

Wrath 831

Chapter 831:

“Wow, good eye! That could be tomorrow’s headline right there!”

“But aren’t you worried about stirring the pot? Stephen was paired with Janice on Love Lab, and their fans are intense. If they see this, there’s bound to be an uproar!”

The room buzzed with speculation as reporters whispered among themselves, eager to uncover any hidden connections between Stephen and Leah.

Just then, a sudden stir swept through the banquet hall as the doors swung open, commanding everyone’s attention.

A man and a woman entered, both exuding an unmistakable aura of influence. The man carried himself with the confidence of someone accustomed to power, while the woman was the embodiment of grace—elegant, poised, and effortlessly captivating.

“Wait, is that Janice and Aiden?”

“This press conference just hit another level! Two industry giants showing up for Stephen? That’s huge!”

“Don’t just stand there—start snapping! I’ve already got tomorrow’s headline mapped out!”

Across the room, Stephen’s eyes lit up the moment he spotted Janice. Aiden, standing beside Janice, noticed Stephen’s gaze but felt not a shred of jealousy. He knew that look—it wasn’t one of longing but of pure, unwavering familial affection.

“Janice, you made it!” Leah wasted no time, gently pulling Janice into the seat beside her. “Right on time.”

Janice's lips curved into a gentle smile as her gaze drifted towards Stephen, her eyes reflecting warmth. "Today marks the start of a new chapter in Stephen's career. How could I not be here for this?" While the press only knew of Stephen's recent transition to a new company, he and Janice understood the deeper significance—it was the beginning of an entirely new life.

"Well? Let's get the show on the road." Leah leaned in slightly, catching the host's eye.

Taking the cue, the host wasted no time. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, let's hear from the man of the hour—Stephen White!"

Stephen nodded, took hold of the microphone, and swept his gaze across the sea of reporters gathered in the hall.

A nervous energy buzzed inside him, making the whole moment feel like an illusion—one that might shatter the second he woke up. Just then, a gentle hand rested over his, its warmth melting away the tension coiled in his chest.

Taking a steadying breath, he spoke. "Today, I officially sever ties with my former company and step into a new chapter with White Whale Entertainment. I'm deeply grateful to Ms. Sugden and Mr. Green for welcoming me into the family."

His voice softened as he continued, "But above all, there's one person I owe everything to. Without her, I wouldn't be standing here, embracing this fresh start."

The reporters sensed an underlying message in Stephen's words, but couldn't quite grasp the hidden meaning.

"As for who she is, that's a secret for now. Her name will be revealed when my new film premieres. Only then will I be able to truly express my thanks," Stephen said with a mysterious smile.

The door opened at that moment.

Stephen's breath hitched. His eyes widened in alarm, and for the briefest moment, fear flickered across his face.

Chapter 832:

The reporters, quick to catch the shift in his expression, instinctively turned to see who had unsettled him. There, standing in the doorway, was a striking figure.

"Wendy Chadwick!"

"I knew it! She wasn't about to let White Whale Entertainment snatch Stephen without a fight."

"This is about to get messy."

The press was surprised by Wendy's appearance, but it also made perfect sense to see her walk in.

White Whale Entertainment had lured Stephen away, and his former boss wasn't one to take a hit to her empire lying down.

No one in the room believed for a second that Wendy would let Stephen slip through her fingers without a fight. He had just clinched the Best Actor award, and his star was burning brighter than ever. Letting go of a goldmine? That wasn't Wendy's style.

"Mrs. Chadwick, to what do we owe the pleasure?" Leah's brows knitted together, her gaze piercing as she locked eyes with Wendy, unreadable yet brimming with quiet defiance.

Janice and Aiden exchanged a knowing glance but remained composed. Wendy had come alone. If she were here to make a scene, she would've brought an entourage of bodyguards.

"Stephen, take it easy," Janice murmured, giving his hand a reassuring squeeze. "With Aiden and me by your side, Wendy can't do anything to you."

Stephen shook his head with a wry smile. “Janice, don’t worry about me. I know exactly what to do. My life used to feel like a dead end—trapped, directionless. She had complete control over me. But now, I have someone I want to protect, and I will never return to those days.”

