

Wrath 641

Chapter 641:

As the door flew open, a dense cloud of black smoke billowed out, engulfing them in its choking embrace. The searing wave of heat hit Janice like a wall, making her stagger as dizziness threatened to overtake her.

This was far from what she had anticipated.

She had imagined finding Stephen in the room with Wendy, caught in some scandalous moment, but a raging fire? That was something she could never have foreseen.

“Stephen!” Janice covered her mouth and nose with her sleeve, ignoring the searing heat as she charged into the smoke-filled room without a second thought.

The room was consumed by thick, suffocating smoke and roaring flames, the oppressive heat so intense it felt as though it was searing her skin.

“Watch out!” Aiden rushed to catch up with her, grabbing Janice’s hand in panic, his heart pounding at the thought she might dart straight into the blaze without thinking.

“Aiden, we have to find Stephen!”

“He’s not here!” Aiden shot back, his eyes scanning the room the moment the door crashed open. Stephen’s absence was glaringly obvious.

“We’ve got to go. This fire’s growing too fast; we’ll be caught in it if we stick around,” he added, tossing off his jacket and draping it over Janice’s shoulders without a second thought. He made to pull her toward safety.

“Wait!” Janice stopped him, her eyes locking on a phone resting on the bedside table.

Something didn't sit right with her. She felt like this phone could hold the answers she was looking for.

Ignoring the heat that scorched the air,

"Hurry! Put out the fire!"

"Damn it! How did this happen? Who's responsible for safety?" Outside, chaos erupted as people scrambled for fire extinguishers and frantically called emergency services.

Devin, acting fast to contain the situation, immediately cut the broadcast the moment he confirmed the fire.

However, despite his quick response, the damage was already done. Viewers had caught wind of the Love Lab fire, and the source was traced back to Stephen's room.

Within minutes, Stephen's fans swarmed the show's social media, demanding answers.

But the crew was in crisis mode—there was no time to address public concerns. Their priority was to put out the fire and ensure Stephen's safety before handling the media storm.

"This is bad!" a staff member reported urgently to Devin. "We can't find Stephen anywhere."

For a brief second, Devin felt a wave of relief. If no one was hurt, they could still salvage the situation. But then the weight of the words hit him. "What do you mean, 'this is bad'?"

Chapter 642:

"Not only is Stephen not here, but we also can't reach him. And it's not just him; Leonidas and Alissa have also vanished from the villa. Their phones are off."

"What?" Devin's face went pale. His initial relief was instantly replaced by sheer panic. His stomach twisted into knots.

“Find them, now! This fire isn’t just an accident. We need to confirm their safety!”

If anything had happened to them, Devin knew his career—and possibly his life—was on the line.

Stephen was a newly minted film star, worshipped by a massive fanbase. If anything went wrong for him on the show, the backlash would be disastrous.

And Alissa? She was from the powerful Welch family. If she got caught in this mess, it wouldn’t just ruin Devin’s career; it could very well put his life at risk.

As for Leonidas, Devin wasn’t too worried about him. The guy had money, sure, but his background was vague, more like a flashy nouveau riche than someone truly influential.

Right now, the only thing that mattered was finding Stephen and Alissa. Nothing else could come before that.

Meanwhile, Janice sat quietly on the nearby sofa, her gaze fixed on Devin as she listened to his conversation.

“Janice, what do you think?” Aiden, noticing the slight tremor in her hand, gently pressed down on it, his eyes filled with concern. “Stephen might...”

“I know.” Janice nodded, her voice steady despite the turmoil inside.

She took a deep breath, forcing herself to stay calm. “This has to be Leonidas’ doing. Stephen was likely taken by him. Aiden, I need you to check the surveillance footage around Riseolara Cafe.”

Since returning, she hadn’t seen Stephen once, which only reinforced her suspicion that something must have happened to him outside the villa.

“Got it.” Aiden gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. He then stood up and walked off to call Braylen.

Just then, Kenneth approached and settled down beside Janice. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." Janice shot a quick look at Kenneth and forced a smile. "There's no need to worry about me."

