

Wrath 461

Chapter 461:

Meanwhile, Kenneth sprang into action. Without warning, he seized the hem of Leonidas' T-shirt and began cutting with swift, deliberate movements. Leonidas barely had time to react.

Watching from the sidelines, Janice burst into laughter, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Does Kenneth secretly have it out for Leonidas? He's totally messing with him!"

Aiden glanced at Janice, her laughter sparking a twinge of jealousy. But as a man, he understood Kenneth's motives. This wasn't about Leonidas—it was about standing up for Janice. Despite his jealousy, he had to admit Kenneth's bold move was impressively executed.

When Carlton's song ended, he glanced at Leonidas, his jaw dropping in astonishment.

The crowd erupted into cheers and laughter.

"Kenneth, are you kidding us, or is this your idea of serious design?"

"What is this? A street beggar's couture line?"

The screen exploded with comments, filled with laughter and disbelief.

Viewers who had eagerly awaited Kenneth's impromptu design found themselves both shocked and thoroughly entertained by the sheer absurdity of it.

Leonidas' expression darkened considerably as he took in his reflection.

The once-simple white T-shirt looked like a shredded disaster. With uneven cuts and frayed edges, it resembled more the uniform of a vagrant than a piece of high fashion.

Kenneth, of course, hadn't stopped at random slicing. His mischievous streak was on full display—two strategically placed holes over Leonidas' chest now exposed his well-defined muscles.

"Kenneth Delgado!" Leonidas growled, his voice icy, his piercing gaze promising retribution. His entire demeanor exuded restrained fury.

Kenneth, unaffected by the weight of Leonidas' glare, said casually, "This is the latest minimalist design. Does it meet your expectations?"

Expectations? Leonidas scoffed inwardly. Did they truly believe he couldn't recognize such an obvious ploy?

"It's certainly unique."

"Thank you!" Kenneth replied, twirling the scissors in his hand before offering a theatrical bow to the small crowd. "Thank you, everyone, for your appreciation. Consider this our impromptu talent showcase. I am Kenneth Delgado."

Carlton quickly rose to follow suit, bowing. "And I am Carlton Patterson."

Both men turned to face Leonidas, their eyes gleaming with mischief.

Leonidas' current state was a picture of absurdity, and he knew it.

Bowing and introducing himself now would be nothing short of humiliation.

He remained silent, his jaw tight, as the realization dawned: the future head of Delgado Group wasn't just shrewd—he was an impish wildcard.

"It seems Leonidas is feeling a bit shy," Kenneth remarked with a sly smile, stepping closer to Leonidas and giving him a firm pat on the shoulder. "Allow me to introduce him."

Leonidas' face darkened, his composure slipping as Kenneth's hand pressed against his back, forcing him into a bow.

"This is Leonidas Miller. He's a little shy, so I hope you'll be patient with him."

Leaning closer, Kenneth whispered, "Janice would probably find it hilarious to see you like this."

Chapter 462:

Leonidas' pupils narrowed, his expression turning from irritation to shock. He had been wondering why Kenneth, someone with no apparent grudge against him, had decided to make him a target. Now it all made sense.

"I didn't realize Janice had such a loyal fan club," Leonidas muttered under his breath.

"Can you blame us? She's extraordinary," Kenneth replied with a wistful sigh, his gaze drifting toward Janice.

Across the room, Janice's eyes met Kenneth's, and his expression softened into a gentle smile.

But the moment was short-lived. Aiden stepped in front of Janice, his cold, unyielding stare cutting through the air like a blade. His presence alone radiated a warning that Kenneth couldn't ignore.

"Now, it's our turn," Aiden declared, his voice calm but brimming with authority.

Beside him, Maggie recoiled slightly, her unease evident.

"We haven't exactly planned anything."

“There’s no need for a plan.”

Aiden strode confidently onto the stage. Maggie hesitated but quickly followed, her reluctance palpable.

