

Her Riches 231

Chapter 231

Nico quickly slapped himself to stop his imagination from going wild.

This is my first time having a solo mission with Ms. Gwendolyn, perhaps this is who she is. I should have faith in her feelings for Boss. However, he must never find out about the details! Back in the bedroom, Gwendolyn grazed the tip of the dagger across Xander's face and down his neck before finally arriving at his heart.

Xander shook throughout, terrified that the blade would pierce his skin.

The room was filled with a dangerous and menacing oppression atmosphere, gripping him so hard that he felt suffocated.

Gwendolyn sneered at his fright. "It only takes a dagger to reduce you to such a pathetic state. You're so weak. How dare you pick a fight with Ceddy?"

Xander seemed to have taken offense by her words and the look of terror on his face suddenly diminished.

He knew very well that Gwendolyn did not dare to kill him within the Jenson residence, nor was she able to do so.

Noticing that he had calmed down, Gwendolyn guessed what he was thinking. "You're right. I won't kill you. In fact, I prefer to torture you slowly. I'm here today to settle this score. Because of you, Ceddy is currently undergoing surgery. How dare you sleep soundly in your bed while he is fighting for his life? I want you to remain awake and experience his suffering tenfold."

With a vicious glint in her eyes, she pressed the dagger's tip slightly against Xander, yet with enough restraint not to pierce his heart.

Blood began oozing out, staining Xander's snow-white bathrobe around his chest. It caused him so much pain that he turned pale.

“Don’t worry. This is just a taste. I won’t take your life so quickly.”

Gwendolyn sheathed the dagger, then produced a bag of powder and showed Xander.

“This is itching powder. I will sprinkle it on you and once the itch becomes unbearable, your muscles will twitch uncontrollably and quicken your circulation, which will cause the blood to flow out from the wound. I wonder if you would die from excessive blood loss if you bleed throughout the night? Shall we try it?”

Even though her tone was innocent, her words were venomous.

Xander gazed at the powder in her hand with terror, shaking his head, and started mumbling.

Gwendolyn’s expression was frigid. Without wasting her breath on him further, she scattered the powder all over him mercilessly, starting from his neck.

Then, she summoned Nico for some areas where it was inconvenient for her to reach.

Upon finding out that she intended to scatter the powder all over Xander’s groin, Nico shuddered so hard that his own member retracted in fear. He gave her a thumbs-up of admiration.

This move is so savage and vicious! If Xander succumbs, he’s not going to make it.

...

After hours of surgery, the bullet lodged in Cedrick’s chest was finally removed. Fortunately, it had missed his heart by two inches.

However, he did lose a lot of blood and was very weak. As he required rest, he was transferred to an ordinary ward.

“Gweny...”

The anesthetic was beginning to wear off. His voice was hoarse and weak. Instinctively, he scanned his surroundings.

The spotlessly bright ward was empty.

There was no sign of Gwendolyn, who he was thinking about nor anybody else there. He was alone in his bed.

There was a sense of melancholic solitude in the air.

Though the anesthetic had not completely worn off, he felt a searing pain in his chest. It was so bad that he could not breathe.

Gwendolyn said she would wait for me and let me explain. She wouldn't lie to me.

He braced himself against the dizziness, ignoring his freshly bandaged chest, and got out of bed. His legs were so shaky that he was forced to inch his way to the door while leaning against the wall for support.

It was silent outside the corridor.

There was nobody else there aside from him. Only an occasional cold gust blew into his pale face, bringing with it a sharp sting.

His eyes grew red. The heavy feeling in his chest was becoming unbearable as an intense feeling of sadness gripped him.

The ringing pain in his chest felt a hundred times more painful than when the bullet had struck him.

“Gweny...”

Where are you? You still won’t forgive me?

He wanted to search for Gwendolyn, but the walk out of the ward had completely drained him. Weak and shaky all over, he was forced to lean against the door.

Motivated by seeing Gwendolyn, however, he did his best to remain conscious.

Halfway through making her rounds, a nurse on duty turned pale with fright when she caught sight of him and hurried over to help him up. “Why are you out of bed, Mr. Jenson? You just went through an operation, and you cannot afford to catch a cold! Go back inside.”

Cedrick avoided her arm, refusing to let her touch him. “Where is Ms. Harris?” he asked with great effort.

“Ms. Harris had gone a long time ago. It’s past midnight now, so she probably won’t be coming back. Your health is more important, Mr. Jenson. Please get back inside!”

Cedrick felt so awful that he gasped for breath.

She’s gone. True enough, she wouldn’t forgive me. She won’t even hear what I have to say.

