

Wrath 961

Chapter 961:

Wasn't this the perfect example of loving someone so much that you embrace everything tied to them?

Janice, as Stephen's sister, ultimately held the deciding vote on whether Wendy and Stephen would ever truly end up together.

"Wendy, just go back to being your usual smug self, will you?" Janice scoffed, pushing her away with feigned annoyance. "This sudden sweetness is honestly creeping me out."

"I might've overreacted before, but now that I know you and Stephen are just siblings, I feel completely at ease." Wendy let out an awkward laugh, a stark contrast to the ferocious woman she had been moments ago. Who would've thought she had an awkward side?

Janice narrowed her eyes, suddenly curious. "When exactly did you start doubting our relationship?"

The moment Janice asked, Wendy's playful air vanished. "Ever since Master called and warned me not to lay a finger on either of you, I started having suspicions. But I didn't overthink it at the time—I never considered you could be siblings. That changed when you decided to move to Cloverhill and insisted on bringing Stephen with you. That's when it clicked."

Janice arched a brow, amusement dancing in her eyes. "So all that jealousy earlier... was just for show?"

Wendy looked at Stephen, who appeared slightly confused. "Not exactly. I suspected something, but seeing Stephen so close with another woman was still really hard for me to handle."

"You always think too much." Janice sighed. "Yes, Stephen and I are siblings. I was the baby my mother was pregnant with at that time, later left at the orphanage's doorstep, narrowly escaping that catastrophe."

"Wow! Janice, you're actually from the White family in Cloverhill?" Sierra exclaimed.

Recently, she had learned about the devastating event in Cloverhill involving the White family, where over a hundred people died overnight, making it the most horrific incident of that year. She had never guessed that Janice was a descendant of the White family. Now, it seemed Janice's return to Cloverhill might be driven by a desire for vengeance.

Nellie was just as surprised and confused, remembering how everyone once thought Janice belonged to the Edwards family, only to find out later that she didn't. That revelation was shocking enough. But now it turned out Janice was actually part of the White family, a family that had been wiped out twenty years ago.

Nellie couldn't help but admire how Janice managed to remain composed despite the tragedy and make her way forward step by step. Clearly, Janice was incredibly resilient.

Wendy reflected deeply before she said, "It looks like Master already knew what you had planned next. So I won't go into that. But just know, the Welch family's influence is not as straightforward as you might think."

"Wendy, even the strongest fortress has its vulnerabilities. I believe with our joint effort, we can take them down. You will stick by my brother through thick and thin, won't you?"

"What did you just say?" Wendy's eyes widened in surprise, her cheeks reddening as she clasped Janice's hand.

Janice blinked in confusion and repeated, "You will stick by my brother through thick and thin, won't you?"

Wendy hid her face in her hands, her body shaking with excitement and her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "You've accepted me as your future sister-in-law, right? From now on, I'm here for you."

Chapter 962:

Wendy's overwhelming enthusiasm left Janice, Sierra, and Nellie momentarily lost for words.

Stephen looked at Wendy with resignation. In an effort to calm her dramatic display, he pulled her into a hug. "Let's start cleaning up here, shall we?"

Wendy wriggled out of his embrace and shouted, "Everyone!"

Suddenly, a group of men in black suits and sunglasses appeared from all directions. They exuded an intimidating presence, their eyes concealed behind sunglasses that seemed to radiate a chilling seriousness.

"Janice, these are the elite fighters I've trained. They are now at your service, ready to follow your orders." Janice was completely taken aback. Could the bond of being Wendy's future sister-in-law really wield such power? Wendy now openly displayed her formidable resources and was even willing to place them at her command.

In that moment, Janice couldn't help but find Wendy quite endearing.

"Wendy, let's have them stand down for now. We shouldn't reveal our trump card just yet. Besides, my relationship with Stephen needs to remain confidential."

"Understood." Wendy signaled the fighters to disappear once more. "Janice, proceed with whatever you need to do. I'm ready to lead the charge against the Welch family for you."

"Even if you're ready, my brother might not be," Janice replied with a regretful smile, casting a glance at Stephen, while Wendy settled down and gave him an awkward look.

"Wendy, if you keep talking nonsense, I'm going to stop talking to you."

"No, no, no. I'm sorry, okay?" Wendy quickly apologized.

Janice exhaled, acknowledging that Stephen and Wendy truly complemented each other in their madness.

