

Wrath 611

Chapter 611:

“What did you say?” Mateo’s voice took on a terrifying chill. “Alissa, do you realize the consequences if you’re lying?”

“Dad, I’m sure of it. This MO is an impostor.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Gerda interjected angrily. “The person before you is the renowned surgeon, MO!”

“Impossible! How could the famous MO be connected to this rundown orphanage?” Alissa’s thoughts spiraled into madness, her eyes wild. “You all conspired to humiliate me. Dad, you must believe me...”

Before she could continue, Janice closed the distance between them and snatched the phone from Alissa. She activated the speakerphone, throwing a mocking glance at Alissa.

“Give me back my phone!” Alissa lunged forward in an attempt to retrieve it.

But Janice smoothly stepped back, evading her with ease, taunting, “Mr. Welch, you want me to save your father, yet you send such a hysterical woman. It seems the Welch family is on the decline.”

“What are you two standing there for? Seize this woman!” Alissa yelled.

The two bodyguards, previously repelled by Janice’s decisive actions, hesitated. They had barely recovered, and upon hearing Alissa’s command, they were unsure of what to do next. They were not eager to risk another confrontation.

“Enough!” Mateo’s commanding voice boomed from the phone, imbued with authority and a touch of iciness, silencing Alissa and the two bodyguards. “Are you MO?”

Janice retorted, “Does it really matter if I say yes or no? The real question is—can I save your father?”

In the study of the Welch family mansion, the atmosphere was thick with the scent of sandalwood, both heavy and refined. A middle-aged man clad in a white long coat sat in an office chair, speaking into the phone. His expression was sharp, and his deep-set eyes sparkled with intelligence, his voice carrying an undeniable authority.

After a moment's consideration, Mateo's lips curled into a smile. "I believe you are MO."

His instincts told him that only someone with her confidence could be the renowned surgeon capable of saving Orson.

Back at the scene, Janice fixed her gaze on Alissa, her tone even. "Alissa has insulted and humiliated Glenn. I require her to kneel and apologize until I am satisfied. Mr. Welch, do you find this request excessive?"

"Not at all." Mateo chuckled in response, his words casting Alissa into deeper despair. "MO, I apologize on her behalf. I will ensure my daughter kneels and apologizes to you, and I will also donate a billion to the Generous Lives Orphanage. What do you think?"

Janice remained silent, handing the phone back to Alissa.

Trembling, Alissa accepted the phone, her mind spinning from her father's decisive words.

"Alissa!"

"Yes..."

"Kneel."

Chapter 612:

Mateo's firm directive broke through any remaining pretense of composure Alissa had. Her father was prepared to force her to humble herself before these people, completely annihilating her pride.

“Show your remorse until MO is satisfied, or leave the Welch family,” Mateo ordered.

“Alright, I’ll kneel!” Alissa clenched her teeth and slowly knelt down.

The two bodyguards were stunned, unable to believe that the typically haughty woman had actually knelt. But compared to kneeling and apologizing, leaving the Welch family was something Alissa found even harder to accept.

“I’m sorry. I apologize to you all,” Alissa’s voice was low, her eyes downcast, weighed down by the gravity of her actions.

“Not enough!” Janice’s gaze was relentless, filled with icy detachment.

“Alissa, bow your head!” Mateo’s commanding voice echoed once more. After a moment’s hesitation, Alissa bowed her head deeper in apology to Janice.

Gerda felt a pang of sympathy, but Janice and Glenn remained impassive. Some individuals’ malice was deep-seated, and their temporary submission often stemmed from strategic necessity rather than sincere remorse.

“MO, are you satisfied now?” Mateo’s voice held a tone of deference. Janice’s expression tightened slightly, a flicker of coldness passing through her eyes behind the mask. “I acknowledge your sincerity. However, I need to consider further.”

“If there’s anything else you’re dissatisfied with, please speak up. I am prepared to make any sacrifice,” Mateo pleaded.

“Dad!” Alissa’s voice cracked with panic. She was consumed by disbelief and fear.

If her previous submission had been to save her grandfather, Mateo’s current indifference stripped away any illusion of paternal affection.

“Silence! You imbecile! I sent you on a mission, not a vacation. But you went off to join some stupid show and offended MO. If your actions delay your grandfather’s surgery, I will take your life myself.”

Mateo’s harsh words left Alissa white as a sheet, collapsing to the floor in shock. Mateo began.