A lump rose in his throat. The empty corridor echoed with his hacking coughs.

The nurse felt sorry for him. “Mr. Jenson...”

“Get lost!”

He glared at her. Despite the severity of his condition, his gaze was filled with rage.

Frightened, the nurse fell silent and trotted away.

Once again, he became the only person in the lonely corridor. He was so weak that he could no longer stand. Thus, leaning against the door, he eased himself slowly into a squat before curling up at the door.

Gweny. I refuse to believe you would be that cruel. I won't be going anywhere.

...

After dealing with Xander, Gwendolyn left Nico behind to take care of the aftermath and sped back to the hospital.

As soon as she emerged from the elevators, she saw the man curled up at the far end of the corridor.

His helpless and frail silhouette caused a stab of pain in her heart.

Sprinting over at once, she helped him up and held him in her arms. "What are you doing out here?" she chided gently. "You should be resting after your surgery!"

Cedrick hugged her tightly around the waist. His joy of seeing her again made his nose twinge and his eyes felt moist.

"I knew it. I knew you would come back."

Gwendolyn's heart seared even more painfully.

She did not have the heart to let him suffer alone in the operating theater. However, she planned to take advantage of the waiting time to execute her revenge plan against Xander. It was just that she did not expect the operation to complete earlier.

"I'm sorry, I had been careless, but I did not leave. All right, let's not stand out here in the cold anymore. We'll talk inside."

Cedrick wrapped his arm around her waist and placed his chin on her shoulder, unwilling to let go.

Gwendolyn was about to pry his hands open when she remembered his wound and got distracted as she was worried about injuring him.

"I told you I'm not going anywhere. Are you going to defy me? I'll leave if you do!"

Though she meant it as a joke, Cedrick turned pale and let go of her immediately before he fell to his knees.

Noticing what he was doing, Gwendolyn quickly grabbed him. Her heart ached.

A mere threat from me scares him so much to the point that he seeks forgiveness for every little thing. Have I treated him so badly in the past to make him feel this insecure? How could the head of the Jenson family lower himself?

In fact, before her arrival at the hospital, Cedrick had been tormented by worry and self-doubt for over half an hour.

As soon as he saw her, he wanted nothing more than to pull his heart out and show it to her.

Gwendolyn willed herself not to cry. Sighing helplessly, she employed the coaxing tone he had once used on her. "I'm not angry, and I'm not going anywhere. Be good, lay down, and I'll hear you out, all right?"

Chapter 232

Gwendolyn helped Cedrick to the hospital bed and pulled the blanket over him.

He had just finished surgery and was still weak. He was cold and trembling non-stop after standing in the hallway for over half an hour.

Gwendolyn turned on the heater in the room before sitting beside his bed.

She poured a glass of warm water and handed it to him, saying, "Nico told me everything when you were in the operation theatre, so you don't have to explain anything to me. However, I do have some questions that I need you to answer."

Cedrick nodded in response.

"Why did you become Maverick? If you're Cedrick, then where's the real Maverick?"

Cedrick reached over to grab her hand, feeling the warmth of her palm. "Do you remember me telling you about the car accident from thirteen years ago?"

"I do."

"That year, the real Maverick Wright was fifteen years old when he died trying to save my life. Back then, the Jenson family was in chaos. I was young and couldn't compete for the power of the family with both my uncles. When Maverick was still a child, his grandfather sent him to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, so his family had never seen his face. Hence, Grandpa let me temporarily take Maverick's name so I could go into hiding. Thirteen years ago, everyone who escorted me in the car died in that accident. No one knows in Fairlake knows my real identity. Because of that, I became Maverick Wright without much hurdle, helping him to look after his grandfather and mother and aiding in the prosperity of Wright Construction Group."

"I see." Gwendolyn lowered her gaze. "What about half a year ago? Was your jar of ashes fake too? Justin watched as they pushed you into the cremation oven. Was that also fake?"

"The ashes are real. They belong to the real Maverick. As for the body, Nico found someone in the warehouse with a similar build to mine. Because of the fire, his face was unrecognizable. That was why Justin did not notice it wasn't me."

His voice was deep, and his tone was soft as he spoke. His eyes glistened with tears as he stared at Gwendolyn.

“Gwenny, I didn’t mean to lie to you. After I returned to Salinsburgh to snatch back the power of the Jenson family... It is impossible for me to turn back. However, I was so happy when I found out you were the daughter of the Harris family.”

Gwendolyn was silent as she looked at him.