“Stephen, from this moment, this is our home,” Janice said solemnly. “Here, we will restore the White family’s honor and seek retribution.”

Stephen felt a stir in his heart, his cheeks reddened, and he gripped his fists tightly. “Yes, it’s finally time to settle the long-running family feud.”

This estate, situated in the center of Cloverhill, would soon echo with the legacy of the White family, signaling to the elite circles that the White family had returned.

With their return, the White family not only reclaimed their position but also confronted their long-standing vendettas.

Leaving the estate, Aiden drove to a villa in the eastern suburbs.

As he got out of his vehicle, he noticed two luxury cars at the entrance of the villa.

“Are these from the Payne family?”

Aiden recognized one of the cars by its make and quickly guessed its owner. Next to the Payne family’s car was what appeared to be one belonging to the Welch family.

Aiden smirked, amused by the unfolding scenario, and headed inside.

“I’ve made up my mind, and no one can sway me,” an elderly man in a suit said firmly in the villa’s courtyard.

Tricia and Alissa stood before him.

“Mr. Vance, do you have to be so stubborn? Would it be the same even if the head of the Payne family were to intervene?” Tricia pleaded, her expression troubled.

“Tricia, Mr. Vance has already stated his position clearly that no member of the Payne family will influence his decision,” Alissa taunted. “You might as well go back and stop bothering him.”

Chapter 963:

“Alissa, why involve yourself when I’m speaking to Mr. Vance?” Tricia responded sharply, her voice low and fists clenched. “Don’t provoke me into hitting you.”

Alissa responded with a nonchalant shrug. “If you think you can strike me in Mr. Vance’s presence, by all means, try.”

Tricia turned to Herbert. His commanding stare was already fixed on her, and she knew that causing a scene could result in her dismissal.

Herbert was highly respected in Cloverhill, with a large group of followers. Even the leaders of the Welch family and the Payne family held him in high regard.

“Mr. Vance, in three days, it will be my father’s birthday. I would appreciate it if you could write a blessing for him. Is that something you could do?” Alissa asked respectfully, bowing slightly.

Tricia’s face fell. What birthday? This was merely a tactic to overshadow Janice’s event.

Her gaze hardened as she realized the Welch family was positioning themselves against Janice’s upcoming banquet, with Herbert likely being the first point of conflict between the two families.

“I believe I’ve made my position crystal clear,” Herbert declared, his tone unwavering. His weathered face, etched with deep lines, betrayed a flicker of irritation, yet his piercing eyes held a commanding authority that dared anyone to challenge him. Meeting his gaze was no easy feat.

“Well, well, Alissa, it seems you’ve hit a brick wall too,” Tricia chimed in with a sly chuckle, her eyebrows arching as she watched Alissa’s efforts fall flat. A strange sense of satisfaction bubbled within her. “What, did you think the Welch family’s name alone could twist Mr. Vance’s arm and make him bend his ironclad rules?”

Alissa cast a fleeting glance at Tricia, her composure unshaken. Rather than bristling at the jab, she reached into her pocket and produced a jade pendant, presenting it to Herbert with quiet confidence. "Mr. Vance, does this look familiar to you?"

Herbert's stern expression softened ever so slightly as his eyes fell on the pendant. "How did this come into your possession?"

With a gentle smile, Alissa replied, "My father entrusted it to me. He told me that presenting this pendant to you would ensure your agreement to our request."

With that, she extended it towards him with grace.

Herbert accepted the jade piece, his eyes shimmering with recognition. "Years ago, Orson pulled me out of a tight spot. As a token of my gratitude, I gave him this pendant, promising that should he ever need a favor, this would be his key—and I'd move heaven and earth to help."

Alissa's lips curled into a victorious smile, and she shot Tricia a playful, triumphant wink, basking in her moment of glory.

With the pendant in play, Herbert's refusal was off the table for the Welch family.

Herbert let out a quiet sigh, tucking the pendant away. "Very well. I'll do you this favor. After that, we're even."

"Thank you, Mr. Vance," Alissa said, bowing with genuine appreciation.

"But Mr. Vance, what about us?" Tricia's heart raced. If this fell apart, how could she look Minnie in the eye? She had sworn to handle Janice's reception arrangements, and failing to meet even this simple demand would leave her eating crow.

"Tricia, darling, it's time to throw in the towel," Alissa cut in smoothly, her lips pursed in a cool, dismissive smirk. "Mr. Vance has agreed to honor my father's celebration, so let's not pester him further."