Janice cut him off. “Mr. Welch, I am a person of my word. I’ve said I’ll think it over, and that’s all I will say for now. I’ll reach out once I’ve made a decision.”

“Understood.”

Mateo managed a forced smile. But as he ended the call, his face grew cold, and his mood darkened.

Alissa departed with the bodyguards in a dismal state. She had arrived full of arrogance, yet left in utter disgrace. Mateo’s stern rebuke had crushed her pride, and her cherished status in the Welch family now seemed perilously unstable.

As the car started, Alissa sharply turned back, her eyes burning with anger and determination as she glared at the fading image of the orphanage. “I will repay today’s humiliation a hundredfold, a thousandfold.”

Back in the office, Glenn was brewing a fresh pot of coffee, pouring a cup for both Janice and himself.

Janice removed her mask, revealing a delicate face with bright, confident eyes that had a calming effect.

Chapter 613:

“Seeing you like this, you must have a plan. I won’t say more.” Glenn smiled, somewhat resignedly. “I was worried you might have antagonized the Welch family too much.”

Janice picked up her cup, contemplating the dark liquid. “Sooner or later, I’ll clash with the Welch family, so there’s no point in pandering to them.”

Glenn frowned, a thought striking him. "Is this about your biological parents?"

Janice was momentarily taken aback, her surprise evident as she looked at Glenn.

"Janice, I'm in my twilight years and I see things more clearly now." Glenn sipped his coffee, his smile gentle. "No matter your plans, you have my support. But you must make me one promise."

"Tell me."

"Always protect yourself."

Janice's eyes misted slightly, and she quickly looked down, taking a sip of her coffee to mask the emotion in her throat. "I will."

"So you can be shy, too. But seeing you all grown up, I'm truly proud." Glenn's laughter filled the room, warm and resonant.

Listening to him, Janice felt a wave of nostalgia wash over her, reminiscent of her childhood days filled with Glenn's robust laughter and games with the children. The only difference now was that his laughter carried a hint of melancholy, lacking its former vigor.

"Once we're through this busy period, I'll cook a meal for you myself," she promised.

"That sounds wonderful!" Glenn's face brightened, his enthusiasm palpable as he slapped the table. "It's been too long since I tasted your cooking. Just the thought brings back memories."

"Let's invite Leah, Prescott, and Costello too." Janice smiled, a twinge of guilt passing through her for being so absorbed in her affairs over the years and not visiting Glenn more often. Once this hectic time passed, she resolved to spend more time at the orphanage and cherish moments with Glenn.

Janice and Glenn continued their conversation for a bit longer before she decided it was time to leave. As she approached the doorway, she paused to watch the children playing joyfully, their laughter

bringing a sense of peace to her restless heart. This place, no matter what the future held, would always be her home.

Just then, her phone rang.

“Janice, how are things going?” Leah’s voice came through clearly.

Janice gave a brief overview of the situation, which led Leah to express her disbelief at Alissa’s stupidity.

“The Welch family has a century-long legacy, yet it’s represented by someone as dim-witted as Alissa.”

“Alissa may be foolish, but do you think the Welch family is unaware of her actions?” Janice queried.

Leah paused, sensing that there was more to Janice’s statement. “Janice, have you uncovered something?”

As Janice continued the conversation, she opened her car door and settled in. Costello nodded to her and started the engine, the car moving smoothly.

Chapter 614:

“The Welch family has deep roots. Consider how they ensure their influence is felt by other powers,” Janice mused.

Leah’s understanding deepened with Janice’s insight. “Are you suggesting Alissa is deliberately used to create disturbances? That the Welch family then resolves these issues, demonstrating their strength and control to others?”

“Exactly! The Welch family’s businesses span nationwide, resting on a robust foundation. They maintain their relevance and instill intimidation by having someone constantly stir up trouble. Alissa believes she can act without consequences, but in reality, she’s merely a pawn. Once she’s no longer useful, she’ll be easily discarded,” Janice explained, her gaze intense. “Yet, Mateo is quite the strategist. As we face the Welch family head-on, he will be our most formidable opponent.”

Even though Alissa was merely a pawn, Janice's recent demands had significantly dented the Welch family's pride. However, Mateo's response had been surprisingly accommodating, agreeing to her demands without any apparent hesitation.