Kenneth studied her closely, a slight crease forming between his brows as he asked, "You seem to care a lot about Stephen, don't you?" Janice blinked, caught off guard by the remark. "What makes you say that?"

Kenneth let out a quiet sigh, recalling her earlier reaction. "The moment you heard about the fire in his room, you looked shaken. I've never seen you like that before. You and Stephen are just acquaintances, so why are you so worried about him?"

"Are you suggesting I have a secret affair with him?"

Kenneth stiffened for a second before flashing an awkward smile. "That's not what I meant. I just don't want you to be deceived by him. Stephen's background is questionable, and there have been rumors about him and Wendy Chadwick. If you get too close to him, it might invite unnecessary trouble."

Janice's expression darkened, a smirk tugging at her lips. "Whatever connection I have with Stephen has nothing to do with you. We're merely acquaintances and, at best, former employer and employee." Her cold tone sent an uneasy shiver through Kenneth, and for a brief moment, a flicker of panic flashed in his eyes.

Chapter 643:

He realized he had overstepped, but his words had come from a place of concern. Even so, Janice's strong reaction felt off.

Before he could say another word, Aiden walked back, having just ended his call. He shot Janice a discreet glance, one she instantly picked up on.

Without another word, she nodded to Kenneth and stood up, heading outside.

“Aiden, what’s going on? What’s the big secret?” Kenneth clenched his fists, frustration tightening his chest. Unable to hold back, he grabbed Aiden’s arm.

Aiden barely spared him a glance and shook off his grip. “This is between Janice and me. You, an outsider, have no place interfering.”

“What the hell did you just say?”

“Isn’t it true?” Aiden’s voice was casual, but his words carried weight. Kenneth gritted his teeth. He could feel it—there was something Janice wasn’t telling him. “Look, I know something’s wrong. She’s clearly troubled. As her friend, I just want to help.”

“There’s no need.” Brushing Kenneth’s hand away, Aiden turned to follow Janice. “You should focus on taking care of yourself.”

At that moment, Maggie approached and gently took Kenneth’s hand. “Kenneth, come with me. This is really important.”

“What is it?” Kenneth frowned, irritated and not in the mood to deal with her.

He simply wanted to understand what had occurred with Janice—what he had said to cause such a drastic change in her attitude toward him.

“It’s something important,” Maggie insisted, her frown deepening. She nudged his foot.

His brow furrowed even tighter as he looked at her intensely. He sighed and said to Aiden, “No matter what, I’m still Janice’s friend. If you need help, please make sure to let me know.”

Aiden laughed coldly and quickly followed Janice.

“Maggie, what do you want to say?” Kenneth watched Aiden’s retreating figure, a sense of helplessness washing over him. Aiden and Janice were now so close that intervening seemed impossible. They didn’t even leave him a sliver of a chance.

“Kenneth, you were too impulsive.” Maggie sighed, her voice tinged with resignation. “Everyone has their secrets, but you pushed Janice too hard.”

“Really?” Kenneth was taken aback, looking at her with a puzzled expression.

“Do you know what Janice is like when she’s in love?”

The image of Janice gazing at Aiden flashed through Kenneth’s mind. He quickly dismissed the thought and replied, “I don’t know.”

Maggie sighed again. “Although I hate to admit it, it’s clear that Janice has feelings for Aiden.”

“Maggie, what exactly are you trying to tell me?” Kenneth’s agitation grew with each word.

“What I’m saying is that Janice and Stephen are just friends, and your earlier comments were harsh,” Maggie continued earnestly. “If I were Janice, I would have scolded you already.”

Kenneth spat, “I’m your brother!”

Chapter 644:

“Yes, exactly! That’s why I’m telling you this. If you were someone else, I wouldn’t even bother.” She stepped forward to pat his shoulder. “Kenneth, don’t rush. Winning a girl’s heart takes patience, especially someone as exceptional as Janice.”

Reflecting on the earlier events and Maggie’s words, Kenneth realized that his remarks had indeed been out of line.

He had not yet grasped the truth, but he rashly judged Janice and Stephen's relationship, which was quite irritating.

"There's probably more to the fire incident. Perhaps a simple start would be to investigate the fire itself," Kenneth mused, squinting as he looked up at Stephen's room on the second floor.