As Stephen spoke, his eyes gleamed with fierce determination.

Wendy, who had been watching him closely since her arrival, immediately noticed the change. Her heart tightened, a sharp, bitter sensation settling deep within her.

In all their years together, she had never seen such passion and conviction in his eyes. It was both breathtaking and unsettling, a look that was as foreign as it was captivating.

“Ms. Sugden, please, there’s no need to be on edge. I’m not here to stir up trouble.” Wendy produced a contract and held it up. “This is the contract between Stephen and my company. Until it’s officially dissolved, he remains under my employment.”

“And you think you’re not here to cause trouble?” Leah’s lips curled into a dismissive smile, her tone dripping with sarcasm. “You’re using that contract to pull Stephen back, aren’t you? Well, let me make it crystal clear, we are fully prepared to terminate the contract unilaterally. Whatever compensation is required, White Whale Entertainment will cover it.”

Leah stood with unshakable poise, her confidence practically radiating from her. The reporters began discussing the matter.

“Is White Whale Entertainment really that bold? Are they truly willing to pay the price for breaking the contract?”

“I heard Stephen’s penalty is set at a billion dollars. For a company just starting out, that’s an extraordinary amount.”

“But with the Green family and Freak Design behind them, a billion isn’t much of a concern. They could easily raise ten times that sum without breaking a sweat.”

Wendy's lips curved into a smile, though tinged with a trace of resignation.

"Ms. Sugden, I believe you've misunderstood my intentions. I brought out this contract to show everyone that my company and Stephen are parting ways amicably. From this point forward, our paths will no longer cross professionally."

Chapter 833:

As Wendy finished speaking, she cast a brief glance at Stephen, whose face was marked with clear surprise.

"Stephen, you've made the right decision. Although our paths are diverging, I truly wish you all the best in the future."

Stephen's brow furrowed, his gaze fixed on Wendy. Was this a genuine gesture, or was it just another well-rehearsed act?

The question lingered not only in Stephen's mind but also in Janice's and Aiden's. They had expected Wendy to fight for Stephen, to leave no stone unturned in her attempt to...

bring him back. But instead, she was making an unexpected public declaration that they were officially parting ways.

"Janice, I trust you'll understand the sincerity behind my actions." Wendy's voice cut through the murmurs in the room, directed at Janice with a directness that left everyone momentarily stunned.

Only Janice and Aiden understood that Wendy was acting out the order of the person behind her.

Without waiting for a response, Wendy turned on her heel and walked out, her stride unwavering and resolute.

Soon after, White Whale Entertainment dropped a series of bombshell announcements.

The first was an additional hundred million dollars dedicated to producing a film specifically designed for Stephen. In addition, the company unveiled plans for an eye-popping billion-dollar initiative aimed at recruiting artists from across the entertainment industry. This ambitious move sent ripples through the entire sector, especially among rival companies, who now faced the undeniable threat of losing their most promising stars.

Many artists, bound by underpaid contracts with other companies, were now being offered life-changing sums to jump ship.

As expected, within hours of White Whale Entertainment's announcement, the company's phone lines were flooded with inquiries from artists eager to join.

The offer was irresistible, especially with the added promise that the company would cover any penalty fees incurred from breaking existing contracts, should an artist prove to be both qualified and promising.

White Whale Entertainment was poised to alter the very fabric of the entertainment world. It wasn't just a business move; it was a game changer. The ripple effects promised to reshape the landscape in ways no one had imagined.

Stephen sat backstage, lost in contemplation.

He couldn't believe how smoothly the press conference had gone. Even Wendy's showing up had only been a timely boost to the event's success. It all felt surreal to him.

"Stephen, it's all real," Janice approached him and sat down beside him, her gaze steady.

"Am I really not dreaming?" Stephen's voice held a trace of disbelief as he turned toward Janice. "I keep thinking any moment now, I'll wake up, and this will all be nothing but a fleeting illusion."

