aiden felt an odd blend of nervousness and excitement stirring in his chest, secretly wishing that the calm, pleasant atmosphere between them could last just a little longer.

But just then, a voice cut through, slicing the tranquility to pieces. "Janice, is this your boyfriend?"

The unexpected interruption caused Janice's expression to freeze. Her eyes quickly snapped toward the source of the voice.

Across from them, lounging on a bench, was a man with a sly grin and eyes alight with trouble.

Aiden followed Janice's gaze, and when his eyes landed on the man, a cold shock ran through him. He froze for a moment before his expression darkened with unmistakable recognition.

"Leonidas!"

The man chuckled, his grin widening. "Ah, what a privilege! After all this time, you still haven't forgotten me."

Leonidas lounged in his chair with predatory grace, a twisted smile playing at the corners of his mouth. Madness danced behind his eyes.

"That time you wounded Costello still burns bright in my memory."

Janice rose from her seat, her gaze crystallizing into arctic steel.

"Janice?" Aiden's brow furrowed as he caught the murderous intent rolling off her. "This is an amusement park, not a battlefield."

"I know." A bitter laugh escaped Janice's throat as her fingers curled into fists. "Consider it a friendly sparring match."

“Stop!” Leonidas raised his hand in a halting gesture just as Janice coiled to strike.

“Are you scared?” Janice arched an eyebrow, studying the madman with newfound curiosity.

“Janice, we’ve barely met and you’re already so passionate. I’m not sure my fragile constitution can handle it,” Leonidas said, gesturing first to one family, then another. “What do you mean by this?”

Janice’s gaze followed his indication, noting the men in black who flanked each family. Despite their dark glasses, the killing intent radiating from them was palpable.

“Let’s play a game.” Leonidas rose with fluid grace, hands nestled in his pockets as he glided toward her.

Janice’s face darkened, her fists clenched with deadly intent, ready to unleash violence at a moment’s notice. Leonidas strolled with languid confidence, utterly unfazed by her battle-ready stance. His casual demeanor spoke volumes—this was a man who knew he held all the cards.

“These two families will each choose an attraction to enjoy next. The pirate ship beckons nearby, while the roller coaster looms on the opposite side. Now, I give you a choice. Will the family on the roller coaster survive, or the family on the pirate ship?”

“Leonidas, what kind of twisted game are you orchestrating? Are human lives mere pieces on your deranged chessboard?” Janice hissed, her fingers striking like vipers to seize his collar. She jerked him close, her eyes blazing with such arctic intensity they could shatter glaciers.

“Isn’t it thrilling? Choose one path to salvation while the other leads to oblivion. Such delicious torment.”

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“I want to save both!”

“Tsk!” Leonidas’ fingers danced through the air as he pried Janice’s iron grip from his collar. “Greed doesn’t become you, my dear. Though saving both isn’t entirely impossible, unless...”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you can fly!” Madness blazed in Leonidas’ crimson eyes, his laughter a symphony of chaos that chilled blood to ice.

“Bastard!” Janice’s fist exploded forward, connecting with brutal force.

The impact sent Leonidas reeling backward, his composed facade cracking as he struggled to maintain balance.

“Janice!” Aiden’s arms locked around her like steel bands as she coiled for another strike. “This guy is doing it on purpose. Don’t let him lead you by the nose.”

Janice met Aiden’s steady gaze, feeling the volcanic rage within her cool to smoldering embers. “You’re right—he’s deliberately stoking my fury.”

“Tsk, why not continue?” Leonidas drawled, wiping crimson from his smirking lips. His eyes glinted with malice. “If you continue this charade, both families meet their end right now.”

“Leonidas, name your terms. What will it take for you to let those two families go?”

Leonidas shook his head. “Your weakness has always been this foolish sentimentality for family, Janice. You really disappoint me.”

“Cut the crap!”

Leonidas dragged his sleeve across his bloodied mouth, his gaze now fixed on Aiden with predatory intensity. “Then beat him up. Put on a spectacle worthy of my attention, and those families walk free.”