Since Janice was not forthcoming, he decided to uncover the truth himself.

Meanwhile, Janice and Aiden had reached the courtyard.

"Aiden, what have you discovered?"

Aiden pulled out a video and showed it to Janice. "I had Braylen review the surveillance around the cafe you mentioned. After Stephen left the cafe, he walked alone for a while. Then, a van pulled up next to him, and several people jumped out and forcibly took him."

Janice watched the footage of Stephen being knocked out and dragged into the van, her expression turning icy.

She clenched her fists, her whole demeanor radiating a chilling energy. Sensing her distress, Aiden reassured her, "Braylen is already on it, trying to track down that van. Once we find it, we should be able to locate Stephen."

"We won't find it." Janice shook her head, her tone resolute. "That guy won't let you catch him off guard."

She took out a phone she had retrieved from Stephen's room. Staring at the dark screen, which displayed only the time, she pondered.

"Could it be Leonidas?"

As soon as Aiden said that, the phone in Janice's hand rang.

Janice exchanged a look with Aiden before answering the call from an unknown number.

“Janice, with your intelligence, you should have guessed that what just happened was my doing, right?”
The voice on the other end was unmistakably Leonidas’.

Janice tightened her grip on the phone, her eyes flashing with cold determination. “Leonidas, I’m the one you want. Why harm Stephen?”

“You know why.” Leonidas’ voice was filled with contempt and mockery. “You are untouchable. I struggled to find a way to reach you. But you care deeply for your family and friends. If—”

“Leonidas, don’t do anything rash!”

“I won’t do anything rash right now. But I can’t promise the same for later.”

“What exactly do you want?” For the first time, a hint of nervousness appeared on Janice’s usually composed face.

Aiden gently intertwined his fingers with Janice’s, offering silent support.

The warmth radiating from his palm seeped into her skin, anchoring her racing thoughts. Janice drew in a deep breath, knowing that a clear mind would be her strongest weapon against what lay ahead.

Chapter 645:

“Janice, let’s play a game,” Leonidas suggested.

“What game?”

“Hide and seek.”

Those three words sent ice crawling down Janice's spine.

The implications were crystal clear—Stephen was the hidden prize in this twisted version of a childhood game, and she was being forced to play the seeker.

"The fire earlier was just a demonstration. You have only one hour. If you can't find Stephen within one hour, he will perish in the flames." Madness and zealous excitement danced in Leonidas' every word. "Janice, you better hurry! Finally finding your brother but only to lose him again must be painful, right?"

"Leonidas, you've succeeded in angering me."

"I'm glad I have angered you! Now, let the game begin." The line went dead.

Janice's knuckles turned white as she gripped her phone, her ethereal features hardening into a mask of ice.

"Leonidas is truly insane," Aiden muttered, his eyes narrowing to dangerous slits as frost seemed to emanate from his very being. "Despite the surprise checks today, he still dared to do such a thing."

"He's always been a loose cannon since childhood, consequences be damned. He'd commit murder on a live broadcast if the whim struck him. Now he's using Stephen as his pawn, trying to throw me into chaos and bend me to his will."

His strategy was working with surgical precision.

Unease clawed at Janice's composure. Despite her typically unshakeable demeanor, knowing her brother, her only remaining family, might be dancing with death had cracked her carefully constructed walls.

Even a saint would find their resolve tested in the face of such stakes.

“Janice, this is clearly a trap.” Aiden gripped Janice’s shoulders, his emerald eyes swimming with concern. “He’s laying out his web, waiting for you to stumble right into it.”

“I know.”

Janice lifted her gaze to meet his, a bitter smile playing across her lips. “But do I have a choice?”

Her words pierced Aiden’s heart like shards of glass.

In one fluid motion, he pulled her into his embrace—a gesture so sudden it made Janice’s breath catch, her body tensing like a startled deer.

“Janice, I understand the tempest raging in your heart. If you were the one taken, I’d charge headlong into that trap without hesitation. You’ve always been a lone wolf, tackling every battle solo. But this time, let me be with you. Let me stand beside you. I’ll move heaven and earth to help you bring Stephen home.”