Janice squeezed Stephen's hands reassuringly. "This isn't a dream, Stephen. Wendy's actions may seem unbelievable, and her sudden change of heart is perplexing, but it actually happened. I don't understand what caused her to change so suddenly, but I'm certain there's someone behind her, a person who won't let her harm you anymore."

Chapter 834:

Stephen's brow creased in confusion. "I've known Wendy for years, and I've never heard of anyone like that. But I did notice something odd—there's a strange number in her phone."

"Whose is it?" Janice was surprised. "It might be the person behind Wendy."

"The contact was saved as 'Master.'"

"Master?" Janice repeated, her mind racing. "That's not much to go on."

"The person has never called her, and she hasn't called them either. I reviewed the call log and saw no calls from that number had been made or received." Stephen exhaled, frustration seeping into his voice.

Janice paused, absorbing this new detail. "So, why did this number catch your attention?"

"Because her contact list is so small. I know everyone except for this one."

Janice sat in silence, lost in thought. Wendy's actions had been puzzling, but one thing was clear: at least for now, she wasn't planning a move against them.

This realization allowed Janice to feel much more at ease in Efrery.

She turned to Stephen. "From now on, don't worry about anything else. Just focus on what makes you happy. In a few days, I'll take you to Cloverhill."

"Cloverhill?"

Stephen's body tensed. His eyes widened, panic flickering beneath the surface.

Janice noticed instantly. Her voice softened, but her words were resolute. "Stephen, I know Cloverhill holds painful memories for you. But our enemies are still there, and it's time we settle the score."

His breath hitched. "Janice, are you planning revenge?"

"Exactly."

"No! You can't!" Stephen immediately objected. "Janice, the White family only has the two of us left. If Mom and Dad were still alive, they wouldn't want us throwing our lives away like this. All I want is for the two of us to live a peaceful life."

Janice shook her head. Her gaze was steady, unwavering. "Stephen, I understand. But I wouldn't take such a risk if I didn't believe I could pull it off. I have the strength to make them pay for what they did."

Stephen's expression changed subtly as he gazed at Janice, his eyes flickering with doubt and concern. It was clear he had little understanding of his sister's true capabilities.

"Trust me, Stephen. I never let things spiral out of control," Janice said, giving a confident smile. "Even if something goes wrong, I always have a way to fix it."

Janice's confidence helped soothe some of Stephen's unease. "Okay, I trust you. But promise me no reckless risks."

"I promise."

A quiet sense of gratitude settled over Janice. Everything she had learned at the orphanage, all the knowledge she had absorbed, had led her to this moment. If not for that, she'd be powerless against the Welch family.

"Stephen, let's have a feast. Consider it a celebration of your fresh start, and our reunion as siblings."

"Alright."

Aiden watched as their laughter and joy filled the air.

He was leaning against the doorway, observing, a genuine warmth filling him as he felt happy for Janice.

Although Janice often smiled around him, this was the first time he had seen such a pure, almost childlike joy light up her face.

Chapter 835:

Around her family, she let herself be a kid again. The innocence she'd buried so deep had resurfaced.

It looked like winning over his future brother-in-law would be necessary. If he ever upset Janice, at least he'd have her brother to help smooth things over.

Meanwhile, Bain sat in the study, sighing heavily, his face clouded with worry.

He had moved his entire family, seeking refuge in Efrery to escape MO's wrath, only to discover, to his horror, that Efrery was actually MO's stronghold.

"Dad, you need to decide," Conley urged, his voice tense. "The Mendoza family's future is in your hands."

"You think it's that simple?" Bain shook his head, exhaustion creeping into his voice. "We paid a steep price to leave Cloverhill, giving almost half our assets to the Payne family. Do you think the Welch family would have let us leave so easily without the Payne family's support? If we align with MO now, it means betraying the Payne family and severing ties with the Welch family. Do you think the Mendoza family can survive that kind of fallout?"

Conley frowned deeply, his mind racing. As much as he hated to admit it, his father was right. "But MO promised that if we serve her, she'll help us return to Cloverhill."

“Son, don’t you understand why MO is pressing us to return to Cloverhill?” Bain’s voice rose in frustration. “Wake up, Conley! She wants to use us like pawns.”