Chapter 964:

With an air of superiority, she waved Tricia off, as if shooing away a pesky fly—an audacious move that set Tricia’s blood boiling.

Herbert hadn’t even hinted at dismissing anyone, yet here was Alissa strutting about as if she owned the place. Without that pendant, Tricia fumed, Alissa wouldn’t have a leg to stand on.

Clenching her jaw, Tricia swallowed her frustration. The Payne family wielded considerable influence, but it wasn’t enough to pull every string in this tangled web. Should she push Herbert into bending to her will, with a single word from him, the Payne family’s reputation might be dashed overnight.

“Mr. Vance.” At that moment, a resonant voice cut through the tension. A man strode forward, his stern features and commanding presence impossible to ignore.

“Aiden?” Alissa’s heart skipped a beat, a spark of delight igniting at the sight of him—only to dim as quickly as it flared, her brow furrowing at the awkward clash of their positions. “What brings you here?”

Aiden didn’t spare Alissa a glance, brushing past her with purpose to stand before Herbert.

Tricia opened her mouth, ready to caution him about Herbert’s prickly temperament, but before she could utter a word, Herbert’s brow creased. He studied Aiden, tilting his head slightly. “Who are you? There’s something familiar about you.”

“Mr. Vance, I’m Aiden Green, Kristopher Green’s grandson.”

“Kristopher?” Herbert’s eyes widened briefly, then softened as a wistful smile tugged at his lips. “So, you’re Kristopher’s boy. My, how you’ve grown! I can still picture you as a little tyke when I first laid eyes on you.”

Aiden’s mouth curved into a faint smile. Herbert might have aged, his years etched deeper into his face, but he carried himself with a refined poise now, radiating an aura that demanded respect.

He recalled the days of traveling the country with his grandfather, meeting many important figures. Among them, Herbert stood out as the most obstinate, a man who held the younger generation to an unrelenting standard.

Back then, Aiden had found him more than a little intimidating.

“You’ve still got that same fire in you, Mr. Vance,” he said warmly.

Herbert waved a dismissive hand, a bittersweet chuckle escaping him. “I’m an old relic now, nearing the end of the road. Tell me, how’s your grandfather? It’s been an age since we last crossed paths.”

A shadow passed over Aiden’s face, his voice dipping. “He’s gone.”

Herbert stilled, then let out a heavy sigh, nodding solemnly. “I suppose that figures. His health was always fragile. To have weathered life’s storms and raised you into the man you are—that’s no small feat.”

“Mr. Vance...” Alissa interjected, her voice tinged with urgency as she watched the two men reminisce. “What about my father’s gift?”

“Everyone, out. I’m shutting the door today to entertain my guest.” With a brisk wave, Herbert dismissed them all, his tone brooking no argument—leaving Alissa’s pride smarting in the dust.

“But you just gave your word,” Alissa protested, her brow knitting as frustration simmered beneath her composed facade.

Once, she had harbored tender feelings for Aiden, but after the sting of humiliation at his and Janice’s hands, that affection had withered into a bitter brew of resentment. Now, to see Herbert brush her aside for Aiden’s sake only fanned the flames of her discontent.

“I did agree. But I never said when I’d do it, did I?” Herbert snorted coldly, rose to his feet, and with his hands clasped behind his back, strode toward the inner room. “Anyway, I’ll send the gift to your father on his birthday.”

Chapter 965:

“Alissa, did you not comprehend Mr. Vance’s directive? He’s asking you to leave now.” Tricia laughed with unbridled delight, her face illuminated with vindictive pleasure. “I presumed that jade pendant might afford you some advantage, yet it wields even less influence than Aiden’s singular appearance.”

Alissa’s expression darkened at Tricia’s derision. “What of it? At the very least, Mr. Vance agreed to my request, while you departed empty-handed.”

Tricia dismissed this with an unconcerned shrug. “Surely you comprehend for whom I was doing this, yes?”

Alissa’s expression changed. Her fists clenched slightly, a sharp glint flashing in her eyes.

“I see understanding has finally graced you. So, do you think I have anything to worry about? At worst, I’ve sacrificed a modicum of the Payne family’s dignity, whereas the Welch family’s machinations appear destined for dissolution,” Tricia taunted.

As Alissa observed her self-satisfied demeanor, her scrutiny intensified, growing more frigid and penetrating.

