

Wrath 771

Chapter 771:

Yet, as Janice remembered Esther's display of hauteur at White Goose Mountain, her rash actions seemed almost predictable.

At Andromache Hospital, many were waiting in the VIP ward area. They were the elders of the Welch family, who had built the Welch empire alongside Orson.

"Gentlemen, your presence here fills me with profound gratitude," Mateo's voice carried just the right note of deference as he approached the assembled elders. "I was fortunate to invite Master MO to perform surgery on Father, and finally pull him back from the jaws of death. I trust that once Father weathers this storm, serenity and prosperity await him."

"Mateo, you've shown great dedication to Orson."

"A son any father would be proud of. Tirelessly devoted to Orson's recovery. Word has it that Master MO's services commanded quite the premium."

"Upon Orson's awakening, we shall certainly counsel him to expedite the succession in your favor."

A wave of satisfaction washed over Mateo as the elders showered him with praise and support. This was precisely the outcome he had yearned for.

Armed with the elders' backing, he felt confident that Orson would eventually relinquish his power, willingly or not.

"I'm merely fulfilling my duty as a son. Even if it means risking everything, it's worth it for Father's health."

His noble declaration drew another round of admiring murmurs from the elders.

At that moment, new visitors entered, catching everyone's attention. All eyes turned towards them.

Janice and Aiden strode in with measured grace, Vernon trailing in their wake.

The duo cut striking figures—one adorned in a golden mask that radiated nobility, the other mysterious behind a mask and sunglasses, emanating an aura of authority that seemed to bend the very air around them.

Their presence dominated the gathering as though they were the true powers here.

"Is that Master MO?" a voice whispered reverently.

"Quick. Go greet Master MO."

The elders swarmed around Janice and Aiden, their faces painted with transparent flattery.

At their age, the looming specters of illness and death made them desperate to secure any possible salvation. A connection to MO could mean the difference between life and death when crisis struck. While others might have preened under such attention, Janice remained unmoved, her demeanor cool as winter frost.

"Master MO, welcome," Mateo gushed, his excitement bleeding through his attempted composure.

Noting his eagerness, Janice allowed herself an internal smirk before stating, "I will examine Orson's condition. However, before that..." Mateo's eyes gleamed with anticipation as he produced a black card with flourish.

"Master MO, this black card represents the Welch family. It grants you unlimited influence and freedom throughout Cloverhill. All lesser families must bow to your commands upon seeing it."

Gasps rippled through the assembled elders at the sight of the legendary card.

Though MO had indeed saved Orson, gifting the black card seemed extraordinarily generous, equivalent to placing the entire Welch family's might at MO's disposal.

Since its creation, no outsider had ever been deemed worthy of such an honor.

Chapter 772:

With an air of nonchalance, Janice took the card, turning it over in her fingers as her piercing gaze settled on Mateo. "Is this all?"

A flicker of uncertainty crossed Mateo's face, his smile wavering before he forced it back into place. "Master MO, if you find it insufficient, we can certainly provide more."

"Mr. Welch, where's Harlan now? And bearing the burden of Jorge's murder—that's quite a heavy price for me to pay."

Janice's penetrating stare sent shivers down Mateo's spine, making his scalp prickle with unease. Despite his discomfort, Orson's recovery hung in the balance, leaving him little choice but to press on.

"Master MO, my men are already in pursuit of Harlan! You'll be the first to know when we apprehend him. Regarding Jorge's death, it was nothing more than an unfortunate accident. Harlan must have orchestrated this as revenge. But rest assured, I've already instructed the Lambert family to stand down. I pledge to investigate this murder thoroughly and restore your reputation."

Janice's eyebrow arched elegantly, her gaze swimming with unveiled contempt for Mateo's performance. The irony wasn't lost on her—Harlan would be livid to witness his brother so readily painting him as the villain.

"I'll keep the black card," Janice stated matter-of-factly, passing it to Vernon with casual indifference.