Conley faltered, his confidence shaken. “That can’t be. She just saved Orson. The Welch family wouldn’t betray her after that...”

“Ha! The Welch family was doing just fine before Orson woke up. But ever since he did, it’s been nothing but chaos.” Bain rose to his feet and began pacing the study, his uneven strides betraying the storm raging inside him.

“Not long ago, the Welch family plotted to have the Lambert family kill MO. But they underestimated her, and she escaped through their fingers like a ghost.”

By now, Conley had come to terms with the harsh truth that his father’s words were true. MO wanted the Mendoza family to bow down and be her weapon against the Welch family.

“Dad, what do we do now?” Conley asked, his voice laced with frustration. “No matter what we choose, it feels like a dead end.” Siding with MO meant turning against the Welch family and being used as pawns in a dangerous game.

On the other hand, refusing to align would make them MO’s next target. With the Mendoza family’s current strength, they wouldn’t stand a chance.

“Dad!” A sharp, urgent cry shattered the air. “Dad, you have to stand up for me!”

Esther burst into the room, her face twisted with fury as she barged into the conversation between Bain and Conley. “That vile woman had the audacity to slap me! I won’t let her get away with it.”

Bain’s expression darkened the moment he laid eyes on Esther.

Stepping forward, he narrowed his gaze. “You got slapped?”

“Yes!” Esther jabbed a trembling finger at her own cheek, where an angry red mark still lingered. “And it wasn’t just a slap! That witch hit me so hard I blacked out!”

“Unbelievable! She dared to do that to you?” Bain reached out, his fingers grazing Esther’s face as if to inspect the damage. But in the blink of an eye, his gentleness evaporated. His hand swung through the air with the force of a whip.

The slap rang out like a crack, sharp and unforgiving.

Esther stumbled, her breath catching in her throat.

Shocked, she pressed a palm against her stinging cheek, her wide, disbelieving eyes locked onto Bain. “Dad, why did you hit me?”

Chapter 836:

“You spoiled brat! Our family is already teetering on the edge of disaster because of you, and now you want me to fight your battles? Haven’t we suffered enough because of your reckless behavior?” Bain’s glare bore into Esther, fierce and merciless, as though he could burn her down with a single look.

Esther’s composure shattered. She let out a wail, her sobs shaking her shoulders. “Mom, Dad hit me!”

“Oh my dear, what happened?” Within moments, Sheena Mendoza came rushing in, her heart nearly stopping at the sight of her daughter’s swollen cheek.

“Mom, Dad refused to stand up for me! Instead of defending me, he hit me!” Esther clung to her mother, her body wracked with sobs. “I can’t live like this! Never in my life have I been humiliated like this!”

“Bain, what’s wrong with you? Even if you’re upset, you can’t take it out on our daughter!” Sheena jabbed an accusatory finger at Bain, her fury rolling off her in waves.

“You’re the reason she turned out this way!”

In that moment, clarity struck Bain like a bolt of lightning—Esther’s spoiled, reckless nature wasn’t just by chance. It was the direct result of Sheena’s constant coddling and indulgence.

“What have I done?” Sheena shot back, her tone laced with grievance. “I gave you a son and a daughter. I raised them with all my heart! And now, when our daughter is wronged, instead of protecting her, you choose to scold her? You’re even blaming me for not raising her properly? Is this how you call yourself a father and a husband?”

Bain felt his patience fraying at the edges. He exhaled sharply, irritation flickering across his face. “Do you have any idea what kind of mess Esther has stirred up this time?”

Sheena crossed her arms, unimpressed. “She’s just a young girl. How much damage could she possibly do? Besides, we’ve already moved to Efrery. What kind of force here could possibly pose a real threat to us?”

Bain pressed a weary hand to his forehead, a storm of exhaustion and helplessness crashing over him.

“Mom, this time, it’s serious. Really serious,” Conley stepped forward, his expression grim. “If we don’t handle this properly, our entire family could be ruined.”

Sheena faltered for a moment, her frown deepening. “Is it really that bad?”

Her husband’s and son’s grave expressions sent a ripple of unease through her.