Cedrick got nervous when faced with such an emotionless stare. “That night at your welcoming party, I was wrong for pretending to not recognize you. I’m also sorry for lying to you and putting on an act in front of you. If you’re still angry, you can continue to punish me. I’m willing to bear everything. Is that okay?”

“No, it’s not okay.”

Cedrick’s heart sank. He did not expect that she would reject him so swiftly.

He looked down and stared at his hands. The disappointment he felt could not be hidden behind his gaze.

While he was not paying any attention to her, Gwendolyn grabbed the chance to lean forward and place gentle kisses on his eyes, forehead, cheeks, and, lastly, his lips. Every one of her kisses was

filled with patience and adoration.

“Silly. I’m not angry anymore.”

“Really?”

Cedrick’s eyes sparkled as he looked at her. “You won’t cancel our wedding then? You’ll forgive me?”

“What do you think?”

Gwendolyn kissed him once more, proving herself with her actions.

They closed their eyes and got lost in the kiss. Their breaths intertwined with each other as they kissed more frantically.

Cedrick quickly backed away when she licked his lips and asked for permission to deepen the kiss.

“What’s wrong? Don’t you like it?”

Gwendolyn did not get up and remained close to him.

“That’s not it...” Cedrick felt breathless as he spoke. The tips of his ears were red, and his eyes darkened as he looked away.

Gwendolyn immediately guessed what was going on when she saw his actions. “Do you want it?”

Red spread across Cedrick’s ears as he blinked furiously. He hesitated momentarily before plucking up his courage to ask, “Can I?”

Gwendolyn unbuttoned the top two buttons of Cedrick’s hospital gown. The injury on his chest was still wrapped in layers of thick bandages. His arm, which had been whipped the night before, was also bandaged.

Plus, he just finished surgery. He was still weak, so he shouldn’t move around too much.

Taking his health into consideration, Gwendolyn blurted, “With your condition, you can’t do much, huh?”

By the time she realized what she had said, it was too late for her to take it back.

Cedrick's desire to dominate her was triggered. "Who says I can't do much? Do you want to give it a try?"

Although his face was pale, his handsomeness could still weaken Gwendolyn's knees.

Because of what Gwendolyn said, Cedrick's fighting spirit was awakened.

With that, he forcefully got up to prove how capable he was.

Gwendolyn giggled and swiftly pushed him back onto the bed, preventing him from getting up.

She leaned forward, her rosy lips near his reddened ears as she seductively said, "Ceddy, what I meant to say is, let me do it tonight. I want to bed you..."

Khaff! Khaff! Khaff!

Her words immediately extinguished the fire in Cedrick's eyes. the blush spread from his ears to his neck.

Does she even know what she's saying?

Under his doubtful gaze, Gwendolyn climbed onto the bed and got on top of him. Afraid that she would put pressure on his wounds, she knelt on the bed instead.

She confidently gripped his chin and leaned forward to kiss him once more.

Cedrick was overcome with desire. My Gwenny is such a minx!

This time, he allowed himself to get lost in the pleasure.

He did not care if his life would be in danger after they did the deed.

In fact, he would willingly give up his life to make love to Gwendolyn.

Cedrick instinctively wrapped his arms around her.

However, she quickly stopped him and placed them back on the bed. "You're still injured. Keep your hands to yourself, and don't move!"

"But they don't listen to me. They're saying that they want to hug you."

Gwendolyn gripped his chin and forced him to look at her. "How disobedient. Do you want to be tied up instead?"

Cedrick pursed his lips and averted his gaze.

Gwendolyn did not bother waiting for his reply as she got out of bed and opened the bedside drawer. She took out a new packet of bandages and held his arms above his head before tying them to the metal railings of the bed.

Compared to the previous two times when she used a belt to tie him up roughly, she was more gentle and patient this time around.

After she was done, she asked, "How is it? Does it hurt?"

Cedrick shook his head earnestly.

Gwendolyn was not in a rush to continue. Instead, she went to check if the room was locked. She then locked the windows and pulled the curtains close, not wanting anyone to interrupt her fun.

After everything was complete, she got back onto the bed. Her rosy, red lips pouted as she lightly blew air onto Cedrick's face. "Be a good boy, and don't move. I'll take my time and play with you gently!"

It was the dead of night, and everyone was deep in slumberland. No one knew of or heard the rhythmic melody playing from Cedrick's room.

...

It was four in the morning.

There was only a dimly lit lamp in the VIP hospital suite.

The dim light reflected on Gwendolyn's sleeping face and emphasized her beauty.

She was a poison that Cedrick willingly allowed himself to be addicted to.

Cedrick who was wearing his hospital gown, sat on the side of the bed and quietly watched the sleeping beauty.