"Master MO, please," Mateo responded with a honeyed smile that couldn't mask his calculating intentions.

Janice turned to meet Aiden's eyes, exchanging a silent command.

Understanding immediately, Aiden took his position at the ward's entrance, his imposing figure facing the gathered crowd.

As Janice disappeared into the ward, a shadow crossed Mateo's face. Once Orson regained consciousness, she would be of no use to him anymore. Then he could settle their accounts properly.

"Isn't Master MO carrying herself with excessive pride? We extended our greetings, yet she barely acknowledged our existence," an elder muttered, his pride stinging from Janice's cold demeanor.

"Her self-assurance speaks volumes about her capabilities," another elder interjected. "If illness ever confines me to a sickbed and she possesses the power to heal, I'd willingly bow to her authority." Though the elder's words were embellished, the stark reality of prolonged illness made such deference seem a small price to pay.

Aiden watched the chattering elders with growing irritation. They truly clung to Janice like a lifeline, but he alone knew the bitter truth. Beyond Orson, she wouldn't spare a moment's concern for any other member of the Welch family.

Inside the ward, Orson lay motionless in the bed. His formerly ashen complexion had softened, a whisper of color returning to his cheeks. The steady rhythm of his breathing, visible in the gentle rise and fall of his chest, spoke of stabilization.

Janice drew a chair closer to his bedside, settling beside him with practiced grace.

"Orson, you can drop the pretense. I know you're awake."

Her tone carried the weight of certainty, as if she'd already seen through his facade of unconsciousness.

The next moment, Orson's eyes snapped open, sharp and commanding, his once serene demeanor dissolving into an aura of quiet authority. The frail old man now radiated an imposing presence.

Janice's lips curled into a knowing smirk. Her voice remained calm, yet laced with amusement. "You weren't really unconscious, were you? You just didn't want to deal with those people outside."

Chapter 773:

Orson turned his head, his aged face creasing with a hint of mischief. "MO, not only do you have keen eyes, but you're also remarkably perceptive."

With a weary sigh, he turned his gaze to the ceiling, his voice carrying an undertone of resignation. "I know what they're after, but they don't deserve it."

"Care to elaborate?" Janice asked, her interest piqued.

She found it intriguing—Orson had dedicated years of his life to the Welch family, yet now he deemed them unworthy. Did this mean he no longer wished for the family's legacy to continue?

"Do you expect me to be lying here while talking to you?" Orson gave Janice a reproachful look.

Janice raised an eyebrow before stepping forward to adjust his position, propping him up against the pillows.

"After lying down for so long, sitting up feels like a luxury. I thought the next time I woke up, it'd be just to say my last words to those ungrateful brats. But now, I think I can hold on a little longer."

"Three years," Janice remarked lightly.

Orson's gaze sharpened, his eyes glinting with something akin to respect. "You're even more capable than I imagined."

"Your time hasn't run out yet," she replied simply.

A deep chuckle rumbled from Orson's chest. There was something oddly familiar about this woman—something that made him lower his guard. He found himself speaking more freely than he had in years.

“Instead of wasting my breath on those vultures outside, why don’t we talk about you?”

His eyes locked onto Janice, scrutinizing her with newfound curiosity. “You saw me wake up, yet you didn’t call anyone in. That means you want to speak with me alone.”

Janice nodded, neither hesitant nor coy. “I want to know the truth about the White family’s downfall.”

Orson’s entire body tensed. His pupils constricted, and a storm of emotions surged within his gaze—shock, sorrow, and simmering rage. A chilling intensity settled over him.

“Why do you want to know about the White family?” His words came measured, deliberate.

“I have ties to them,” she answered without flinching.

“So, you saved me just to extract the truth?” Orson’s gaze bore into hers, searching, assessing.

Janice didn’t waver. “That’s right. If not for uncovering the truth, no amount of wealth the Welch family offered would have convinced me to cure you.”

A cold chuckle escaped Orson’s lips. “And what makes you think I’ll tell you?”