Adapting swiftly to circumstances made him a challenging adversary. Janice wished the Welch family had been more arrogant, rejecting her demands outright, which would have made them easier to manipulate.

"Janice, are you planning to save Alissa's grandfather?"

"Of course." Janice's response came with a cold smirk. "Knowing both your opponent and yourself ensures victory. With such a chance to interact with the core figures of the Welch family, I couldn't possibly refuse."

"Then why are you keeping them on edge?"

"Look into the current status of the Welch family, particularly their network of connections."

"Understood."

Leah had been alongside Janice for many years and immediately grasped the rationale behind keeping the Welch family anxious. It was a strategy to buy time to unearth their deeper secrets.

Mateo's father was advanced in age, yet Mateo's willingness to humble himself to extend his father's life hinted at a significant underlying secret. At the show venue, the guests used their free time to tend to personal affairs. Only a few, including Delilah, had no pressing engagements.

She sat alone in the living room, idly flipping through a magazine. Yet her attention wasn't on the pages; instead, her eyes occasionally drifted toward the second floor, as if biding her time for something.

At that moment, Stephen hurried down from the second floor and quickly exited the villa. Observing his departure, Delilah's expression darkened. She promptly set the magazine aside and stealthily made her way upstairs.

She reached Stephen's room, checking to ensure he was alone before slipping inside. Moments later, she emerged clutching a black opaque bag, the contents hidden from view. Her face tense, Delilah looked around to confirm she was still unobserved, then proceeded toward Janice's room.

Meanwhile, Demi, having woken from a nap thirsty, stepped out to fetch some water. Just as she left her room, she caught Delilah sneaking out of Janice's room.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

Chapter 615:

Delilah jolted, her entire body shaking as she faced Demi, fear written all over her face.

"Delilah, why are you sneaking around like this? You're clearly up to no good." Demi narrowed her eyes, a cold spark flickering within them. "I'm reporting you this instant."

"No!" Delilah quickly moved closer to Demi. "I just needed to speak with Janice, but she wasn't in her room."

"Really?" Demi scoffed. "Delilah, stop the act! You're not fooling anyone."

Delilah's brows creased with worry. If her scheme were to be revealed, her reputation would be irreparably ruined.

"You want to get close to Stephen, don't you?" Delilah asked, grasping Demi's hand in a show of feigned vulnerability. "I can make that happen if you keep my secret."

Demi raised an eyebrow, giving Delilah a skeptical look. She had been previously tricked by Delilah, which had even caused Carlton to distance himself from her. She felt a lingering bitterness toward Delilah.

However, the idea of a staged romance with Stephen presented an opportunity that might justify collaborating with Delilah this one time.

“How would you help me?” Demi asked, puzzled.

Delilah’s eyes sparkled as she silently scoffed at Demi’s naivety. “You’re aware of my past. You should also keep in mind that there’s someone behind me, supporting what I do.” Demi nodded.

“The person supporting me is Alissa,” Delilah revealed.

Demi had suspected as much.

Delilah continued, “Alissa is the heiress of the influential Welch family. With her influence, setting you up with Stephen would be effortless.”

A spark of excitement flickered in Demi’s eyes. “Can you really make that happen?”

“Absolutely.”

“What about Aiden and Kenneth?”

Delilah’s smile vanished. Demi was actually considering Aiden and Kenneth?

“Demi, I would advise against pursuing Aiden. Alissa is interested in him.”

Demi furrowed her brow, took a moment to think it over, and then let the idea go.

Aiden was likely well aware of her reputation and wouldn't give her a second glance. Rather than offending Alissa for someone she couldn't approach, it was better to stage a publicity romance with Stephen and gain some benefits.

As for Kenneth, the situation would probably be the same, offering no real gain.

"Delilah, I'll trust you on this. Just ensure I get more appearances with Stephen, and your secret is safe with me," Demi said.

"No problem," Delilah responded, her lips curling into a cunning smile as her gaze drifted towards Janice's room on the second floor. Tonight promised to be an eventful one.

Aiden and Alissa were victorious in the competition and proceeded to the romantic location arranged by the show. This time, the date was set in an amusement park. Known as a lovers' paradise, the amusement park naturally enhanced the romantic vibe, raising a connection between them.