A wave of warmth bloomed in Janice’s chest, melting her frozen fears. Aiden was her perfect paradox—a man whose frosty exterior masked a soul that burned with passionate intensity. It was this duality that had captured her heart so completely.

“Alright!”

Meanwhile, in a space touched only by wavering shadows, a single bulb cast its sickly glow.

Chapter 646:

The air hung heavy with an acrid stench that yanked Stephen from the depths of unconsciousness.

His eyes fluttered open, struggling to pierce the murky darkness that pressed in from all sides. Beyond the dim light’s feeble reach, an impenetrable void swallowed everything else.

“Where am I?” Stephen’s head throbbed as he fought through the fog of unconsciousness.

Fragments of memory flickered through his mind—bidding farewell to Wendy, waiting for a cab under the city lights. Then a van materializing from the shadows, dark figures lunging forward, and darkness claiming him before he could even cry out. “Was I kidnapped?”

The words tasted bitter on his tongue, his mind reeling at the absurdity of it all.

In this age of omnipresent surveillance, where cameras lurked at every corner, someone had dared to snatch him off the streets. It was a brazen display of lawlessness that shook his faith in modern security.

“Is anyone there?” Stephen drew in a breath, instantly regretting it as a noxious scent invaded his lungs, making his stomach churn.

The odor tickled at his memory, familiar yet ominous.

“Gasoline?”

The realization hit him like a physical blow. The air was saturated with the unmistakable stench of fuel. “Is anyone here?”

His voice echoed through the darkness, desperation creeping in at its edges. Though the reason for his abduction remained a mystery, the presence of gasoline painted a horrifying picture — this wasn’t just a kidnapping, it was a prelude to something far more sinister.

His shouts bounced off unseen walls, returning to mock him with their emptiness.

Panic clawed at his chest as he wracked his brain for answers. He’d never crossed anyone, never made enemies worthy of such malice.

If ransom was the goal, where were his captors?

And if death was their aim, what could he possibly have done to deserve such a fate?

Stephen doubled over in a fit of coughing.

The acrid fumes of gasoline turned each breath into a battle.

But what truly chilled him to his core was the knowledge that a single spark could transform this fuel-soaked prison into an inferno. As if summoned by his darkest fears, wisps of smoke began to curl beneath the door like ghostly fingers.

The already poisoned air thickened into a suffocating miasma, each inhalation becoming more precious than the last.

Yet in the face of this impending doom, an odd serenity washed over Stephen. "Maybe dying like this isn't so bad. At least I won't have to return to that hell."

But then, like a ray of sunlight piercing storm clouds, Janice's image blazed through his consciousness. His heart stuttered in his chest, and a bitter smile tugged at his lips. "This is so strange. We've barely crossed paths, yet her presence has etched itself so deeply into my soul. Of all the faces that could flash before my eyes in these final moments, it's hers that breaks through the darkness."

Chapter 647:

Stephen thought the person who came to his mind would be Wendy.

After all, she was the only woman in his rotten life.

Whether driven by love or hate, her memory should have been etched in his heart.

However, it was Janice who occupied his thoughts now.

The room was gradually being engulfed by smoke as the heat escalated. Stephen found himself coughing relentlessly.

He hesitated to breathe deeply, knowing that inhaling the smoke could be fatal.

But even if he managed to extend his life, what value would it hold? His existence had deteriorated, tainted with the odor of defeat. Maybe the fire was a harsh grace, intended to erase his decaying life.

Still, there lingered a faint resistance within him.

He was determined to delve deeper into Janice's true motives for approaching him.

He certainly was not someone who could be called a fool.

Though Janice had talked extensively before, she had never unveiled the truth.

What could be the true motive behind her actions?

Once again, Stephen coughed. His coughs were growing weaker.

His vision began to blur. His consciousness was slowly slipping away. "Is this the end for me?" he murmured, letting out a soft chuckle with his gaze distant, as around this hour was when that woman typically made her calls to him.

Now, without his phone by his side, her inability to reach him would surely drive her mad.

Yet, none of that seemed to matter any longer.

His life was slowly slipping away.

Death would cut every tie, ending his connection with that woman completely.