“Mom, don’t listen to them. It’s just a small family acting high and mighty because they have a bit of influence.” Esther continued to fan the flames. “They could crush them without even trying. Dad and Conley are being overly cautious, as always. They just don’t want to help me get justice. Maybe they’re just tired of me; maybe they don’t love me anymore.”

Bain and Conley stiffened, their faces darkening. Neither of them could believe what they were hearing. Esther was sowing discord between them?

Sheena's anger flared up again, like dry kindling catching fire. She jabbed a finger at Bain and Conley, her voice rising. "When did you two turn into cowards? First, you told me we had to flee Cloverhill because our son offended someone powerful, and I bit my tongue, didn't say a word. But now? Now we're in this tiny, insignificant place, and you're still cowering? Since when did our family become so spineless?"

"Sheena, you don't understand the full picture."

Chapter 837:

"Enough! If you refuse to stand up for Esther, then I, as her mother, will do it myself!" Sheena was ablaze with fury, resolute in her mission to champion Esther's cause.

Deep down, she wasn't just fighting for Esther—she was seizing the chance to unleash her own bottled-up frustrations.

When Conley was punished before, resentment had festered in her heart. Then, being forced to surrender half their assets and relocate to this small, suffocating place only added to her frustration. And now, her daughter had been wronged? She had reached her breaking point.

"By the way, the Payne family sent word that their eldest daughter will be coming to Efrery to attend our housewarming banquet. I'll invite whoever dared to bully Esther and make them apologize to her in front of everyone."

"Mom..."

Conley opened his mouth to explain, but Bain raised a hand, silently stopping him.

He frowned, puzzled by his father's restraint. He turned to Bain, only to be met with a wink.

"Sheena, since you've made up your mind, then I won't object." Bain let out a weary sigh, his expression one of reluctant submission.

"Useless! You actually need me, a woman, to step in and clean up your mess? Have you no shame?" Sheena glared at Bain, who lowered his head and didn't retort.

Esther smirked, emboldened by her mother's fierce support. "Mom, with Minnie on my side, I won't just make them apologize—I'll have them slapping themselves until I'm satisfied."

Sheena chuckled, patting her daughter's hand. "Alright, alright. As long as it makes you happy, I'll do whatever it takes."

As soon as Sheena and Esther left, Conley wasted no time questioning Bain. "Dad, do you really think it's wise to let Mom and Esther run wild like this? Are you refusing MO?"

Bain exhaled deeply, shaking his head. "The Mendoza family may have seen better days, but we still carry the weight of our legacy. Pride is in our blood. For the sake of survival, I can bow my head and serve her, but only if she proves herself worthy of my submission."

Conley frowned, struggling to grasp Bain's meaning. "Dad, just be straight with me. What exactly are you planning?"

A slow smirk curled Bain's lips, a flicker of madness flashing in his eyes. "I'm willing to take a gamble. At the banquet, I want to see who truly holds the upper hand—MO or the Payne family."

Conley's breath hitched. His father had to be out of his mind. If MO got wind of this scheme, the Mendoza family would be finished.

"Conley, we're already at an impasse. Why not go all in?"

Seeing the resolute expression on Bain's face, a wave of unease washed over Conley, yet he found himself unable to oppose his father's plan. The Mendoza family had once been a dominant force in Cloverhill, admired by high society and envied by their rivals.

But thanks to Esther's reckless actions, their promising future had unraveled into this precarious deadlock.

“I understand.” Gritting his teeth, Conley relented. “We pit MO against Minnie. If MO proves she can hold her own against the Payne family, we pledge our loyalty. If not, we do whatever it takes to secure our alliance with the Payne family.”

Chapter 838:

Bain’s grin widened. “Now you’re thinking like a Mendoza.”

“Dad, I feel like I’ve changed so much in just a few days.” Conley let out a weary chuckle, shaking his head. “Maybe this is what you always say—maturity comes at a steep price.” Yet, for him, that price was far too high.

First, he had lost the Eternity Building—a property worth 1.5 billion. Then, he had inadvertently caused the Mendoza family to move out of Cloverhill. And now, they stood at the brink of becoming MO’s servants.