“You may refuse, but I won’t waste any opportunity to find out.” A slow smirk tugged at the corner of Orson’s lips. This woman was unfazed—even under the crushing weight of his presence. A rare quality. He had expected a skilled surgeon. But perhaps, she was something far greater than that.

“I’ll tell you the truth. But first, take off the mask.” Orson’s voice was steady, but his piercing gaze made it clear—there was no room for negotiation.

If she didn’t reveal her face, the truth would stay buried with him.

Chapter 774:

“Alright.” Janice didn’t hesitate. With a swift motion, she lifted her hand and removed the golden mask.

Beneath it was a face so breathtakingly exquisite it seemed sculpted by the hands of a master artist. The delicate balance of beauty and sharp elegance made her almost unreal.

But what truly sent a jolt through him wasn’t her beauty. It was the eerie familiarity of that face.

His chest tightened. Memories, long locked away, surged to the surface with a force that nearly knocked the breath from him.

His frail body trembled as the past clawed its way into the present.

“Are you alright?” Janice’s brows knit together. Concern flickered across her face. She wasn’t sure why, but seeing him in pain unsettled her.

Orson forced a steadying breath, the ghost of a smile touching his lips. “I’m fine. Just remembering things I’d rather forget.”

He let the moment stretch before his voice dropped, lower, quieter. “You know something about what happened to the White family that year, don’t you? Tell me—how much do you really know?”

“Fine.”

Janice didn’t waste words. Methodically, she laid out everything she had uncovered—pieces of truth stitched together from Hank’s accounts and her own investigations.

“So that’s what they think, huh?” Orson let out a soft, bitter laugh. “Do you believe that’s the full truth?”

Janice shook her head. “No. It reconstructs what happened, but it’s incomplete. I can feel it. There’s another side to this.”

She studied the man for a long moment before speaking again. "And I don't believe you would give away the Welch family's fortune for a mere lover. That woman must have meant more to you than that."

Orson let out a deep, hearty laugh. "You, an outsider, can see things so clearly, yet my own sons remain blind to the truth. How ironic! If they had been more clear-headed back then, perhaps such a tragedy could have been avoided."

"No!" Janice's voice rang with conviction as she shook her head. "Even if they had known the truth, they would have done the same. Some people are simply born with malice in their hearts."

Orson stiffened. He wanted to refute her words, but no argument came.

Instead, an unsettling silence settled between them.

The White family, over a hundred lives, wiped out in an instant. No matter how one framed it, could such an act truly be the work of humans?

No. That was no man's doing. Only demons could be responsible for such a massacre.

Orson exhaled heavily, rubbing his temples. "Could you pour me a glass of water?"

"Of course."

Rising to her feet, Janice moved to the side table and poured a glass, then handed it to him.

Orson accepted it, taking a slow sip. His gaze drifted into the distance, losing focus as the past began to unravel in his mind.

"It happened so long ago. I hardly know where to begin. Let me tell you a story. Many years ago, when I was still young, I met a woman. From the very first moment I laid eyes on her, I knew one thing for certain. She would be the love of my life. The Welch family has thrived for over a century, built on

discipline and tradition. They are ruthless in shaping their heirs, sending the young away to carve their own path. Only those who return in triumph are deemed worthy. But for me, the moment I met her, I no longer cared about returning. All I wanted was to build a life with her.”

Chapter 775:

Janice remained silent, but her expression softened. In her mind’s eye, she could almost see them—the two of them, young and fearless, building something beautiful together.

Orson’s fingers tightened around the glass. “With her, I forgot I was a Welch. I worked tirelessly just so I could give her the life she deserved. Business miracles, they called them. But at the very peak of my success, I realized my victory meant nothing. Because what waited for me wasn’t a future with her. It was the pain of losing her. The Welch family acknowledged my success. And the moment they did, they demanded my return. They decided she was unworthy—born too humbly to stand beside me. But I didn’t care. I was willing to throw it all away for her. I tried to escape, but the Welch...”

family’s power ran deeper than I ever imagined. Even at the height of my influence, I could not defy them.”