As soon as Leonidas ended the call, Janice called Prescott, requesting that he determine Leonidas' location.

Previously, Prescott had succeeded in tracking Leonidas, but now all he could retrieve was a false location.

It became evident that Leonidas was aware of the surveillance and had deliberately misled them about his whereabouts.

This deception made it nearly impossible to trace Stephen through Leonidas.

"Okay, I see." Upon hanging up, Aiden turned to Janice and said, "Braylen just reported they located the van used to take Stephen. However, the kidnapper was clever enough to switch vehicles in a zone without surveillance, losing our trail. Therefore, this lead has also stopped."

Concern creased Janice's forehead, her anxiety visibly deepening. Aiden saw her like this for the first time. In just a short span, Janice had furrowed her brow more than she ever had before.

"Janice, even though these leads have gone cold, there's another avenue we might explore."

"Are you suggesting Alissa?"

Chapter 648:

"Yes. Besides Leonidas, Alissa was also absent tonight. Leonidas only has influence overseas and would need Alissa's cooperation to discreetly abduct someone in Efrery."

Prescott had already been directed by Janice to monitor Alissa's location.

At that moment, he called back.

"Janice, the most recent sighting of Alissa was on the set."

“Ah, it seems I was making too much of it. Leonidas is too clever. If he managed to erase his own traces, why would he allow Alissa to be spotted?” Janice gave a wry smile as she shook her head.

All their leads had now gone cold.

“That can’t be the end of it. Given what I know about Leonidas, he wouldn’t just lead us to a dead end,” Janice suddenly said. “Back when he was in the orphanage, he had a cruel streak and bullied other kids. He wouldn’t have clouded my vision if all he wanted was a result. He would leave me clues along the way just to show he’s more clever than I am.”

With that thought, Janice faced Aiden. “We should search his room.”

“Okay!”

They made their way back to the set.

Although the fire in Stephen’s second-floor room had been put out, the smell of smoke lingered in the air. Everyone was bustling about, tidying up the mess, their appearances disarrayed.

For their safety, the remaining guests had vacated their rooms and gathered in the living room to follow Devin’s guidance.

In the wake of such a major incident, coordinating the guests’ accounts was critical. Any negative comments could jeopardize the show.

Devin had poured immense effort into this program, and just as it was starting to gain popularity, he found it hard to accept that it might crumble.

It would crush him to witness the destruction of the show.

“Aiden, Janice, we’re counting on your support.”

As they made their way back, a smiling staff member came up to greet them.

“Step out of the way!” Janice couldn’t afford to spend any time dealing with the staff.

Leonidas had set a one-hour deadline, half of which had already slipped by. If she didn’t locate Stephen’s whereabouts soon...

The result was something she simply could not accept.

“Janice...”

“Is something wrong?” Devin approached with a concerned look. “Janice and Aiden...”

“Understood.” Devin dismissed the staff with a wave and then turned to Janice and Aiden. “Aiden, Janice, news of the fire has already hit the internet, and it’s impacting our show negatively. I’m working to limit the fallout. Your cooperation with our public relations efforts would be invaluable...”

“Leave!” Aiden didn’t bother giving Devin a chance to speak. He took Janice’s hand and walked briskly inside. “If the show fails, that’s not on us. And don’t forget who was behind funding this project in the first place.”

Chapter 649:

Devin’s expression darkened at Aiden’s words. Leah had been the original backer of the show.

“But Leah isn’t the only investor now,” Devin countered, inhaling deeply as he held Aiden’s gaze. “Alissa and Kenneth invested too.”

“Hah!” Aiden let out a sharp, icy chuckle. His presence was so overpowering that Devin instinctively stiffened.

In that moment, Devin was reminded of who stood before him—the ruthless and formidable Aiden.

Aiden reserved his gentleness for Janice alone; for everyone else, he was merciless.

“Janice, go on ahead.” Aiden gave Janice a brief look, silently signaling her to let him handle it.

Janice gave a brief nod before hurrying towards Leonidas’ room. She had complete faith in Aiden to handle Devin. Her priority now was finding any clues about Stephen’s location as quickly as possible.

Leonidas’ room was plain, with minimal decorations, and his clothes were few and simple.