Chapter 616:

Aiden showed up in casual clothes. Despite the relaxed attire, his striking good looks gave an effortless elegance to his appearance. Looking around at the amusement park, Aiden's expression relaxed, and a spontaneous smile touched his lips. He remembered the time he had spent here with Janice. Though it was his first visit to such a place and he had felt a bit out of place, those memories remained clear in his mind.

"Sorry, I'm late," Alissa said, rushing over after just leaving the orphanage. For the occasion, she had chosen an elegant yet somewhat overly formal outfit. Upon entering the amusement park, she immediately felt out of place as her outfit seemed too fancy for the casual location.

Aiden paid no attention to her, caught up in his memories of times spent with Janice.

Alissa looked over and noticed the smile on Aiden's lips. Slowly, her feelings of grievance and resentment began to melt away. Men were such interesting creatures. They appeared indifferent but were secretly looking forward to dates. That smile clearly showed his happiness.

"Aiden, what should we do next..."

Before Alissa could finish her question, Aiden was already making his way toward the roller coaster. Upon seeing the roller coaster, Alissa's knees trembled. Was he really planning to take her on such a fearsome ride?

"Aiden, I'm terrified," she muttered.

Aiden paused and looked back at Alissa with a cold expression.

"Then, Alissa, you may stay here," he said coolly.

Her face showed her disappointment, as she had hoped that revealing her vulnerability would win Aiden's sympathy and affection.

Aiden's gaze, however, remained cold, offering no hint of warmth. The more distant he seemed, the more Alissa felt he was playing hard-to-get. After all, why else would he choose the roller coaster?

She glanced at the roller coaster in motion, with passengers screaming and some couples taking the chance to cling to each other. It seemed like an ideal moment to deepen their relationship.

"Alright, if it pleases you, I'll come," she said.

Alissa managed a brave smile, trying to appear unfazed by the challenge ahead, a gesture that momentarily touched those around her. However, Aiden offered her no comfort, stepping ahead to claim his seat on the roller coaster first.

"Aiden, wait for me." Alissa hurried to sit beside him.

Just as she fastened her safety harness, Aiden abruptly stood up and moved to a seat behind her.

"Aiden, you..."

Alissa attempted to rise, but found herself restrained by the locked harness. It couldn't be removed until the ride was over.

"Ms. Welch, it seems you've overlooked something."

"I'm allergic to you," he replied.

Alissa's eyes widened. "Unlock this for me, I need to switch seats."

Chapter 617:

"Miss, please lower your voice. The roller coaster is starting soon, and we can't unlock the harness until it ends." A staff member approached, trying to soothe her.

"How did he manage to change seats then?" Alissa demanded, her tone sharp. Aiden gave a lazy shrug.

"I never locked mine, allowing me to change seats any time before the launch."

Realizing she had been outmaneuvered by Aiden, Alissa's frustration boiled over. "Unlock it now! I want to get off, or I'll ensure everyone here loses their job!"

"Miss, please stay calm. The ride is about to begin. We must insist on your cooperation for safety reasons."

"I'll buy this amusement park and fire every single one of you!" The staff member frowned at her unreasonable behavior.

Aiden remarked coolly, "Ignore her. She's merely frightened; she'll settle down once we start."

Exchanging wary glances, the staff decided to disregard Alissa's outbursts as the roller coaster began its ascent.

Throughout the tumultuous ride, Alissa's screams echoed throughout the park. Her poised demeanor as the dignified heiress of the Welch family visibly crumbled.

As the ride ended, Alissa was shaken, her appearance disheveled, and her elegant attire in disarray.
"Aiden, my legs are shaky..."

She looked to Aiden for support, but he had already disembarked and was walking away.

"Miss, do you need assistance?" a staff member offered.

"Fuck off!" Alissa snapped.

Her fierce outburst left her looking wild and discomposed, startling a nearby child.

"Mommy, that lady is scary! She looks like a ghost!"

"Oh, sweetie, don't be afraid! Let's go, far away from her." The mother quickly whisked her child away from Alissa.

Alissa's rage was palpable, especially after the humiliations at Generous Lives Orphanage. Now, she harbored a destructive wish.

She wished the world would just end.

The cameramen observing the spectacle scratched their heads.

"Great, no sweet moments. It's turning into a comedy show. What do we do now?"

“What else? Shoot more scenery, less of the people, and just make do.” Meanwhile, Aiden seized the opportunity to make a call to Braylen while Alissa was distracted. “Where is Janice?”