The weight of these failures had drained him, both body and soul.

“Dad, I’m sorry. This is all on me.”

Bain waved him off. “No use dwelling on the past. What’s done is done. Now, go tell MO that at tomorrow’s banquet, the Mendoza family will pledge our allegiance to her—publicly.”

Conley raised a brow and smirked slightly. “And the timing of that pledge, that’s up to us, right?”

Bain’s expression sharpened. “Exactly.”

The Mendoza family had arrived in Efrery with a grand entrance, wasting no time in inviting all the prominent families to their housewarming banquet.

The elite circles in Efrery had long heard of the illustrious Mendoza name, and even those unfamiliar with them understood one thing—anyone from Cloverhill carried an air of undeniable prestige.

“The Mendoza family is quite something,” Janice murmured, amusement laced with icy calculation. “Bold enough to think they can outmaneuver me.”

“Janice, should we deal with the Mendoza family now?” Aiden’s eyes glinted with an icy sharpness, his entire presence radiating a cold, oppressive aura.

Janice lounged against the car window, her posture relaxed and indifferent. “We just took care of the Ramirez family. If we bring down the Mendoza family too, it’ll stir up chaos in Efrery’s high society. That kind of instability won’t do the city’s economy any favors. I want to see what the head of the Mendoza family is really plotting.”

Aiden shrugged, his icy aura vanishing in an instant as he shifted his focus back to the road.

Just then, Janice’s phone rang, breaking the silence. She pulled out her phone and saw a message from Kenneth.

“Janice, did you receive the Mendoza family’s invitation?”

Janice’s reply was brief. “I did.”

Kenneth texted again. “Are you going? Maybe we can catch up at the banquet.”

That made Janice pause. She recalled that Kenneth had previously mentioned he had something important to tell her in person. Now, he had chosen the Mendoza family’s banquet as the setting for their conversation. That could only mean one thing—whatever he needed to say couldn’t wait.

Kenneth wasn’t the type to rush unless it was truly urgent. After a moment of contemplation, Janice typed back. “Alright.”

“Messages from Kenneth?”

Aiden's voice cut through the quiet hum of the car. Seated in the passenger seat, Janice turned to find his sharp gaze already on her, reading her unease like an open book.

Janice blinked, caught off guard. "Aiden, are you part bloodhound or something? I didn't even say who it was, and you didn't look at my phone. How did you just know?"

Chapter 839:

"Sixth sense." Aiden let out a scoff, his expression smug. "Never underestimate a man's instincts."

Janice rolled her eyes, her voice laced with exasperation. "Instincts? Please. You're just jealous."

Her teasing barely lasted a beat before she frowned, her gaze turning serious. "And you really need to quit reading all those ridiculous romance novels."

For a split second, Aiden looked stunned. Then, with an arched brow, he smirked. "And that's a bad thing?"

Janice's lips curved into a warm smile. "Actually, I like you just the way you are."

Aiden's smirk deepened as he mulled over Janice's words, the moment unfolding like a scene straight out of a novel.

It screamed, "I don't need you to change for me. I only wish for you to stay true to yourself."

Recently, Kenneth had been wearing a constant frown.

The situation in Efrery was becoming increasingly unstable. The Mendoza family had established their presence, and now, the Welch family.

But the Welch family had come quietly, seemingly for some undisclosed business.

Kenneth knew about this because the Welch family had come to him for help.

Knock, knock!

The sound of knocking echoed through the office.

"Please, come in!"

His secretary swung the door open, allowing two men to step inside.

"Mr. Delgado, the gentlemen from the Welch family are here."

Kenneth's eyes narrowed before he looked up.

The two men at the doorway carried a commanding presence. One dressed in a black suit, his expression stern and firm, radiating an intensity that kept others at a distance.

His companion, wearing a gray suit and glasses, had a friendly smile that appeared warm, but Kenneth could sense the hidden menace lurking behind it.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, gentlemen." Kenneth put on a smile and stood to greet them.

Jensen Welch, the man in the black suit, said firmly, "Mr. Delgado, let's skip the formalities. We've discussed matters prior to our visit, so let's dive right into the details."