“Looking forward to your performance, Aiden.” Kenneth, stepping down from the stage with Carlton, offered a faint smile as he passed Aiden.

As Maggie hurried past, she threw Kenneth a desperate look, her wide eyes practically begging for intervention. Kenneth, however, met her silent plea with indifference, turning his back without a second glance. He exited the stage with Carlton, leaving Maggie to her fate.

“Leonidas, please don’t leave yet.”

“What now?”

Leonidas froze mid-step, turning to find Aiden’s cold gaze fixed on him.

“I need a partner for my performance.”

“But you already have one.” Leonidas’ eyes flicked to Maggie, who was practically shrinking into herself.

Aiden’s lips curved into a sharp smirk, his expression devoid of warmth. “She’s a woman. Hardly suitable for what I have in mind.”

“And what exactly does that mean?”

“My performance involves combat choreography—intense physical movements. Do you think she can handle that?” Aiden took a step closer, his demeanor predatory, giving Leonidas no space to back down. “Or are you afraid to step up and be my partner? Don’t worry. I’ll take it easy on you. I wouldn’t dream of actually hurting you.”

First Kenneth had embarrassed him, and now Aiden was openly provoking him. Leonidas couldn't afford to look weak, not here.

"If you're offering me this great honor, how could I possibly refuse?"

"Excellent." Aiden gestured towards the chef onstage. "Please step aside. I wouldn't want to hurt you by accident."

The chef, unnerved by Aiden's commanding presence, quickly vacated the stage, retreating to confer with the other staff.

"Are they really going to fight?"

"It looks that way."

"Shouldn't someone stop them? This is a live broadcast!"

Chapter 463:

"Devin said to let it play out. If things get too wild, we'll cut the feed."

Devin's sharp eyes locked onto the screen displaying the livestream analytics.

The viewership had surged dramatically, an unmistakable sign of the audience's captivation.

Controversy always sold, and the promise of a physical showdown between two powerful figures was irresistible. Aiden wasn't reckless—he'd know how far to push without crossing the line. And if things spiraled out of control, Devin would cut the broadcast immediately, curtailing any potential fallout.

On stage, Maggie stood awkwardly in the center, now assigned the role of referee.

Her expression was a mix of confusion and relief. She had braced herself to become the target of Aiden's intense demonstration, only to be reduced to a mere prop in the brewing clash between the two men.

The tension thickened as Janice watched the scene unfold, her brows knitting together in worry.

Aiden's sudden provocation puzzled her. Was he doing this for her?

Her chest tightened with unease. Aiden's combat skills were well known, but Leonidas was no less formidable. If this confrontation escalated into a real fight, there was no telling who would emerge victorious.

"Don't worry. Aiden's pretty good at fighting." Though Kenneth wasn't particularly fond of Aiden, he couldn't deny the man's skill.

Back when Kenneth was still clawing for a foothold in the family, Aiden had already carved out a fearsome reputation overseas, earning respect and fear in equal measure. By the time he returned, his experience on the battlefield had set him apart from his peers.

Janice nodded at Kenneth's reassurance, though unease lingered in her chest.

Aiden, noticing the flicker of worry in her expression, felt a surge of satisfaction.

His lips moved subtly, forming the words, "I'm teaching Leonidas a lesson."

Janice blinked, momentarily startled by his boldness. Then a faint, wry smile appeared on her face. He really was doing this for her.

Aiden turned back to Leonidas, his earlier warmth replaced by frosty determination. His tone was cold and taunting. "Come on. Let's see if you've improved over the years."

"You're insufferable!" Leonidas spat, charging forward with a claw-like strike aimed at Aiden's chest.

Maggie, caught off guard by the sudden aggression, yelped and scrambled to the side, nearly tripping over herself.

But Aiden didn't flinch. His eyes narrowed, tracking the movement with precision. At the last moment, he pivoted smoothly out of the way, his counterattack swift and brutal—a sharp blow to Leonidas' wrist that sent a jolt of pain up his arm.