His long and slender fingers danced across her forehead, eyes, nose, and lips, tracing the outline of her good looks.

Gwendolyn was sleeping peacefully and did not wake up from his feather-like touches. She was exhausted after their "exercise."

Cedrick leaned forward and lovingly placed a soft kiss on her forehead.

Suddenly, a soft bird-like whistle could be heard from outside the door.

It was Nico. He could not open the door or dare to open it. Hence, he resorted to using a signal to check in with Cedrick.

Cedrick got up, slowly approached the door, and opened it.

Before Nico could speak, Cedrick held a finger to his lips to silence Nico. "Gwenny is tired. Don't wake her up by making too much noise."

Nico nodded. Cedrick stepped out of the room, and the two made their way to the end of the hallway.

"What is it?"

Nico was about to speak when his gaze accidentally fell onto Cedrick's chest, which was exposed from the unbuttoned hospital gown. Nico's eyes widened in shock as he stared at the deep red and purple markings littering Cedrick's neck and collarbone.

"What the f*ck? Boss, why are you injured again?"

Cedrick looked down and saw hickeys of various sizes and shapes.

Instead of hurrying to cover himself up, he shamelessly widened the collar of the gown wider to show off the markings to Nico.

"It's Gwenny's artwork. What do you think? Isn't it pretty?"

Chapter 233

Cedrick sounded proud when he said that. It seemed like he was in a good mood.

He made himself seem like a piece of artwork that Gwendolyn had carefully and attentively completed.

Nico stared at him in shock. Cedrick's gaze seemed to be saying... Look! My wife did this! Isn't she amazing?

Khaff! Khaff! "It looks wonderful!" Nico gulped before nodding and complimenting Cedrick. "Ms. Harris is indeed impressive!"

Satisfied, Cedrick buttoned his gown to cover the love bites.

Seeing that Cedrick was in a good mood, Nico hurriedly tried to claim credit. "Boss, shouldn't I get some credit since you were able to enjoy yourself? Ms. Harris must've been touched by everything that I told her. Is that enough for me to redeem myself?"

Nico was nervous. Previously, he was deducted two years' worth of salary.

"You did well."

Cedrick's lips curved into a smile. He emanated an elegant yet arrogant aura as he said, "I'll return the previously deducted salary. On top of that, I'll also give you a six-month bonus."

Nico cheered inwardly. Ahhhh! Boss is the best! He's the world's kindest leader!

However, Nico was still worried about Cedrick's condition.

"But, Boss, please don't use such a dirty trick in the future. Although you knew beforehand that you weren't shot in the heart, your life will be in danger from losing so much blood."

Cedrick's eyes darkened as he shot a look at Nico. "Are you saying there will be a next time? Are you hoping that Gwenny and I will argue again?"

Nico turned pale with fear.

"Touch wood! I was just spouting nonsense. Boss, please don't deduct my salary. You haven't even banked in the money..."

Sh*t! I take back what I said about the boss being the world's kindest man! He's so unpredictable, temperamental, and unreasonable!

Cedrick could not see through Nico to discover the rage and curses the latter was thinking in his mind. His expression turned hostile as he said, "Let's get to business."

Nico quickly regained his composure and straightened his back. "Tonight, Ms. Harris secretly brought me to the Jenson residence and claimed some benefits from Mr. Xander for you."

After knowing that Gwendolyn had not left, Cedrick's expression softened. "What did she do?"

"She..." Nico paused momentarily as he tried to find the right words to say. "She stabbed a knife through Mr. Xander's chest and tied him up before pouring itching powder all over him. She was quite vicious with her act!"

Cedrick furrowed his brows into a frown. His tone was icy as he replied, "She even poured the powder onto his private parts?"

"No! Of course not! I helped her do that!"

Nico hurried to wave his hand, denying Cedrick's claim. He tried to please the latter by buttering up to him and said, "Boss, you have such a nice figure. How could Ms. Harris lay her eyes on a skinny man like Mr. Xander?"

Cedrick scoffed but lost the frown on his lips when he heard that.

Nico continued, "However, this isn't a small matter since Mr. Yael is not one to back down from a threat. He definitely won't let this slide. I'm sure he'll throw a fit tomorrow morning."

"What are you afraid of? Let them cause trouble if that's what they want, but allow them to only do it in the ancestral hall at the Jenson residence. Send some people to stand guard. Don't allow any of them to make a scene at the Harris residence."

“Yes, Boss.”

“All right. Run along now. I’ll go back and accompany Gwenny.”

Cedrick waved his hand to dismiss Nico. Without waiting for the latter to respond, he returned to the room.