Mateo had dispatched her to procure Herbert’s writing primarily to undermine Janice. Janice was using Herbert’s writing to gather momentum for her entry into Cloverhill. To assert the Welch family’s dominance and deal Janice a significant blow, Mateo had carefully arranged the confrontation that just unfolded. But now, even with the jade pendant as leverage, they couldn’t prevent Herbert from writing for Janice, making their efforts meaningless.

“I should go back and share the good news. Minnie will be absolutely delighted to hear that even with your precious token, you failed to stop Janice,” Tricia announced, lifting her chin as she swept past Alissa, deliberately brushing against her shoulder while humming a satisfied tune.

Hearing Tricia’s taunting melody and watching her smug, retreating figure, Alissa’s restraint finally snapped, and she lunged forward in one swift movement. But Tricia had been waiting for exactly this.

With a practiced sidestep, Tricia dodged Alissa's attack, grabbed her arm, and executed a quick leg sweep, throwing Alissa over her shoulder with efficient precision.

"Ah!" Alissa's pained cry echoed as she lay stunned and disoriented.

"You amateur, thinking you could take me on?" Tricia dusted her hands, looking down at Alissa with pure disdain. "You should stick to being eye candy. Stop embarrassing yourself."

"Tricia, I'll destroy you!" Alissa shrieked, her voice laced with venom.

But Tricia dismissed her entirely, sauntering to her car and departing with casual indifference, leaving Alissa behind, consumed by futile fury.

Inside the room, Herbert observed the scene through the window, shook his head, and exhaled wearily. "They're so energetic."

As he spoke, he unveiled a container of his cherished coffee beans.

Anyone acquainted with Herbert would be astounded by the appearance of this particular collection of coffee beans, as it constituted his most treasured possession, seldom revealed except in the presence of the most distinguished visitors. This gesture revealed the profound esteem in which he held Aiden. Perhaps more accurately, one might say he revered his longtime companion, Aiden's grandfather, and extended that sentiment to encompass Aiden himself.

"Mr. Vance, allow me to assist," Aiden volunteered, accepting the coffee beans from Herbert with genuine warmth. In that fleeting moment, all his characteristic intensity and edge appeared to dissolve completely. "I've recently acquired some coffee brewing techniques. Permit me to demonstrate."

Chapter 966:

"Alright," Herbert agreed with a smile, saying no more.

Aiden executed each step with precision—boiling water, grinding beans, brewing, and finally pouring—his movements revealing a profound attentiveness. Not a single action betrayed haste or indifference.

Observing his concentration and earnestness, Herbert nodded with quiet approval.

Kristopher had undeniably cultivated an exceptional grandson. With such equanimity and poise, yet maintaining that essential edge, Aiden was clearly destined for significance.

“Mr. Vance, please savor the coffee!” Aiden presented a cup adorned with exquisite latte art, offering it with both hands in a gesture of respect. Even before the first taste, the intricate design captivated Herbert’s attention, illuminating his weathered features.

“Impressive! I hardly expected someone of such apparent wildness to possess such refinement,” Herbert observed.

“My grandfather consistently maintained that one should cultivate diverse talents. Consequently, during moments of leisure, I immerse myself in various texts and acquire different abilities.”

Herbert sipped the coffee thoughtfully, its rich sweetness elevating his mood and awakening dormant recollections. “You bear a striking resemblance to your grandfather. In our youth, your grandfather and I engaged in remarkably similar exchanges.”

Kristopher once waded through an ocean of books, his days consumed by the written word. I remember asking him what the point was of drowning in so much reading. He quipped that life was a never-ending classroom, and while the lessons he absorbed might not pay off immediately, they would prove their worth down the road,” Herbert said.

Aiden sipped his coffee, hanging on every word, without the faintest flicker of irritation. In fact, he felt a sense of calm, as if he were facing Kristopher himself. Perhaps it was because Herbert, who had once shared a tight bond with Kristopher, carried echoes of his old friend’s spirit.

“To be honest, I owe the heights I’ve reached to your grandfather’s spark of wisdom. Without his nudge, I would never have honed my writing to such a fine art, nor earned the admiration that’s come my way. That said, your grandfather could be as cold as a winter’s breeze. After that one visit when he brought you along, he vanished from my life—no letters, no calls, nothing.”

A shadow of bitterness flickered in Herbert's eyes as he recounted this. "I once asked my grandfather why he never came back to see you. He brushed it off, saying reunions at his age were just a sentimental fool's errand."