Leonidas winced, clutching his wrist, but Aiden wasn't done. In one fluid motion, he raised his leg and delivered a powerful kick to Leonidas' chest. "This one's for Janice!"

Leonidas let out a guttural cry as the force of the kick launched him backward, sending him sprawling across the stage.

The sheer impact of Aiden's kick left the audience in stunned silence.

"Is this real? Could they be faking it for the show?"

"It has to be staged! No one kicks someone that far outside of an action movie!"

Chapter 464:

"But still, Aiden's kick was just too cool!"

Initially, Devin had been on edge, worried that things might spiral out of control. Yet the intensity of the confrontation worked in their favor, as the audience chalked it up to an elaborately choreographed performance.

On the stage, Leonidas staggered to his feet, one hand clutching his chest, his expression a mix of disbelief and fury.

"Leonidas, if that's all you've got, I suggest you give up now."

Give up?

Leonidas' lips curled into a sneer, understanding the insult behind Aiden's words.

"Strong kick, Aiden. But it's not enough."

Leonidas charged again, this time faster and more calculated.

Aiden's sharp eyes followed his movement, and with a fluid spin, he deflected the blow with precision, sending Leonidas off balance.

Stumbling forward, Leonidas barely regained his footing when Aiden reached out and grabbed his shirt. A loud ripping sound echoed through the room. Leonidas' already damaged shirt tore completely, leaving his muscular upper body exposed.

His well-defined physique drew gasps from the audience, but their awe quickly turned to shock as they noticed the scars etched across his skin. Each mark told a story of battles fought and survived, giving his otherwise impressive figure a menacing, almost primal edge.

"Aiden Green!" Leonidas snarled, his voice low and filled with rage. His eyes glowed with fiery intensity, the blood-red hue betraying his murderous intent.

But Aiden, unfazed by the display, regarded him with a cold smirk, his expression mocking a pitiful attempt. "Come on! Show me what else you've got."

Leonidas' jaw tightened, his teeth grinding audibly as his fists clenched at his sides. He suddenly reached into his pocket.

Noticing his move, Janice abruptly rose to her feet, her eyes wide with alarm.

"Aiden, your performance was impressive. But let's end it here. I think everyone's hungry. Why don't we check the support ratings instead?"

Aiden turned to her, and the cold, detached expression he wore moments ago softened instantly.

“As you wish.”

The audience was stunned.

“What just happened? He was just a cold-blooded warrior, and now he’s a perfect gentleman!”

“No way! I was rooting for Janice and Stephen, but now, I can’t help but ship Aiden and Janice!”

“They’re just perfect for each other. It’s like a romance novel come to life—tough and unyielding on the outside, but completely tender with the one he loves.”

Social media erupted with snapshots of the moment, captions like “The ultimate romantic duo” and “Janice and Aiden forever” flooding feeds.

Janice’s radiant beauty paired with Aiden’s fierce devotion created a scene that captivated netizens, turning them into an overnight sensation.

Aiden cast a final glance at Leonidas, a smug smirk tugging at his lips. “Thank you for your cooperation.”

Leonidas stood rigid, his face dark and stormy. He slowly withdrew his hand from his pocket, his plan crumbling before his eyes.

Chapter 465:

He had intended to expose Janice, to unmask her secrets in front of everyone and drag her down.

But instead, not only did he fail to unmask Janice, but he was also mocked by Kenneth and Aiden in turn. Frustration clawed at him, his fury bubbling dangerously beneath the surface.

“With everyone’s self-introductions and talent showcases complete, it’s time to unveil the support rankings,” the chef announced, his commanding voice slicing through the murmurs.

A hush fell over the room as all eyes turned to the big screen. Numbers ticked upward rapidly, the crowd collectively holding their breath as the rankings locked into place.

At the very top were Stephen and Janice, their support rate an absolute landslide.