Nico stared at Cedrick’s retreating figure and tutted.

My, my... Boss is in such a good mood after he got laid.

Cedrick disliked having a female nurse change his IV drip. Hence, a male nurse entered the room the next morning with a stainless-steel medical tray.

When the nurse pushed open the door, he was greeted by a shocking scene.

Cedrick, who wore a hospital gown, was sitting beside the bed and carefully feeding Gwendolyn. She had just woken up and was still in bed.

The nurse was confused.

Who the heck is the actual patient?

He stood rooted to the ground, dumbfounded. He stared at Cedrick’s large and muscular back and was impressed by the latter’s adoration for Gwendolyn.

This is a master class level of spoiling one’s wife!

Cedrick could not be bothered if anyone saw them. The only thing on his mind was that Gwendolyn was tired from their activities at night and needed to replenish her energy.

Besides, it had taken him much effort to win back his sweetheart. It was only natural that he would spoil her.

He was going to pour all his love and attention onto her so that she would never leave him. He wanted to make sure he spoiled her so much that she would not be able to handle her daily affairs.

On the other hand, Gwendolyn thought differently. She stopped Cedrick from continuing to feed her when she noticed the male nurse standing at the door. "Are you here to change his IV drip? Come over."

The nurse carefully brought the tray over. Cedrick instinctively held out his left hand to let the nurse insert the needle.

Gwendolyn was about to get out of bed and let Cedrick sit in a more comfortable position to receive the IV drip.

As soon as she got up, Cedrick placed a hand on her shoulder and pushed her back down. He fondly said, "You worked hard last night. Lie down a little longer. Is your waist sore? I'll help you massage it later."

Gwendolyn immediately flushed a bright red.

There's still an outsider here! How can he say something so shameless and misleading?

"B*gger off!"

Gwendolyn gently pushed his chest as her face got redder in embarrassment. In the end, she pulled the blanket over her head and hid herself.

How cute. Cedrick's lips tugged into a grin as he stared at her.

In the next second, his gaze shifted to the thousand-watt “light bulb” beside him.

He glared at the male nurse and coldly said, “Hurry up.”

“Y-Yes, Mr. Jenson.”

The nurse quickly changed the IV drip and left the room. Cedrick glanced at Gwendolyn, who was still under the blanket. His right hand disobediently reached into the blanket and gently massaged her slender waist.

“Are you feeling better from the massage? Now you know how hard it is to be a man.”

His deep voice was magnetic.

Still hidden under the blanket, she remained silent yet inwardly agreed to Cedrick’s words. Those few hours last night almost broke her waist. Until now, her legs were still trembling from how weak she was.

However, women who sought sexual pleasure could not lose to their male other halves.

Gwendolyn lifted the blanket and struggled to sit up. Not admitting defeat, she pouted and exclaimed, “Oh, hush! Wait until you get better! I’ll make sure you beg me to stop! Besides, I was very fierce last night!”

Cedrick’s smile widened as he reached out to pull her close to him. He lightly rubbed his nose against hers and acted coy.

“Well, then... If you’re that fierce, why don’t you finish breakfast, and we can have some dessert? I want more...”

Gwendolyn reached up and pushed his face away. “You shameless b*stard! Can’t you be more aware of the surroundings?”

Cedrick was unfazed by her cursing as he leaned forward and snuggled against her chest.

If I were shameful, I wouldn't have been able to chase after you. I would've been brutally murdered and burned to ashes instead!

Gwendolyn could not help thinking that he was really pushing his luck. She grumpily ruffled his hair before smoothing it down. She repeated her actions and laughed as she had her fun.

The two were messing around when someone suddenly knocked on the door.

In walked Yael's bodyguard, Charlie Yandell. He solemnly said, "Mr. Jenson, Mr. Xander was injured last night. Ms. Harris seems to be involved in that incident. She's your fiancée, so naturally, you're deemed her accomplice. I'll have to ask you to please make a trip to the ancestral hall."

Cedrick did not reply. As though he had not heard what Charlie said, he remained silent in Gwendolyn's arms.

On the other hand, Gwendolyn's expression turned grim as she glared at Charlie. "Are you blind? Can't you see that Ceddy is injured badly? How dare Xander sends his lackey to invite Ceddy to the ancestral hall? Is he courting death? Besides, who's the leader of the Jenson family right now? Is this the attitude a subordinate should have when talking to the head of the family?"

Chapter 234

"Yes. I'm terribly sorry. This is my first time relaying a message. Please forgive me, Mr. Jenson, Ms. Harris." Taking advantage of his identity as Yael's subordinate, Charlie didn't bother showing Cedrick and Gwendolyn any respect.