Janice swallowed, her throat tight. She could feel it—the helplessness, the frustration of a man who had conquered the world but still lost the one thing he fought for.

“In the end, to protect her, I made the hardest choice—breaking up with her.” Orson closed his eyes, the weight of old regrets pressing against his chest. Even after all these years, the bitterness hadn’t faded.

“I can still see her face... the way she looked at me that day. Despair. Pure, gut-wrenching despair. But I had no choice. For her safety, I walked away. I lost all contact with her after that. My family dictated my future—I married someone else, had children. I convinced myself that this was it, that I’d live out my days in quiet numbness, letting time wear me down like a stone in a river.”

At that moment, a surge of emotion crashed over Orson, unraveling the composure he had struggled to maintain.

“But then she returned. No, it wasn’t her. It was her child.”

Janice felt her pulse quicken. Orson's words confirmed her worst fears. Her hands clenched into fists, emotions flickering behind her eyes.

The truth was far more horrifying than she had imagined.

"That child was yours, wasn't it?" Janice didn't even wait for Orson to respond. "By pure chance, you crossed paths with her child and recognized her. Guilt consumed you. You wanted to do right by the child, to offer something—so you secretly arranged for part of the Welch family's wealth to go to her. But you underestimated your sons. You thought you had hidden it well, yet they found out. And to ensure that not a single coin of the Welch fortune fell into the hands of an outsider, they orchestrated a massacre. They wiped out the White family overnight—every single one of them. Over a hundred lives, erased in the blink of an eye. All their assets were devoured by other families. When you learned the truth, you collapsed from the shock.

Am I wrong?"

Orson stared at her, his face pale, eyes filled with anguish. The silence stretched long enough to confirm everything.

"You abandoned the woman you loved. Why did you reach for her child years later?" Janice's tone was cold, yet carried a hint of resignation. "Why disturb the life she had? If you truly wanted to make amends, you should have left her in peace."

"I was wrong!" A raw, broken sob tore from Orson's throat. "I should never have sought her out. None of this would have happened! Their deaths... it's all because of me!"

Janice studied the shattered man before her. Despite everything, despite the anger burning inside her, she found herself reaching out, placing a hand over his. "You shouldn't have sought her out, but I understand why you did. If I discovered that the person I loved had given birth to my child, I wouldn't be able to suppress my joy either. I would want to give them everything, no matter the consequences. And you couldn't have foreseen that your own sons would become monsters."

Chapter 776:

Orson lifted his head, his eyes wide with surprise. "Do you really think that way?"

Janice sighed, deciding not to address his question. "You've just undergone heart surgery. It's crucial to maintain emotional stability. It could be life-threatening otherwise."

Orson took a deep breath, stifling his sadness, and gazed at Janice with a look of hope. "Can you tell me your name?" he asked, his expression a blend of anticipation and anxiety.

"Janice Edwards."

At the mention of the surname Edwards, Orson's eyes dimmed once more.

Janice knew why but offered no explanation. "If one day the Welch family were to fall, what would you do?"

Orson's pupils narrowed, and he stared at Janice, taken aback. "What are you implying?"

"You only need to tell me where you stand."

Orson sighed and shook his head, a bitter smile crossing his face. "I've harbored a secret thought, one I've never revealed to anyone. But today, I'll share it with you. Since my return to the Welch family, I've detested it deeply. Yet, for my beloved's sake, I've suppressed that hatred." Orson's gaze softened as he looked at Janice. "I know you're capable. Follow your instincts. Don't worry about me."

Janice nodded. She had revealed so much to Orson, even her identity, because she sensed his deep resentment towards the Welch family. Moreover, he had once decided to transfer a portion of the Welch family's assets to the White family unconditionally.