Trailing behind them, to Maggie’s utter astonishment, were Aiden and herself.

Maggie blinked, staring at the screen as if it had just sprouted wings. Second place?

What had she done to deserve this? She’d barely spoken, barely moved, barely existed on stage.

Her gaze slid to Aiden, who stood as impassive as ever. His presence alone seemed to radiate an aura of quiet dominance. Maggie reconsidered her initial fears. Perhaps he wasn’t terrifying—at least, not in the way she’d thought. He hadn’t forced her into doing anything.

In third place were Kenneth, Carlton, and Leonidas. But the real spectacle was in fourth—and dead last—place: Daniel and Demi.

“I refuse to accept this!” The results had barely settled before Daniel erupted like an overfilled kettle. “How can I be last? Me? With this physique? And even if Demi’s terrible singing dragged us down, there’s no way we should be at the bottom!”

Everyone rolled their eyes at his protest. How could he be this clueless?

“I can’t take it anymore!” Maggie sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing with fury as she confronted Daniel. The sudden outburst left Daniel stunned, his usual confidence crumbling into speechless bewilderment.

“Daniel, do you have some kind of misunderstanding about your physique? Your muscles are just disgusting, and you still dare to claim you’re handsome and perfect. Who are you trying to fool?”

“You...”

“I what!” Maggie planted her hands on her hips, her presence electric with rage, effectively silencing any retort Daniel might have attempted. “While some might swoon over your muscle-bound stereotype, that doesn’t mean the entire world shares their questionable taste. I, for one, find it revolting. And don’t you dare think that being a Chadwick puts you on some pedestal. Everyone here outranks you by leagues, so what exactly fuels that insufferable superiority complex of yours? Now cover up that monstrosity, seal those lips, and vanish from my sight.”

Her scorching tirade left both the room’s occupants and online viewers in electrified silence.

“Holy smokes! Who knew our sweet little Maggie had such fire beneath that gentle exterior? She transforms into a force of nature when provoked!”

“LMAO! She literally spoke everyone’s mind with that epic takedown, especially that brutal reality check about his muscles. Pure gold!”

“Is it just me, or is Maggie not only fed up with Daniel but channeling all her pent-up terror of Aiden?”

Chapter 466:

The viewers’ insight cut straight to the heart of the matter.

Maggie had suppressed her fear of Aiden for so long that it finally erupted like a volcano, with Daniel serving as the unfortunate target of her emotional tsunami.

“Kenneth, your sister is absolutely fascinating,” Janice remarked, her eyes dancing with admiration as she watched Maggie’s unexpected display of spirit.

Kenneth’s lips curved into a knowing smile. “I have a feeling she would take quite a shine to you. There’s a striking similarity in your spirits.”

“Really?” Janice tilted her head, intrigue written across her features.

“You both have an extraordinary talent for turning the tables at the most pivotal moments.” The memory of the flying slipper hung unspoken between them.

A moment of surprise flickered across Janice’s face before dissolving into an amused smile as she recalled her slipper incident. “Well, what can I say? Some people are so thick-skinned they need a dramatic wake-up call before they grasp the concept of personal space.”

“Janice, given your kindred spirit with Maggie, our doors are always open to you. She would be thrilled to have your company.”

“That’s not necessary.” Aiden’s voice cut through the air as he settled beside Janice, his eyes boring into Kenneth with barely veiled warning. “Janice’s schedule is quite demanding. Your home isn’t exactly on her priority list.”

Kenneth’s pleasant expression never wavered, immune to Aiden’s attempted intimidation. “Aiden, I believe Janice is perfectly capable of managing her own social calendar. Or perhaps you’re channeling Daniel’s delusion that the world bends to your will?”

His gaze turned to Janice. “Janice doesn’t like men like that.”

The words landed like a perfectly aimed punch.

Aiden’s expression clouded over instantly. He hadn’t anticipated that beneath Kenneth’s bright smile and seemingly gentle demeanor lurked such a razor-sharp tongue.