“After leaving the villa, she visited Generous Lives Orphanage.”

Aiden’s brow furrowed, puzzled by Janice’s sudden visit to the orphanage. “By the way, Alissa also went to the orphanage. From what I gathered, there was some unpleasantness between Janice and Alissa there, but I’m not clear on the details.”

Aiden’s expression hardened, and he spotted Alissa approaching, looking somewhat disheveled. “Heh, daring to trouble Janice? I’ll play along with you.” Alissa stumbled over to Aiden. Despite feeling unwell, she forced a smile.

Chapter 618:

“Aiden, where are we headed next?”

“Ms. Welch, you seem uncomfortable. Perhaps we should call it a day?”

“No way!” Alissa straightened up, her resolve clear. “I’m feeling much better now. Let’s continue the date.”

“Alright, let’s grab something to eat.” Aiden’s smirk was sly, but Alissa interpreted it differently.

She thought he could no longer resist her allure.

Just moments ago, he seemed indifferent, but now, seeing her distressed, he must be feeling sympathetic. At last, he was showing her some affection. With renewed confidence, Alissa lifted her chin slightly, a sense of triumph building within her.

She was convinced that by the end of this date, she would win Aiden over. Then, she could boast to Janice, demonstrating that true love was no match for her allure and influence.

However, as Alissa followed Aiden to a food stall, her stomach, already unsettled from the roller coaster, revolted at the sight and smell of the food.

With an audible retch, she vomited in public.

Not only her breakfast, but also her dignity as the proud heiress of the Welch family, was thoroughly compromised.

“Ms. Welch, are you alright?” Aiden asked, his voice carrying a note of concern, though the smirk playing at the corners of his mouth suggested amusement. “If you’re not feeling well, we could call it a day.”

“No. I’m fine!” Alissa insisted, quickly dabbing at her mouth with a tissue. Despite her intense embarrassment, she was determined not to show any weakness.

Yet, when she risked another glance at the food from the snack stand, her stomach lurched, and she quickly turned her gaze away.

“You must be hungry after losing your breakfast. Let me get you something light to eat.”

Alissa tried to interject, but Aiden was already on his way to the snack stand, where he ordered a portion of fried chicken nuggets.

Alissa turned deathly pale as she watched him. The thought of food, particularly something as greasy as chicken nuggets, made her stomach churn again. She had barely recovered from the roller coaster’s effects, striving to hold herself together and suppress the mounting nausea. But the smell of oil permeating the air and the sight of the greasy food were overwhelming, nearly triggering another wave of sickness.

“Have some,” Aiden returned, offering her the chicken nuggets with a bright, seemingly considerate smile. Despite the friendliness in his gesture, Alissa sensed a deliberate provocation.

“I’ve heard these are the best snacks here. It’d be a shame to miss out.”

"I'm really not hungry," Alissa replied, forcing a smile and avoiding looking at the food. She feared that even a brief glimpse might be enough to unsettle her stomach again, risking further embarrassment.

"Of course, someone accustomed to fine dining like yourself might not find this sort of food appealing," Aiden remarked with a sigh, feigning a tone of regret. Hearing this, Alissa felt somewhat guilty. This was their first date, and she knew that failing to connect with Aiden would render the outing pointless.

Chapter 619:

A sudden thought struck her. Could this be a test from Aiden? She speculated that Janice had captured Aiden's attention because she appeared down-to-earth and authentic.

Someone like Aiden, accustomed to the upper echelons of society, likely encountered countless ostentatious women. Janice, with her refreshing and unpretentious demeanor, would stand out as a breath of fresh air.

"Fine, I'll eat it." Alissa took a deep breath and accepted the fried chicken nuggets from Aiden.

Merely looking at them unsettled her stomach, but she was determined to push through to impress him. With closed eyes, she took a bite, focusing all her effort on suppressing the urge to gag, the flavor utterly irrelevant.

"Is it good?" Aiden's eyebrow arched, a hint of mockery in his tone.

"Delicious." Alissa forced her eyes open and offered Aiden a sweet smile. "It tastes even better because you bought it."

Aiden felt an involuntary chill. Had Janice said that, it might have been charming, but from Alissa, it felt disingenuous.

"Aiden, you should try some too," Alissa suggested, holding out a piece toward him. Her heart fluttered with hope. Was he finally letting his guard down, showing genuine affection? Sharing food in such a manner was typically reserved for close couples.