Had it not been for Mateo and his brothers' brutal assault on the White family, Orson would have allied with the Whites to dismantle the Welch family.

Janice sensed a profound obsession within the old man. It was as intense as the fixation she once had on her own family. "One last question."

“Go ahead.”

“The woman you loved... What was her name?”

Orson paused, his eyes softening. Even after all these years, his memories of her were clear and vivid.
“Her name was Gracie Wilson.”

Gracie Wilson. That was her grandmother’s name.

What a lovely name!

Then, a soft click sounded.

The door to the ward opened.

Janice stepped out to find Mateo and other Welch family elders assembled.

“Orson is awake. You may enter now, but he requires rest, so please, no more than three visitors at a time.”

“Thank you, Master MO!” Mateo’s eyes brightened as he hurried inside. Two respected elders from the family were selected to accompany him.

After leaving the hospital, Janice got into the car and instructed Vernon to head straight back to Efrery.

“Why are we leaving so soon?” Aiden asked, a hint of confusion in his voice. “Is everything resolved in Cloverhill?”

Janice replied calmly, "After today, the Welch family will undergo significant changes. It's best we distance ourselves to avoid the fallout."

Aiden paused, visibly intrigued by what might have transpired between Janice and Orson in the ward.

Chapter 777:

"Isn't Orson supposed to transfer his authority to Mateo?"

Janice scoffed. "Orson isn't a fool. He understands what he needs to do."

"You mentioned needing to see Orson to verify some suspicions. So..." Vernon, driving, couldn't contain his curiosity.

Aiden was equally eager to learn more.

Janice paused thoughtfully before revealing, "Orson is likely my mother's father."

"What?" Vernon exclaimed, slamming on the brakes in surprise. He turned to Janice, his face a portrait of shock.

Aiden was equally astounded by this revelation. He now understood the magnitude of the truth Janice had hinted at being shocking.

Indeed, it was shocking!

The Welch family had been responsible for the downfall of the White family, yet Janice was related to Orson.

"Don't be so shocked," Janice said, massaging her temples. "I have no intention of reconnecting with him. No matter his reasons, he failed to protect his loved ones. He probably is too ashamed to claim me as his granddaughter."

Reflecting on Orson's demeanor earlier, it seemed the perceptive old man had recognized her.

However, burdened by his inability to safeguard the White family, he believed he didn't deserve to acknowledge his granddaughter and had chosen to remain silent.

"Everything is resolved in Cloverhill. We need to return to Efrery and address my brother's issues," Janice stated, her eyes narrowing and her tone taking on a grave note. "When I return, it will be to settle things with the Welch family once and for all."

Aiden looked at Janice, his expression somber. He reached out to hold her hand, his silence conveying deep support.

Whatever her plans, he was committed to standing by her side. Janice offered a small smile to Aiden, then turned her attention back to the landscape speeding by outside the car window.

As the cityscape flashed past, she made a silent vow that soon all the prominent families in Cloverhill would recognize the resurgence of the White family.

Boom!

Suddenly, a loud roar shattered the calm.

"It's an ambush!" Vernon cried out as several black cars emerged from the traffic, maneuvering to encircle their vehicle.

On the highway, a high-speed chase unfolded with several cars. A black sedan sliced through the traffic, maneuvering with the precision of a seasoned racer.

Yet, no matter its speed, the pursuing vehicles clung closely behind, poised to overtake at any opportunity.

At the rear of the procession, Gilmore lounged in a Rolls-Royce, idly spinning a wine glass, relishing the chase unfolding before him.

“MO, I owe you for saving Father, so I’m personally overseeing your departure. Quite the gesture, don’t you think?” Gilmore’s eyes gleamed with malice, a sinister smile curling his lips.

With Orson now conscious, MO had outlived her usefulness.

Eliminating her was the only way he could truly relax; the lingering threat she posed was intolerable.

Suddenly, a loud crash disrupted the silence.