To Charlie's surprise, however, Gwendolyn reprimanded him before Cedrick could speak. Startled by the woman's aggressiveness, he immediately showed subservience.

Cedrick felt his heart leap with joy when he heard Gwendolyn defending him. Putting on an amicable expression, he said, "I'll be done with my IV drip in two hours' time. I'll return by then."

“Noted.” Before Charlie left, he added, “Since Ms. Harris is your fiancée, perhaps she should come with you to the ancestral hall.”

“Sure,” Cedrick replied flatly. He wanted to lean against Gwendolyn’s chest again after the door closed, but she pinched his cheek instead.

“Ouch! Gwenny...” Cedrick grimaced in pain but didn’t dodge her.

Amused and annoyed at the same time, Gwendolyn loosened her grip and said, “Well played, Cedrick. That was quite crafty of you. You made me the bad guy, didn’t you?”

“No. I’m just happy you defended me.”

Only then did Gwendolyn let go of him and rubbed his reddened cheek gently with her thumb.

Cedrick beamed, enjoying the affection he was receiving.

The next second, however, his expression turned serious instantly when he thought of the matter concerning Xander. “Gwenny, I’ll send you back to the Harris residence later. You don’t have to go to the Jenson family’s ancestral hall.”

“Why not?” Gwendolyn questioned, her tone placid. “Everyone on the internet knows I’m your fiancée. Besides, what happened last night was indeed my doing. I should be there, no? Though the Jensons won’t be able to do anything to me, I don’t want to miss a good show.”

Cedrick tapped her nose dotingly upon hearing that. “All right, then. If that’s what you want, we shall go there together.”

After the IV treatment was done, Gwendolyn helped Cedrick put on a shirt and a suit.

The love bites he had on his body were impossible to ignore, and the ones on his neck, in particular, were so obvious that they could not be concealed. He looked as if he had been taken advantage of.

Gwendolyn regretted her actions when she saw that. I should've been more gentle and exercised restraint!

With that in mind, she grabbed a scarf and wrapped it around Cedrick's neck.

Cedrick was baffled. "Gwenny, summer is approaching. Why are you putting a scarf on me?"

"Why not? You should be recuperating right after going through surgery, but since you have no choice but to return because of Xander, I have to make sure you're warm, no? I don't want you to catch a cold."

"Okay." Cedrick relented, allowing her to wrap the scarf around his neck and help him put on his gloves. In the end, almost his entire body was wrapped up tight.

The two then held hands as they made their way over to the Jenson residence together.

At that moment, everyone was sitting in their respective seats in the ancestral hall. Yael, Valentino's second son, and David, Valentino's fifth son, were also present. Moreover, Triss, David's daughter, was

there, too. Almost all of the Jenson family members were there except for Xander and Cedrick's aunt, Tania Jenson.

Nobody said a word in the ancestral hall as they waited for Cedrick.

Meanwhile, the wind blew, and the candles on the Jenson family's altar flickered. The atmosphere in the ancestral hall was undoubtedly tense and eerie.

Valentino, who was sitting at the head of the table, was drinking his coffee silently and solemnly.

Soon, Cedrick and Gwendolyn entered the ancestral hall hand in hand calmly and composedly.

The moment Cedrick entered the ancestral hall, everyone except Valentino stood up and greeted respectfully, "Mr. Cedrick."

Cedrick nodded, and everyone sat back down.

"Hi, Grandpa."

"Hi, Old Mr. Jenson."

The couple walked up to Valentino and greeted him.

Valentino's heart melted when he heard Gwendolyn's sweet voice. He also couldn't help sparing Cedrick a glance when he saw the couple enter while holding hands. Nice one, Cedrick! She was demanding to call off the engagement just two days ago, and he's already gotten her placated. As expected of my favorite grandson!

"Good girl. Have a seat. Don't stand around," Valentino replied.

The two took their seats, and Cedrick asked in a deep voice, "Uncle Yael, why were you in such a rush to see me?"

Yael rose to his feet, bowed at Valentino, and said, "A few people avoided the surveillance cameras and climbed into Xander's villa late last night. The intruders knocked the bodyguards out and assaulted Xander brutally. Fortunately for Xander, one of the bodyguards regained consciousness in time to save Xander, who was bleeding heavily. If not for that bodyguard, Xander would've been dead by now!"

With that, he shot a vicious glare at Gwendolyn, who remained impassive as if it had nothing to do with her.

Cedrick remained expressionless upon hearing that. "Where's Xander now?"