But just as the chicken nugget was about to reach his mouth, Aiden turned away. "Sorry, I don't eat unhealthy junk food."

"What?" Alissa's pupils narrowed, her hand shaking as she held the nugget. "What do you mean?"

Aiden shrugged. "Unhealthy junk food contributes to weight gain. Janice appreciates my fitness, so I need to stay in shape to keep her happy."

Alissa's expression hardened. "Janice again? Aiden, you're doing this deliberately, aren't you?"

Aiden's smirk faded into a grimace. "Yes, I am doing this deliberately. Alissa, did you really believe I had genuine interest in you? I'm here to make a point on behalf of Janice. No matter how influential the Welch family might be, if you threaten Janice, I will not stand by idly."

Alissa's eyes widened as she confronted Aiden's icy stare, feeling as if a cold wind had swept over her. This man harbored no affection for her, only disdain.

"Aiden, what is it about Janice that makes her worth your complete loyalty? Don't you realize, compared to me, she's insignificant? With the Welch family's resources, the Green family could ascend to the top in everything, even reaching the upper echelons nationally. But if you choose her, the Welch family will ensure that the Green family falls from grace."

Aiden chuckled, his hands tucked into his pockets, his face radiating arrogance and disdain. "Alissa, do you honestly think you're that important? If the Welch family wants to bring down the Green family, go ahead. Give it your best shot."

"Aiden, you ungrateful wretch! It's a privilege that I even considered giving you 100k! You should be groveling at my feet, obeying my every whim!" Alissa's eyes blazed with fury, a fire so intense it seemed like she might tear Aiden apart right there on the spot.

But Aiden didn't flinch. His calm, collected demeanor only fueled Alissa's rage, making it feel as though her words were bouncing off a wall. "Hah! So protective of Janice, aren't you? Then I—"

Chapter 620:

Before she could finish, Aiden's expression shifted. His gaze darkened, and the air around him seemed to crackle with an intimidating energy. The sudden change hit Alissa like a cold slap, leaving her wide-eyed and trembling.

It was as if she could feel the shadow of death looming over her, making her knees weak.

"I don't make a habit of hitting women, but I will kill you," Aiden said, stepping closer. His tall frame cast a shadow that felt heavy enough to crush her. "You might think I'm bluffing, but trust me, you don't want to find out."

Alissa's pupils dilated in fear, her bravado crumbling like a house of cards. The sheer force of Aiden's presence left her shaking.

Without another glance, Aiden turned on his heel and walked away, his steps firm and unbothered.

As his figure disappeared into the distance, Alissa's fear slowly ebbed away, replaced by a venomous cocktail of envy and hatred.

Janice!

What spell had that woman cast to earn Aiden's unwavering protection? In that moment, Aiden had been like a fierce lion, ready to lay down his life to defend her.

Alissa's heart burned with jealousy. If only Janice weren't in the picture, Aiden might finally see her.

The thought sent a malicious spark through Alissa's mind. Her eyes narrowed, and her lips curled into a bitter sneer.

Every grievance she had suffered, every humiliation—it was all because of Janice. Her hatred boiled over, dark and consuming, as she silently vowed to rid herself of her rival once and for all.

Meanwhile, the two cameramen on the scene stood frozen, exchanging uncertain glances. They had no idea how to react to the explosive showdown they had just witnessed.

They hovered uncertainly, torn between stepping in to mediate and staying out of the fray. They had hoped to coax the two stars into some semblance of cooperation for the shoot.

With both parties being untouchable, the cameramen could do little more than sigh in resignation, keeping their distance and avoiding any risk of stepping on sensitive toes.

“Forget it. There’s no way they’re going to play nice.”

“Yeah, let’s just call it. We’ll tell Devin everything straight. He’ll get it. Worst case, we’ll pad the episode with more scenic B-roll.”

And so, surrendering to the inevitable, the cameramen trudged off, lamenting the drama but unwilling to risk ruffling any feathers. Filming the pair under these circumstances was like trying to patch a leaky roof in the middle of a storm—completely hopeless.

“Miss, did you have a fight with your boyfriend?”

The stall owner approached, cradling a steaming box of chicken nuggets. His tone was gentle, laced with well-meaning concern. “It’s normal for couples to bicker, you know. Good communication can smooth things over. Here, these nuggets are on me. I hope they brighten your day a little.”