“Janice, that’s not what I meant.”

“Oh? Do enlighten us then. What were you trying to convey?” Kenneth’s voice dripped honeyed venom, his radiant smile a perfect mask for his razor-sharp words.

Aiden's brow furrowed deeply, finding himself outmaneuvered in this delicate dance of words. In the business world, he was invincible, but in matters of the heart, he was a novice.

"Oh my! Are these two powerhouses actually squaring off?"

"Now this is what I call prime-time drama! And poor Janice, caught in the crossfire. What a deliciously awkward position!"

"Why do I see that Aiden is like a clueless newbie in love?"

The viewers were practically feasting on the unfolding spectacle.

Here they were, barely minutes into filming the premiere episode of Love Lab, and already the sparks were flying in spectacular fashion.

But what would Janice do, caught between the two men?

"Kenneth, while your sister is undeniably delightful, I'm afraid I must decline the invitation," Janice said.

A flicker of triumph danced in Aiden's eyes. Could she be taking his side?

Chapter 467:

"I've always been a free spirit, you see. The thought of visiting those draped in wealth and bound by countless traditions makes me rather uneasy. I'd feel like a sparrow in a golden cage."

Though Janice's words painted a picture of neutrality, she had lived quite comfortably with the Green family, seeming every bit at home there.

This subtle revelation sent a wave of quiet satisfaction through Aiden's chest.

A shadow crossed Kenneth's eyes, though his practiced smile never faltered. "Janice, you overstate it. The Delgado family is quite ordinary beneath all the glamour. This 'wealthy family' label is just an ornament others pin on us."

"Janice, you must be hungry. Shall we grab something to eat?" Aiden redirected the conversation, offering her an elegant escape from the growing tension.

The smooth interruption caused Kenneth's perpetual smile to crack ever so slightly. The way Aiden strategically positioned himself between them had been grating on his nerves.

"Alright. Then I'll go dine with Stephen now."

Refusing to get caught up between Aiden and Kenneth, Janice nodded and made her way to the main dining table at the front.

Aiden turned to face Kenneth, his expression stern. "Even though Janice and I are divorced, it's only a matter of time before we get back together. So, you might as well save yourself the trouble and drop your little schemes."

"You don't need to concern yourself with that. How I handle things is my business, not yours."

The tension between the two crackled in the air, effortlessly stealing the spotlight of the show and splitting the audience's opinions.

"I think Aiden wins!"

"Me too. Kenneth might be a charmer, but Janice sided with Aiden in this situation. There is definitely something going on between them."

"No, that's not it. Clearly, Janice just didn't want the two to be at each other's throats. You're reading too much into it."

“Argue all you want, guys, but I’m Kenneth and Janice all the way! They’re simply meant to be!”

After Maggie put him in his place, Daniel finally fell silent, though his furious gaze remained fixed on her.

If they weren’t on a live broadcast, he wouldn’t have hesitated to snap back.

“What should we do now, Daniel? Are we really just going to sit here and watch while the others eat?”

Demi’s gaze flicked to Janice and Stephen in front of the chef, who was preparing a gourmet meal for them.

The mouthwatering aroma in the air only intensified the hunger, causing their stomachs to growl.

The other two groups, though not feasting on gourmet dishes, at least had something to eat. Only the two of them were left with nothing but air on their table.

“Hey you, come over!” Daniel called out, gesturing to a staff member standing nearby.

The staff member hesitated a moment before running over, curiosity etched on his face. “You called me?”

“I’ll give you ten thousand. Buy us food.”

“Ten thousand?”

Chapter 468:

Daniel’s brow shot up irritably. “Is it too little? I’ll make it fifty.”

The staff member scratched his head, looking conflicted, then turned to the production team and shouted, “Director, Daniel wants to give me money to buy them food.”