“He’s hurt badly and is in a coma. However, he was still conscious when the bodyguard saved him last night. Xander said the people who attacked him were Cedrick’s fiancée, Ms. Harris, and Cedrick’s subordinate, Nico.” Appearing heartbroken, Yael squeezed out a few tears and turned toward Valentino. “Dad, I came here today to seek justice. I know Cedrick is now the head of the Jenson family, but does that mean he can do whatever he wishes and harm his own family?”

Arrogance and disdain were written all over Cedrick’s face.

Right when he was about to stand up and talk, his face suddenly turned pale. He then frowned in pain and instinctively held his injured chest.

Gwendolyn held him and asked, “What’s wrong?”

His face pale, he looked at her and spoke with difficulty. “M-My wound... It hurts.”

He was okay when we had rough sex last night, and now he’s in pain? Gwendolyn knew what was on Cedrick’s mind, so she looked at him tenderly and said, “Your body is still weak after the surgery. Let me speak on your behalf instead.”

Yael was displeased. “Ms. Harris, you’re not a part of the Jenson family. I don’t mind letting you listen to our discussion. However, I don’t think it’s appropriate for you to speak during our family meeting.”

Gwendolyn ignored him, stood up, and turned toward Valentino. With her soft voice, she asked, “Old Mr. Jenson, I’m Caddy’s fiancée, so I think I should consider myself a member of the Jenson family. Caddy is heavily injured, so he can’t talk much. Since I was involved in what happened last night, may I speak on his behalf?”

Valentino was thrilled when he heard Gwendolyn say that she considered herself a member of the Jenson family. “Of course, you can! Just say whatever you want to say. Cedrick and I are here. No one would dare to bully you.”

“Thank you, Old Mr. Jenson.” Gwendolyn flashed a sweet smile.

She then turned to look at Yael. "I admit that I was involved in what happened last night, but—"

Before Gwendolyn could finish her sentence, Yael interrupted, "I'm impressed, Ms. Harris. I wasn't expecting you to admit to your involvement right away. However, as Cedrick's fiancée, how could you sneak into Xander's bedroom so late at night? The consequences would be dire if word gets out!"

Right after he said that, the expressions of everyone present changed dramatically. Triss wanted to stand up and defend Gwendolyn, but David stopped her.

Sensing the peculiar gazes directed at her, Gwendolyn suddenly chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Yael was puzzled.

"Even my dog back at the Harris residence knows to sit and listen intently whenever I'm speaking. You're already in your forties, Mr. Yael. Don't you know it's rude to interrupt someone's speech?" Gwendolyn mocked.

With that, she turned toward Cedrick and winked mischievously at him.

Cedrick's heart almost melted when he saw that.

"Y-You!" Yael saw red. How dare she compare me with her dog?

Gwendolyn, on the other hand, continued wearing an innocent and pure smile. Yael would appear petty if he were to argue with someone younger than him.

Amidst the tense atmosphere, Triss suddenly let out an untimely chortle.

Everyone at the scene turned toward her at once. Seeing that, she cleared her throat and lowered her head awkwardly. "I'm sorry."

At that moment, Valentino stomped his cane on the ground and drew everyone's attention back. "Carry on, Gwendolyn."

"I was involved in what happened last night, but I merely sent Nico there to teach Xander a lesson. I was taking care of Ceddy at the hospital when the incident took place. May I know who told you I went into Xander's bedroom, Mr. Yael? You need proof to back up that accusation of yours," Gwendolyn stated.

"Even if you refuse to admit to going into Xander's room, it's a fact that you've sent someone to harm Xander. You admitted to that yourself," Yael argued.

"Yes, that's true. However, why don't you ask yourself why I wanted to teach him a lesson? When Ceddy was out on a mission yesterday, Xander sent someone to spread rumors about how I wanted to call off the engagement. Ceddy almost died because of that and had to receive emergency treatment. Don't you think Xander deserves to be taught a lesson?" Gwendolyn sounded so righteous even after doing something wrong, so much so that the rest of the Jensions thought her statement made sense.

However, Yael sneered, "You said Xander sent someone to spread rumors and ended up causing Cedrick to get hurt, but where's your proof?"

Upon hearing that, Cedrick looked at Nico, who was standing outside the ancestral hall. In a feeble but hostile voice, Cedrick said, "You want proof, Uncle Yael? I'll give it to you."

Chapter 235

Everyone present turned to look at Cedrick, who finally spoke up.

He proceeded to remove his scarf and undo his buttons.

After all, the wound on his chest was the best proof.

Seeing that Cedrick was about to expose the love bites on his chest and collarbones to the members of the Jenson family, Gwendolyn panicked and grabbed his shirt, preventing him from taking it off.