Janice and Aiden shared a loaded glance, the weight of Leonidas’ twisted proposal hanging between them. Was this madman truly demanding they turn on each other?

Aiden met Janice's gaze with steel in his eyes, his composure unwavering. "Go ahead. A few bruises are worth innocent lives."

"You don't know Leonidas like I do," Janice's voice cut like winter wind. "Everything's a game to him—promises are just pawns on his twisted chessboard."

"Oh, I'm so touched!" Leonidas crossed his arms, lips curving into a mock pout. "Janice, you truly are my finest audience. No one reads my performance quite like you do. You alone can match my wit!"

"Leonidas, you'll regret this!" Janice's eyes became lethal daggers, promising vengeance. "The debt you're accruing will be paid in full!"

"Enough!" Leonidas' voice cracked like a whip as he raised his hand, signaling his black-clad sentinels into motion. "Make your choice—battle each other, select a family to save, or watch them both perish!"

"Janice, trust me." Aiden's voice carried steel-clad conviction, his eyes burning with purposeful determination. A flash of understanding sparked between them. Janice's fist launched forward, then pivoted mid-strike, rocketing toward Leonidas instead.

In perfect synchronization, Aiden snatched up a nearby trash can, hurling it at their tormentor with devastating force.

Leonidas' mask of amusement shattered. "You're really asking for trouble!"

His fingers snapped through the air, unleashing his dark-suited hounds onto their prey.

The trash can hurtled through the air, but Janice was faster. Her fist connected with brutal force, sending it ricocheting toward Leonidas.

The improvised projectile found its mark. Leonidas took the full impact, and a cascade of garbage exploded around him.

“Ugh! That’s absolutely revolting!”

While Leonidas frantically tried to shake off the putrid mess, Janice and Aiden seized their moment. Like practiced dancers, they moved in perfect synchronization, converging from opposite directions until Leonidas was trapped between them. Their hands shot out, each securing one of his arms in an iron grip.

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Leonidas’ chest constricted as he thrashed against their hold. “You two are heartless, willing to destroy both families.”

“Who said that?” Janice retorted.

Leonidas was momentarily stunned, glancing at Janice before quickly turning his head. His two bodyguards had been intercepted by two men—Costello and Braylen.

“When did they get here?” Leonidas sputtered, dumbfounded. He’d only been there minutes, yet somehow Janice and Aiden had not only alerted their allies but also orchestrated this perfectly timed ambush.

“Leonidas, how do you want to die?” Janice’s voice was as cold as winter frost as her grip tightened on his left arm.

“I don’t want to die just yet.”

“That’s not your decision to make.” A sickening crack split the air as Janice wrenched his arm out of its socket.

“Ah!” Leonidas’ agonized scream turned into a deranged laugh, his face contorting with maniacal glee. “You’re ruthless, Janice! But we both know you won’t kill me!” Yet the murderous glint in Janice’s eyes told a different story.

What made Leonidas so certain of his survival?

A shadow of doubt crept across Aiden's face. Something in Leonidas' unwavering confidence suggested he held cards they couldn't see.

"Even if Janice spares you, I won't," Aiden growled.

Leonidas' lips curled into a cruel smirk. "You?"

"What do you mean?"

"Aiden, if it were a few years ago abroad, I might believe you. But now, you're under her spell, willing to sacrifice everything for her sake."

Aiden's chest tightened as his eyes found Janice. True, he would move mountains for her, but what leverage did Leonidas hold that could make them hesitate?

"Janice, what do you think I've been doing all these years? Plotting your destruction, crafting ways to break you, to drag you into the depths of despair. Your old self, those three friends, that elderly fool—they were such obvious weaknesses. Too obvious. Too boring. So I found a better target. For example, your brother, Stephen White!"

The fury in Janice's eyes blazed white-hot as her grip threatened to shatter what remained of Leonidas' arm. "What have you done to Stephen?" she demanded.

"Janice, we're not sure if Stephen is your brother," Aiden reminded, his mind racing. They hadn't even done a paternity test. How could Leonidas be so certain? Could he be bluffing?

The realization washed over Janice too, bringing with it a forced calm.