Kenneth's smile slowly stiffened, and his face took on a grave expression. "Mr. Welch, you're from the powerful and established Welch family of Cloverhill. What brings you to ask for my help?"

"Mr. Delgado, as I mentioned, let's cut to the chase."

Kenneth's eyebrows knitted together, and he let out a sharp chuckle. "Your presence certainly commands attention. However, remember, this is Efrery, not Cloverhill. If you seek assistance, you must demonstrate genuine sincerity."

"How dare you!" Jensen fumed.

"Jensen, take it easy." Calvin Welch, Jensen's younger brother, quickly stepped in to defuse his brother's temper. He then turned to Kenneth with a smile.

"Mr. Delgado, you're right. We're your guests. I apologize if we came off as impolite earlier."

Jensen frowned at Calvin, unhappy with his brother's apology to Kenneth. They were from the prestigious Welch family, respected in Cloverhill, and looked up to by lesser families like the Delgado family. Having a conversation with them should be considered an honor.

Chapter 840:

Yet Calvin shot him a glance that seemed to remind him, "We are not in Cloverhill."

Even the mightiest must honor the local customs, especially when seeking help, so a courteous demeanor was essential.

"Mr. Delgado, should you choose to assist us, the Welch family would be eager to form a strategic alliance with the Delgado family." Calvin offered a hopeful smile. "With our support, I am confident that the Delgado family's prospects could reach new heights. You might even rise to become the leading family in Efrery."

Kenneth's expression changed subtly. While Calvin's promises might sound overly optimistic, the influence of the Welch family was undeniable.

"Mr. Welch, your proposal is indeed tempting." Kenneth kept his calm, carefully choosing his words. "The Delgado family has always prioritized stability. Moving too quickly can lead to costly mistakes."

“Mr. Delgado, you have a sense of humor. But I think you don’t want to always be one step behind a certain individual, am I right?” Calvin’s comment struck a sensitive nerve. “From what I understand, both you and Aiden Green are regarded as prodigies. Yet, you have consistently been second to him over the years. Don’t you aspire to outdo him?”

Kenneth’s eyes narrowed, a sharp gleam appearing in them as something deep inside him stirred.

Yet Calvin appeared undisturbed and continued, teasing Kenneth further. “I’m aware that you both are charmed by the same woman. It seems you’re also falling behind in romantic pursuits.”

Suddenly, Kenneth’s hand came down hard on the table, cutting Calvin off.

He inhaled deeply, his hands tightening into fists. “Mr. Welch, it’s clear you’ve done your research. But tell me, if you believe I’m always the runner-up, why don’t you partner up with Aiden instead?”

“We did think about that,” Calvin said, smoothing his sleeve before taking a seat on the couch nearby. “But Aiden is overly aggressive. Working with him would prove challenging.”

Was he merely their second option? A sarcastic grin appeared on Kenneth’s face as he recognized the widening gap between himself and Aiden. Even the formidable Welch family from Cloverhill hesitated to challenge Aiden.

“Mr. Delgado, what’s your decision?” Calvin leaned back, crossing his legs elegantly, and looked over. “Are you interested in collaborating with us? This could be a beneficial venture for both of us.”

Kenneth thought for a moment before asking, “Who are you looking for?”

“The individual’s last name is White. We don’t have his full name or whereabouts.” Calvin opened his hands in a gesture of resignation. “Honestly, we’ve had our people on this for a long while, but each time we’re close, something blocks our path.”

“It appears this person is under the protection of local forces; everyone we’ve sent has been dealt with.”

Kenneth furrowed his brow, suspicion etched across his face. “You can’t be serious? All you know is the surname White—and nothing more. How on earth am I supposed to find him?”

“Well, take a look at this first.” Jensen strode over and slapped a map onto Kenneth’s desk with decisive force. “The spots marked on this map are where our people have vanished without a trace. We’re not locals and aren’t familiar with this city. You can use these locations to narrow down your search and find him.”

Kenneth’s eyes swept across the map with laser focus. Several spots were marked—seemingly scattered at random, yet whispering of a hidden pattern.