"That is exactly the kind of line he would toss out without a second thought." Herbert shook his head and took a slow sip of coffee. "Well, he's gone now, so there's no use crying over spilled milk."

Lifting his gaze to Aiden, his eyes sharpened like a hawk's. "So, Aiden, out with it. What brings you here? You're not the type to pop in for a casual chat."

Aiden grinned, a spark of mischief in his tone. "You're pulling my leg, Mr. Vance. Truth be told, I had planned to swing by Cloverhill and pay my respects once I had settled in. But since this little matter involves you, I figured I'd drop by sooner."

Herbert stayed cool as a cucumber, savoring his coffee in silence.

"I would like you to craft an inscription for my girlfriend," Aiden said at last.

"Your girlfriend?" Herbert's brows shot up, caught off guard. He sized Aiden up with a curious glance. "A man like you—sharp as a tack and tough as nails—must have landed a real gem."

Chapter 967:

"You bet!" Aiden beamed, his chest puffing with pride and a glow of triumph that only stoked Herbert's intrigue. What kind of woman could light up Aiden's face like that? It was love, plain as day.

"She is Janice, the founder of JE Consortium and the renowned surgeon known as MO."

Herbert's eyes widened, his breath catching for a split second. He had imagined someone remarkable, but this was a cut above the rest. "You don't mess around, do you? Just her title as a surgical genius would've sold me on the spot."

“Actually, Tricia was also running an errand for Janice just now,” Aiden added. “She had some nerve, insisting I do her a favor while dangling the Payne family name like a golden ticket. Of course, I wasn’t about to roll over for that.”

Herbert chuckled. “Had she led with MO right off the bat, I’d have said yes without blinking.”

Aiden quirked a brow. Herbert was a straight shooter who couldn’t stand puffed-up nonsense. The Payne and Welch families had strutted in earlier, acting like they owned the place, so it was no surprise they had left empty-handed.

If Alissa hadn’t flashed that jade pendant, Herbert might’ve shown them the door without a second thought.

“MO is a legend in medicine—a lifesaver in every sense,” Herbert mused. “For someone that extraordinary, I’d bend over backwards. So, what is she after? What does she want me to inscribe?”

Aiden’s lips curved into a sly smile. He dipped a finger in the water and traced two words across the table.

When Herbert caught sight of the words, his pupils narrowed to pinpricks. He fixed Aiden with a piercing, searching stare. “Are you sure about these two words? You must know the weight they carry.”

“Absolutely,” Aiden replied without hesitation. “Janice’s return to Cloverhill is all about settling an old, festering score.”

“I can’t say I’m entirely on board, but you young folks have your own fire and vision. Far be it from me to throw cold water on your plans.”

Twenty years ago, the White family’s brutal massacre had rippled through the grapevine, and given Herbert’s standing, it was no surprise he had caught wind of it. So, when those two words glimmered on the table, the pieces clicked into place—he knew exactly what Aiden and Janice were gunning for.

Once that inscription went public, it would be like tossing a gauntlet at the Welch family's feet—a declaration of war.

Meanwhile, when Alissa returned home, she laid out the whole encounter with Herbert for Mateo, holding nothing back.

When Mateo discovered that Aiden had not only dropped by to see Herbert but had been greeted with open arms, a scowl creased his forehead. "What's so special about some small-fry from Efrery that Mr. Vance would give him the time of day?"

"I heard Mr. Vance and Aiden's grandfather go way back. It's probably just a nod to 'old times' sake," Alissa remarked.

Mateo's lip curled into a sneer. "Old ties or not, it doesn't erase the fact that he's just a nobody from nowhere."

Alissa's eyes sparkled with a flicker of hope. "So, Dad, are you saying Mr. Vance might not go along with whatever Aiden's after?"

"Obviously. Our Welch family had to part with a priceless jade pendant just to persuade Mr. Vance to inscribe for my birthday. Even if Aiden has some ties to Mr. Vance through his grandfather, there's no way his connection runs deeper than ours," Mateo declared, his tone dripping with certainty, as if the Welch name alone could bend fate to its will. "I'd wager Aiden's already been shown the door with a polite rejection."

Chapter 968:

"Mateo, you're being too confident," Gilmore countered, shaking his head. "Mr. Vance isn't the kind of man anyone can predict. His temper's as erratic as the wind. There's no telling whether he'll agree to Aiden's request or not."