"I wouldn't dare challenge two lethal opponents without an ace up my sleeve," Leonidas' voice carried an unsettling certainty. "Can you let me go now? Or would you prefer to see Stephen's corpse? The kill order is already in motion. If I die, so does he."

"You absolute monster!!" Raw fury blazed in Janice's eyes. She thought she had finally found her real family, but instead, she had brought him danger.

While she could weather any storm herself, the thought of someone else suffering for her actions was unbearable. And that person was her only family in the world. With measured reluctance, Janice and Aiden released their hold on Leonidas.

He slumped onto the bench, his face twisted into a mask of deranged satisfaction. "Consider this merely a prelude, Janice. Our real battle has yet to begin."

"Whatever twisted game you're orchestrating, I'll see it through to its bitter end. But keep it between us." Janice's voice carried the bite of winter steel. Had Stephen not been Leonidas' unwitting pawn, she would have made him beg for death's mercy.

"But where's the thrill in a game without consequences? Only when everything's at stake do we see someone's true nature."

"Leonidas." Aiden's voice cut through the tension as he stepped forward, his gaze arctic. "I know you love games, especially thrilling and dangerous ones. So let me propose this: make me your opponent instead."

Chapter 419:

Janice's breath caught as she turned to Aiden. Was he offering himself as a shield between her and Leonidas' madness?

"Ha-ha!!" Leonidas erupted into fits of laughter, oblivious to the bewildered stares cast his way. He doubled over, clutching his sides as if his ribs might crack.

Yet Janice and Aiden saw no trace of humor in the scene. Leonidas' lunacy seemed to exist beyond the bounds of normal understanding, each erratic outburst amplifying the peril he posed.

Neither spoke; their icy gazes bore into Leonidas as his laughter spiraled into mania. After all, attempting to reason with a madman was an exercise in futility.

“Aiden, is this your attempt at entertainment?” Leonidas stifled his laughter, smoothing his messy hair, his face twisting into a derisive smirk as he turned to Aiden. “Do you really believe you’ll escape unscathed once Janice is involved?”

He chided, wagging a finger. “The moment she steps in, you’re dragged along too. It’s like killing two birds with one stone. Why would I let you take her place?”

Those words sparked an inferno in Aiden’s chest, and he spat, “You’re insane!” Yet under Leonidas’ control, both he and Janice teetered on a dangerous edge.

“What’s your next move in this game?” Janice shot Aiden a brief glance before facing Leonidas, her tone calm and measured.

Leonidas eased into his chair, draping his arms over the backrest and crossing his legs with an air of nonchalance. His grin brimmed with mischief. “No plans for now. You’ll be the first to know when I come up with one.”

Janice scowled as frustration bubbled within her. Though she yearned for swift resolution, Leonidas’ deliberate ease was a calculated effort to unnerve them.

“It’s late now. A pleasure meeting you both.” Leonidas rose, straightened his attire, gave a careless wave, and strolled off.

As his nonchalant figure faded into the distance, Janice’s and Aiden’s faces grew grim. Were it not for the looming threat to Stephen, they might have acted on their fury. A lunatic of his caliber was a persistent menace, his threat escalating with every moment.

Sadly, their strength and decisiveness faltered under the weight of their vulnerability. And Leonidas preyed on that very weakness.

“What’s our next move, Janice?” Aiden tugged at his collar, inhaling deeply as he cast a worried glance at Janice.

“What choice do we have?” Janice retorted with a bitter chuckle, steadying herself with a deep breath. “We tread carefully, one step at a time. With Leonidas holding all the cards, we can only observe. But...”

Her gaze darkened with contemplation before she spoke. “Leonidas may not be acting alone. These players might be linked to the forces that shattered the White family long ago.”

“What are you suggesting?” Aiden arched a brow, caught off guard by the direction of Janice’s theory. Yet, upon dissecting Leonidas’ nature and actions, Janice’s reasoning felt more plausible than far-fetched.

The Leonidas he knew thrived as a lone wolf. When he did accept assistance, it was from subservient lackeys, not external powers.