Chapter 778:

The Rolls-Royce jerked to a stop. Gilmore’s face contorted as the abrupt halt propelled him forward, his wine glass tumbling to the floor.

“What happened?” he snapped.

“Sir, there’s been an accident ahead, blocking the road,” the driver informed him.

Gilmore peered forward and saw a pile-up had indeed occurred. The vehicles chasing MO had crashed, along with several other cars, completely obstructing the road.

“Why did this happen? How did it come to this?” Gilmore’s expression was one of frustration, his icy gaze more intimidating than usual.

“It appears MO’s car reversed suddenly and crashed into ours, triggering the pile-up,” the driver explained, still bewildered by the sudden turn of events.

Gilmore’s expression darkened. Then, he spotted a man emerging from one of the vehicles ahead.

“Patton?”

Gilmore’s brow furrowed, surprise flickering in his eyes. “Hank actually sent his son to lead the charge. Quite ruthless.”

Patton climbed onto the car roof, pulled out a gun, and fired three shots at the speeding car carrying Janice.

“Today, I swear the Lambert family and MO are in a fight to the death.” Gilmore exhaled, feeling a sense of relief as he sensed Patton’s fury and resentment, which alleviated his worries.

For a moment, he had been concerned that the Lambert family might have intentionally let MO go.

The Rolls-Royce slowly made its way towards Patton.

Recognizing the vehicle, Patton quickly descended from the roof and greeted Gilmore respectfully.

Gilmore rolled down the window. “Mr. Lambert, our families have maintained a long-standing alliance, but MO saved my father’s life, so...”

“Don’t worry. You’ve done us a great service by revealing MO’s whereabouts and clearing the way. The Lambert family will surely serve the Welch family loyally from here on out.”

Gilmore nodded, sighing. “Although your brother’s reputation was less than stellar, he was still a person. MO indeed crossed a line. I’ll inform you immediately if there’s any news of her whereabouts.”

“Thank you.”

The window rolled back up.

Gilmore's gaze turned frosty and calculating. "What a bunch of fools. They fall for everything. No wonder they've been subservient to the Welch family for so long. Check which flight MO might have taken to leave. We don't have her exact details, but if she departed by plane, there must be a trail to follow."

"Yes, sir!"

After some time, his subordinate returned empty-handed.

Gilmore paused, then let out a cold laugh. "Interesting. So MO's identity has stayed hidden because she employs top-notch hackers to erase her tracks. Well, let the Lamberts handle her."

Although he hadn't succeeded in eliminating MO, as long as she was out of Cloverhill, she posed no immediate threat.

Just then, Gilmore's phone rang. He glanced at the caller ID and raised an eyebrow. "That must be news about Father."

Chapter 779:

It likely concerned Mateo assuming the official leadership of the Welch family. However, Harlan required some placating. If he couldn't relinquish his fixation on power, the Welch family might encounter further complications.

"Mateo, are you organizing a grand feast tonight to celebrate your full takeover of the Welch family?"

"Shut up!"

Gilmore's smile faded. He could feel Mateo's fury even through the phone. "What happened? Hasn't Father awoken?"

"He's awake! But he's more foolish than ever," Mateo spat, frustration evident in his voice. "He just divided the Welch family's power into four parts, assigning three to his trusted aides and only one to me. Furthermore, he retained a ten percent share of the family business for himself."

Gilmore now understood his brother's anger.

Mateo had gone to significant lengths, treating MO with deference, all to seize real control from Orson.

But now, the power was dispersed among Orson's three confidants. Even with his share, Mateo was still restricted, unable to wield full control over the Welch family. Thus, he remained a figurehead.

Mateo had believed he could count on the elders to persuade Orson to relinquish power. However, once they had power in their hands, their broad smiles revealed no intention to advocate for him.

In the face of absolute profit, the elders' true greedy nature emerged.

"Mateo, I'm heading back now," Gilmore announced over the phone, his expression dark and contemplative. He sensed something odd about how events were unfolding, as if unseen forces were manipulating their actions.