Devin grimaced, picking up the loudspeaker and announcing to everyone on the set, “Daniel is trying to bribe the staff to get them food, which is unacceptable. As punishment, he will run three laps around the villa. Let this be a warning to everyone.”

“What the—”

Before Daniel could finish his words, Demi covered his mouth with her hand.

“Calm down, will you? If you argue with Devin, you’ll get more punishment!”

Though Daniel annoyed the hell out of her, he was still her teammate, and she couldn’t let this fool drag her down with him.

Daniel’s face darkened, then he stripped off his shirt, revealing his gym-toned body.

“Just say you guys want a free show of my glorious bod. No need to beat around the bush.”

Everyone turned to him, speechless.

“You want me to run some laps? Then I’ll run some laps! I don’t usually show off my muscles, but today is an exception. Make sure you get this on camera.”

The cameraman assigned to him looked reluctant.

Without another word, Daniel walked out and ran laps around the villa.

Meanwhile, the others were concentrating on their meals.

Aiden and Maggie were enjoying their steaks, while Kenneth, Leonidas, and Carlton had to make do with eggs.

Leonidas toyed with an egg in his hand, his gaze fixed on Janice with undisguised malice.

He had to admit she must be quite something.

After all, Aiden and Kenneth were going out of their way to protect her.

It was a good thing, actually.

It would make things interesting.

Leonidas ran his tongue over his lip, already planning his next scheme.

"I'll take this if you don't want to eat it." Kenneth snatched the egg from Leonidas' hand.

Leonidas flicked his cold gaze at Kenneth. "Are you fond of taking what isn't yours?"

"Taking?" Kenneth cracked the egg and peeled off the shell. "I'm just doing you a favor. How is that called taking?"

Leonidas shook his head. "Thanks, but I can't help wondering if you can easily take Janice from Aiden like that. I can see she has feelings for him."

Kenneth stopped peeling off the shell and looked up at Leonidas.

With his back to the camera, he stripped off his rehearsed cordial smile and let ire shadow his features. "I might not know the full story, but if you dare harm Janice, I swear I won't let you get away with it."

“Is that a warning? What makes you think you can threaten me?”

“I don’t need a set of rules. Let’s just say I like to meddle.” Kenneth snorted coldly, tossing the peeled egg to Carlton. “I suddenly lost my appetite. You can have it.”

Chapter 469:

Carlton blinked and then looked at Leonidas. Seeing no objection, he shrugged and accepted it.

But instead of eating it, he handed the egg to Demi, who was starving. “Here. You can have it.”

“Really?” Demi’s eyes lit up with joy as her gaze flicked from the egg to Carlton.

Carlton studied Demi for a moment, his expression softening with something close to pity. “It’s not your fault they rated you that way. Daniel’s arrogance is the real problem here. Besides, giving this egg to you won’t break any rules.”

He glanced at the staff nearby. They stood by, uninterested, silently acknowledging his decision.

“Thank you, Carlton.” Demi accepted the egg with both hands. “You’re the only one who’s truly kind to me on this show. If there’s a chance, I’d really like to team up with you next time.”

“There will be,” Carlton replied, his smile warm and reassuring.

Inside, Demi sneered. Carlton, bless his gullible heart, was far too easy to fool. A sprinkle of feigned despair, and he’d handed her food like a knight in shining armor.

An egg might not be a feast, but it would silence the pangs of hunger—and dim the envy clawing at her every time she glanced at Janice and Stephen’s decadent spread.

Her gaze darted to Stephen, who remained utterly unfazed by her act. Carlton was the only one in the room who had been deceived by her.

“Ms. Edwards, Mr. White, tonight’s special—garlic roasted prawns,” the chef announced, placing two plates before Janice and Stephen with a flourish.

Janice tilted her head, inhaling the fragrant steam rising from the plate. “The prawns are incredibly fresh, and the seasoning is just perfect.”

“Impressive. You seem to know your way around food,” the chef responded, curiosity sparking in his eyes.