"You're overcomplicating things, Gilmore." Mateo waved him off with an air of finality. "I know exactly what kind of man Mr. Vance is. If the Welch family couldn't convince him, then no one else has a prayer—just ask the Paynes."

Gilmore's brows knitted together. Mateo's overconfidence was troubling. If he carried this attitude into a confrontation with Janice, he might not just stumble—he might fall hard. After all, Janice wasn't just JE; she was also MO.

A woman who had concealed her true identity for years wouldn't suddenly bare it all unless she had a reason. And her reason was anything but friendly.

If his informants hadn't reported that Janice visited the Payne family upon arriving in Cloverhill—specifically to treat Oliver—he never would have linked her to MO. But, in this world, only one person had the skills to heal Oliver's legs—the legendary surgeon known as MO.

Once her identity as JE was exposed, and with the string of near-impossible feats she'd pulled off, there was no doubt left—Janice was also the elusive MO.

"Mateo, we need to tread carefully," Gilmore murmured, rubbing his temples. "Our fight isn't just with Janice. We're up against JE and MO."

"If you're that concerned, I'll send invitations to all the major families right now," Mateo said, his heart skipping a beat at the mention of Janice's dual identities. But a slow, wicked smile curved his lips. "The Welch family is the dominant local force. Home turf is our advantage. I'll make her banquet a laughingstock."

Gilmore had no objections to this proposal. As long as the Welch family was involved, other families wouldn't dare act rashly.

If no one attended Janice's banquet, she would suffer a crushing defeat, forever remaining under the Welch family's shadow. But one thing still gnawed at Gilmore—why was Janice pushing this so far? Was this retaliation for the assassination attempt he'd orchestrated, or was she merely protecting her artist, Stephen?

Neither reason seemed enough to justify an outright war. If she wanted revenge, she could have resorted to subtle, underhanded tactics to weaken the Welch family. But her actions screamed something different—this wasn't just revenge. This was total war.

For both sides, the risks far outweighed the rewards.

Lost in thought, Gilmore pulled out his phone and fired off a message to Harlan. A few moments later, Harlan's response came through.

"All is well. No need to worry."

Gilmore's frown deepened. On the surface, the response seemed acceptable, yet an unshakable unease gnawed at him. He hesitated briefly before pulling up the dialer, his thumb hovering over the screen, ready to make the call.

Mateo asked, "What are you up to, Gilmore?"

"Nothing much, just checking in on Harlan. I have a bad feeling."

Mateo scoffed. "He's probably enjoying himself without a worry. Once we deal with that thorn from the White family, we'll drag him back."

"Fine." Gilmore slid his phone back into his pocket, his eyes darkening with calculation. "Next, we wait and see how Janice's banquet unfolds. If she becomes a laughingstock, then we won't need to hold back. We'll just strike and eliminate this threat."

If she couldn't even pull off a simple banquet without becoming a joke, then what real threat could she possibly pose to the Welch family?

Chapter 969:

Word of Mateo's birthday banquet, scheduled for three days later, spread like wildfire among the elite families. At the same time, invitations from the Welch family landed in their hands, carrying an unspoken message.

Bain had barely set foot inside the Mendoza family's estate, yet the weight of the invitation in his hands eclipsed any nostalgia he might have felt.

“God, this invitation feels more like a warning than a gesture,” Conley muttered, his brows furrowing as he eyed the card in Bain’s hand. “How do you think we should respond to the Welch family?”

“Do you really think we have a choice?” Bain’s gaze turned sharp. “We’ve already thrown in our lot with Janice. Now, we stand firm or fall.”

Conley flinched at the weight of his father’s words but understood the message loud and clear. Hesitation meant ruin. Their only option was to stand by Janice and gamble on her strength—a gamble that Janice had the power to shatter the Welch family’s dominance and carve out her own place in Cloverhill.

If Janice triumphed, the Welch family’s grip on power would waver, and the city’s elite would hesitate, waiting to see which giant would fall.

“Without Janice, we’d still be stranded in Efrery, nothing more than a fading name,” Bain sighed, his gaze shifting between the two invitations in his hand. “Now, all we can do is hope she’s strong enough to weather the storm and take the Mendoza family to new heights.”

He ripped the Welch family’s invitation into shreds, letting the pieces fall like discarded promises.