He remembered the bug that was unexpectedly found in his room.

He had thoroughly searched the room the day before, but to no avail. Yet, it was miraculously discovered in the door crack the next day. Initially, he hadn't given it much thought, considering perhaps Jorge used the vase as a distraction. But now...

Gilmore closed his eyes, massaging his forehead. His thoughts were in turmoil. For the moment, his only option was to hurry back and fully assess the situation before making any further plans.

Patton watched the Rolls-Royce execute a swift U-turn and speed off, a slight smile curling his lips. He turned, gazing in the direction where Janice had long since vanished.

"MO, the Lambert family will await your return to Cloverhill. When you come back, please don't let us down."

The shots fired earlier were not a vow but a symbolic farewell.

On the plane, Janice had changed into her everyday clothes. She leaned against Aiden's shoulder, deeply asleep.

Aiden sat rigidly, careful not to move and disturb her.

He admired Janice's beautiful face, her long eyelashes, and her smooth skin. Her lips, glossy and red, were particularly enticing.

Aiden sighed silently, wishing time could stand still at this very moment.

They had never been this close before, and the feeling of being her support was profound.

"Haven't you seen enough?"

"Hmm?"

Startled, Aiden then noticed Janice's eyelashes flutter. She slowly opened her bright, mesmerizing eyes.

Chapter 780:

Those eyes were deep-set and captivating, drawing him in like a whirlpool, holding him captive.

"Never enough!" Aiden took a deep breath and offered a gentle smile. "I want to keep looking at you for a lifetime."

Aiden's sudden sweet words caught Janice off guard. "Since when did you become so smooth?"

"Love makes it happen," Aiden replied.

Janice sat up abruptly, staring at Aiden in disbelief. "You don't usually talk like that. Have you been reading those corny romance novels?"

Aiden, as if caught with a guilty secret, laughed awkwardly. "How could I? Do I look like someone who reads those novels?"

"It seemed impossible before, but now..." Janice squinted at Aiden, who appeared nervous. "I have reasons to suspect you do. With your usual lack of sensitivity, how else could you come up with such romantic lines?"

"Yes, I've read them. So what?" Aiden admitted with a hint of defiance. "Janice, I know I was rather blunt and not very gentle before. But that's not who I am anymore. I've changed for you."

"Your change involves learning romantic lines?" Janice rolled her eyes. However, she then noticed a change in Aiden's expression, a hint of mischief in his eyes.

"Actually, it's not just about the lines. Some of the love scenes in those novels..."

"Stop!" Janice quickly cut him off, fearing Aiden might venture into more daring territory.

Although they were alone on a private plane, the intimacy of their conversation could lead to an uncomfortable situation.

"Janice!" Suddenly, Aiden's expression turned serious, his demeanor unusually earnest.

"What?" Janice was startled, meeting his deep gaze with a blank expression. Her heart began to race.

"Where are we exactly?" Aiden asked earnestly. "Sometimes, it feels like we're a couple, but then it seems like something's missing." Janice was not expecting such a direct question.

"We're close friends."

Aiden's face fell. "But didn't you kiss me before?"

"Can't friends kiss on the cheek?" Janice replied matter-of-factly, leaving Aiden momentarily lost for words.

He remembered that Janice had indeed kissed his cheek. But were they just friends in her view?

Seeing Aiden's disappointed look, Janice's heart softened. "Aiden, I understand where you are coming from. But I need time."

"Alright!" Aiden's face brightened with a smile, the earlier gloom completely dissipating. "I'll wait."

Janice couldn't ignore the faint bitterness lurking behind Aiden's smile, and that trace of unspoken emotion unsettled her more than she cared to admit.

When he voiced his affection, her heart swayed between exhilaration and apprehension.

Perhaps it was the weight of all the unresolved matters pressing on her that kept her from embracing a relationship riddled with uncertainties.

"I'll get you a glass of water." Aiden rose to his feet and strode towards the dining area.