Janice surveyed the space, her eyes stopping on a sarcastic clown drawing on the white wall.

Seeing it, her expression changed, her eyes growing darker. It seemed Leonidas had expected her and drawn it to taunt her.

She searched the room, but there were no clues to be found.

Every passing second deepened her unease. If she were Leonidas, how would she have planned this?

Janice shut her eyes, forcing herself to think like Leonidas—to anticipate his moves. Delilah, Demi, Liliana...

One by one, the people tied to Leonidas passed through her thoughts.

Ding!

The phone she had found rang again.

Snapping her eyes open, Janice picked up—Leonidas’ voice greeted her once again.

“Janice, you’re anxious, aren’t you? I can see why. It’s been half an hour. How could you not be?”

“Leonidas, where is Stephen?” Janice asked, her voice icily composed.

“Ah, but you must follow the rules of the game. If I simply told you, what would be the fun in that?” Leonidas’ tone dripped with smugness and mockery. “How unusual! You’ve always been so composed and strategic, but now... It seems like everyone has a weakness that makes them vulnerable. Janice, why don’t you kneel...”

Without a second thought, Janice ended the call, refusing to let Leonidas continue his taunts.

She knew him too well; he would never slip up and give her a single clue.

He feared her sharp mind, knowing that even the smallest hint from him could allow her to turn the tables.

Just in that moment, the door slammed open, and two figures were shoved into the room.

Chapter 650:

Janice cast a quick glance at the newcomers—it was Delilah and Demi.

“Janice, these two are tied to Leonidas. Maybe they know something useful,” Aiden suggested as he walked in, followed by Liliana.

“I was about to question them anyway. You’ve just made things easier,” Janice said, turning her gaze to Liliana, Delilah, and Demi.

“Janice, what are you going to do with us?” Delilah asked, panic in her eyes. “I swear, I don’t know anything! It was Demi’s idea!”

“Delilah, you tricked me earlier, and I kept quiet. But don’t you dare try to blame me now!” Demi snapped back angrily.

“Enough!” Janice’s voice rang out, silencing them instantly. “Answer me truthfully, or I will have no hesitation in killing you.”

“I’ll tell you everything,” Demi said, her voice trembling. Her instincts screamed that Janice was not someone to be trifled with—she was capable of anything.

“Did you meet Leonidas today? What was discussed? I want every detail, every word.”

“You don’t need to go that far,” Liliana suddenly spoke up. “I think I know exactly what you’re after.”

Janice furrowed her brow in confusion as Liliana handed her a drawing. “This is the drawing Leonidas asked me to make. Maybe it’s the answer you’re looking for.”

Janice stood frozen for a moment before her eyes focused on the drawing.

The drawing was intricate and lifelike, but it was the small house depicted that caught her eye. Suddenly, it clicked in her mind.

Without wasting another second, Janice rushed out, not bothering to look back.

She now knew where Stephen was.

Leonidas and Alissa were enjoying fine red wine, smiling proudly, as if everything was going just as they planned. Not far from them stood a villa.

“Leonidas, you’re a true psychopath,” Alissa said with a cold laugh, sipping her wine. “You could have killed Janice, but instead, you’ve gone through all this trouble. Aren’t you worried she might actually find Stephen?”

Leonidas crossed his legs, swirling his wine glass, exuding confidence.

“Don’t you find it funny? Watching your rival struggle in frustration is oddly satisfying,” he said, a flicker of madness dancing in his eyes. “The idea of Janice desperately searching for Stephen thrills me.”

Alissa narrowed her eyes and studied this madman intently. If it weren’t for his impressive skills, she would never have agreed to collaborate with someone like him. Who knew when his madness might turn on her?

“But I’m curious. Why does Janice care so much about Stephen?” Alissa asked in confusion. “They didn’t have any connection before, yet her reaction seems over the top.”

“That’s not for you to know. But feel free to imagine they’ve been having a secret affair.”

“Humph, you’re playing all mysterious.” Alissa scoffed, taking another sip of her wine. Her cheeks flushed pink as the alcohol began to take hold. She was already a bit tipsy, but her excitement only fueled her desire for more.