The study was suffused with the rich aroma of sandalwood. Janice sat at the mahogany desk, her gaze demurely lowered as she savored her coffee. Her graceful posture, complemented by a simple yet elegant long dress, radiated a serene beauty that captivated anyone who observed her.

“Janice.”

A voice shattered the peaceful sanctuary of the study. Janice glanced up to find Aiden entering, his lips curved into a self-assured smile.

“Judging by your countenance, I presume everything proceeded favorably?” Janice inquired.

"Of course." Aiden extended his hands with undisguised smugness. "When matters fall under my personal supervision, how could the outcome be anything but successful?"

Janice shook her head, a subtle smile gracing her lips as she nudged a cup of coffee in his direction. "Have some coffee, my invaluable hero."

Aiden leaned against the polished surface of the desk, his penetrating gaze fixed intently on Janice. "Rather than a hero, I'd prefer you call me honey."

This audacious remark elicited an eye roll from Janice. "Aiden, if you don't want me to kick you out, keep joking."

"Alright," Aiden promptly sealed his lips, suppressing a mischievous grin as he lifted the cup and idly toyed with it. "But I believe I shall decline the coffee. I indulged quite liberally at Mr. Vance's residence. Further consumption would condemn me to perpetual bathroom visits."

Janice raised an eyebrow, curious. "How did you come to know him?"

Aiden replaced the cup on its saucer and seated himself, nostalgia flickering in his eyes. "During my childhood, I accompanied my grandfather to Cloverhill and had the privilege of making his acquaintance. Mr. Vance may adhere to traditional sensibilities, but he possesses genuine virtue and shows considerable support for the rising generation."

Chapter 970:

"I must disagree," Janice countered. "If he truly supported the younger generation, Tricia wouldn't have hit such a brick wall with him. Minnie called earlier, apologizing for the whole mess and even offering compensation."

Aiden was surprised. "Minnie is quite the tactician, isn't she? Always knowing when to bend and when to stand her ground."

"How else do you think she managed to become the future leader of the Payne family as a woman?" Janice's lips curled into a sneer, a keen intelligence glinting dangerously in her eyes. "Once she becomes an enemy, she would be a formidable adversary."

Aiden chuckled. He always felt Janice was being modest. To other powers in their world, Minnie was indeed formidable, but in Janice's penetrating assessment, Minnie was merely an opponent who required a calculated strategy, not a genuine threat to her position.

"By the way, what do you think of Oliver?" he asked.

Janice took a sip of coffee, pausing at the question, her eyes lowering as if in thought. "Quite handsome. He reminds me of you."

"That's too much." Aiden frowned, his fingers tapping a discontented rhythm against the polished surface.

"Are you getting a bit jealous?" Janice teased, raising an eyebrow. "I've noticed you're quite the jealous type lately. First, you were jealous of Stephen, and now of Oliver."

Aiden wasn't perturbed. Instead, his lips curved into an unapologetic smile. "Yes, I confess to my jealousy without reservation. My devotion to you knows no bounds, and anyone who dares to entertain thoughts about you instantly becomes my adversary."

His declaration resonated with commanding certainty and possessive ardor. Janice couldn't resist the impulse to reach forward, her fingertips brushing against the contours of Aiden's face.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I'm attempting to measure the remarkable thickness of your skin!"

"Get lost!" Aiden captured her wandering hand, enfolding it in his warm grasp rather than releasing it to freedom.

"Didn't you tell me to get lost? How can I, when you're holding my hand?" Janice's lips formed a bewitching pout of feigned displeasure.

“Well, you can get lost in my heart.”

“Wow, not only are you thick-skinned, but you’re becoming increasingly silver-tongued.”

Aiden grinned, drawing Janice into his embrace.

“That’s all thanks to your influence.” His eyes softened as he gazed at Janice with deepening affection.

Janice had intended to tease Aiden, but now found herself on the receiving end of his charm. Aiden’s flirtation skills had evolved to such a formidable level that she found herself struggling to maintain her composure.

Janice quickly cleared her throat, gently pushing Aiden away and taking a deliberate sip of coffee to mask her flustered state.

Witnessing her reaction, Aiden couldn’t suppress a knowing chuckle. Being the target of Janice’s teasing before must have felt similar to her current predicament.

“Let’s get serious,” Janice said, regaining her poise and adopting a businesslike expression. “I confirmed that Oliver is genuinely disabled, which invalidates your previous assumption.”