The true peril of someone as ruthless and formidable as Leonidas was his utter lack of hesitation. He followed his impulses without a shred of restraint, a quality that instilled terror in his adversaries.

“We’ve been digging into the White family, yet the trail has been frustratingly faint,” Janice remarked.

Their expertise granted them access to classified information, yet the sparse leads they uncovered hinted at an opponent shrouded in deep secrecy.

She went on, “And yet, Leonidas seems utterly convinced that Stephen is my brother. Doesn’t that strike you as odd?” Janice’s words clicked, bringing Aiden face-to-face with the doubts she harbored.

Chapter 420:

Despite the absence of a DNA test, Leonidas’ unwavering confidence in mentioning it implied he was armed with knowledge far beyond their grasp.

The matters slipping from their grasp now rested firmly with Leonidas. Such power suggested he might be backed by the same entity that decimated the White family in Cloverhill years earlier.

Aiden massaged his temples, his gaze hardening as unease crept in. "Do you think his return this time is just to torment you, or is there a deeper plan at play?"

"Maybe." Janice exhaled deeply, her thoughts clouded and her energy too drained for further contemplation. "Leonidas thrives on unpredictability. Deciphering him with conventional logic is futile. All we can do is move forward, one careful step at a time."

"Fine." Aiden clasped Janice's hand, his gaze firm with determination. "Whatever's ahead, I'm staying with you. You can protest all you want, but I'm not backing down."

Janice blinked in mild surprise before a faint smile tugged at her lips. She chose to stay silent.

Once they departed the cocktail party, Leonie whisked Stephen away to an exclusive club. Steering clear of curious onlookers, they slipped into a secluded private room.

The private room exuded an air of exclusivity, its walls an impenetrable barrier against uninvited intrusions. The room breathed luxury, with bottles of fine wine adorning the table. Since there were only Leonie and Stephen, the space felt empty.

Wine glass in hand, Leonie found comfort in Stephen's presence, her complaints flowing freely.

"Ever wonder what the Ramirez family truly means to me?" Stephen's gentle eyes met hers as he refilled her glass, his silence inviting her thoughts to surface.

"Nothing more than an exquisite prison of gold and expectations. You see, no matter how illustrious your position appears, joining that family is like willingly stepping into a cage adorned with precious metals and false promises—a cage from which escape becomes increasingly impossible."

Wine had painted her cheeks rosebud pink, her eyes slightly unfocused as she watched the bubbles dance in her glass, a bitter smile gracing her lips. Her face, though marked by time, carried an elegant grace that spoke of endured hardships, evoking sympathy from all who beheld her.

“Don’t be deceived by my facade as an influential wife wielding considerable power. Within that family, I remain merely an ornamental token. To avoid disposal, one must constantly demonstrate their worth. I gave birth to two daughters, believing they would serve as my leverage in this power play. Yet the older one proves disappointing, while the younger rebels against familial influence, refusing any connection. Now, having caused significant losses to the family’s fortune, I am destined to face retribution while trapped within these golden bars.”

“Things will get better.” Stephen’s gentle touch and soothing voice worked their magic as he comforted Leonie, his reassuring presence calming the storm in her heart.

Gazing up at Stephen’s striking features, Leonie reached out, her fingertips brushing against his face. Her eyes sparkled with newfound warmth.

Stephen instinctively recoiled, but Wendy’s instructions echoed in his mind, forcing him to maintain his position despite his discomfort.

“Do you show such tenderness to everyone?” Leonie whispered.

“No.” Stephen’s response carried a ring of sincerity as he shook his head. “I’ve encountered many women, but you stand apart.”

A flicker of satisfaction warmed her heart—though she wasn’t his only conquest, she was the first to receive such devoted attention.

“Wendy certainly has mastered the art of manipulation.” Leonie’s eyes narrowed as she swirled her drink, a knowing smile playing on her lips. “I see through her schemes, yet here I am, willingly ensnared.”

“You can think more about yourself.”

“Think more about myself?” Leonie’s voice wavered with uncertainty as she gazed at Stephen, confusion etched across her features.