“I’ve dabbled in culinary arts, but it’s been years since I cooked anything myself. If I’m wrong, I hope you’ll forgive me.” Janice offered a modest smile.

Leah fought the urge to groan. Janice had many skills. Among them, her culinary expertise was exceptional.

Even the most celebrated chefs paled next to her. She’d nearly won the coveted Top Chef title, only to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances.

“Ms. Edwards, you were absolutely spot on.” The chef’s face lit up with admiration. “Truth be told, this garlic roasted prawn is my attempt to replicate a dish crafted by a mysterious chef.”

“A mysterious chef?” Janice echoed, her brows lifting slightly as a flicker of recognition stirred within her.

“Yes! This chef once participated in a prestigious culinary competition and, with nothing more than a simple dish of garlic roasted prawns, defeated many renowned chefs. Her reputation became legendary. Sadly, she withdrew from the finals under mysterious circumstances. To honor her, I’ve worked tirelessly to recreate her masterpiece.”

Janice froze for a moment, the pieces clicking into place. She knew exactly who the chef was describing—it was her.

Years ago, on a whim, she had entered a competition brimming with world-class chefs.

To keep her identity hidden, she had donned a mask and earned the moniker of “the mysterious chef.”

A single dish of garlic roasted prawns had been enough to outshine the others and carry her to the finals.

Chapter 470:

But before she could claim victory, the Edwards family had appeared to bring her back. Overcome with excitement, she had withdrawn immediately, leaving the competition and her masked persona behind.

“It’s exquisite.” Stephen’s voice suddenly broke through her thoughts, pulling her back to the present. “I can’t say how close it is to the mysterious chef’s original, but this is undoubtedly the work of a Michelin three-star talent.”

“Thank you, sir.” The chef bowed slightly, beaming.

“I believe the greatest dishes are those that preserve the natural essence of the ingredients while adding just a hint of magic.” Stephen’s expression darkened ever so slightly, his gaze distant, as if he were chasing a memory.

“Is something on your mind?” Janice asked, her curiosity piqued.

“They say food often brings back memories. Did this dish remind you of something?”

Stephen met her inquisitive gaze and nodded slowly. “It did. The freshness of this dish brings back a flavor I’ll never forget.”

“Something that left such an impression must be extraordinary.”

Stephen’s lips curved into a faint, bittersweet smile. “It’s nothing extravagant—just casserole.”

“Casserole?” Janice blinked, caught off guard.

For someone of Stephen’s stature, even if his life had taken a downturn, such a simple dish seemed an odd thing to reminisce about.

“You might not understand. But the taste of the casserole has lingered with me, even now,” Stephen said, his voice carrying the weight of a distant memory. His hand curled into a fist, his knuckles whitening slightly.

Janice studied him, the sadness in his eyes unmistakable. It wasn’t the dish he missed, she realized—it was the person who made it. Someone irreplaceable.

“It’s a shame,” Stephen added, his tone quieter now. “I know I’ll never have it again.”

Janice tilted her head thoughtfully, then broke the silence. “How about I make you some casserole?”

Stephen was slightly taken aback, looking at Janice in surprise. “You know how to make it?”

“I told you, I’ve studied food. Casserole might not be the most sophisticated dish, but it’s well within my capabilities.”

Stephen’s gaze lingered on her, searching for something he couldn’t quite name. There was a familiarity in the way she smiled, a warmth that felt like an echo of something he thought he’d lost.

For the first time in years, the thought of tasting that dish again filled him with an unexpected sense of hope.

“Sir, may I use your stove for a moment?” Janice asked the chef.

“Of course.”

The chef watched with interest as Janice approached the stove.

Typically, young women of her status were not known for their culinary abilities, often more accustomed to being served than serving. He wondered if Janice was simply seeking attention or if she genuinely possessed cooking skills.

Devin, observing the unfolding scene, was instantly animated.

“Quick, zoom in on Janice and spice up the shot with some catchy captions. This is a highlight!”