“Don’t take off your clothes! Have you no shame? There are so many people around!” Gwendolyn uttered. Why is this jerk so shameless? I’ll definitely teach him a lesson once he recovers!

In response, Cedrick pursed his lips and smiled. “I’m a man. Exposing my chest isn’t a big deal.”

“Yes, it is!” Gwendolyn glared at him and warned in a whisper, “From now on, I’m the only one who’s allowed to look at your body. Put your clothes back on!”

Cedrick was happy to hear her staking her claim to him.

Following that, he buttoned his shirt and shot Nico a look.

Nico then brought a tied-up young man into the ancestral hall and threw him into the open space in the middle of the ancestral hall. After that, Nico passed a printed document to Logan and let Logan bring it to Valentino.

“This is the man who was spreading the fake news when Mr. Cedrick was on a mission. When I apprehended him last night, he was about to flee after receiving a payment from Mr. Xander. His statement is attached in the document,” Nico reported.

Valentino perused the statement carefully and shot Yael a stern look afterward.

Yael was dumbfounded. Xander told me he had that man killed in the suburbs last night! How did the man end up getting caught by Nico?

Valentino then handed the statement to Yael.

Yael read the document three times over to confirm its authenticity. Xander’s subordinates made a blunder! Cedrick has dirt on us now!

“Mr. Xander nearly got Mr. Cedrick, the head of the Jenson family, killed. Shouldn’t he get punished according to the Jenson family’s rules?” Nico continued.

Everyone at the scene quickly turned toward Valentino and waited for him to make a decision.

Valentino stroked his beard under everyone's gaze before letting Logan help him to his feet. "Cedrick, you're now the head of the Jenson family. The decision is yours. I'm going back to my room to rest."

Cedrick nodded slightly. "Take care, Grandpa."

"Dad! Don't leave!" Yael yelled. If Dad leaves, no one's going to help me! I'm in hot water now. This is the first time Xander does something independently, and he screwed everything up!

Alas, Valentino ignored Yael and left the ancestral hall without looking back.

After Valentino left, the rest of the members of the Jenson family followed suit.

All of a sudden, only Gwendolyn, Cedrick, Yael, and Nico were left in the spacious ancestral hall.

The young man that Nico had apprehended had also been taken away.

Now that they were alone, Yael no longer had to care about his dignity. As such, he humbled himself and smiled ingratiatingly. "Cedrick, I doubt Xander knew things would turn out this way. Perhaps it's not

necessary to deem he had the intention to harm you. Furthermore, he's also injured heavily and unconscious. Shall we just call it even and move on?"

"No can do, Mr. Yael. It was my idea to teach Xander a lesson, so you're more than welcome to argue with me regarding that. Meanwhile, Xander harming Ceddy is another matter altogether. As you can see, these are two different matters," Gwendolyn answered instead.

Yael glared at her and turned back toward Cedrick. "What do you say, Cedrick?"

Cedrick carried Gwendolyn onto his lap and caressed her cheek lovingly. The couple acted all lovey-dovey with each other right before Yael as Cedrick said, "Gwen's right. Those are two different matters."

With that, he turned to look at Yael coldly. "I heard that Xander is still unconscious now. Is that true? Is he hurt badly?"

"Yes! I'll give him an earful when he wakes up. I'll surely tell him to behave himself in the future!" Yael promised, smiling.

Cedrick ignored him and looked at Nico. "I want you to invite Xander here personally. Bring him here, even if you have to carry him."

Yael's expression changed slightly, and he immediately gave the bodyguards outside the door a look.

Twenty minutes later, Nico dragged Xander into the ancestral hall.

"Boss, Mr. Yael's bodyguards were trying to sneak Mr. Xander out of his villa just now, but I stopped them," Nico reported.

"Good job," Cedrick uttered.

Xander was rescued within a few hours after the incident took place the night before. Hence, being a sturdy man, he merely suffered minor injuries.

"What punishment do you have in mind, Uncle Yael?" Cedrick asked. I knew they were pretending from the beginning.

Yael's tone softened when he replied, "Xander was too immature, but luckily, you're fine. Maybe we should just give him a light punishment. I'll definitely give him a beating when we return home later. Is that okay?"

“Dad!” Xander was dissatisfied. Why should I get punished? I was just unlucky. That bullet should’ve hit either Cedrick’s heart or brain!

Gwendolyn heard that the Jenson family was a strict and conservative family with its own set of rules and regulations, but she didn’t know if the beating Yael swore he would give Xander would suffice for such an incident. Nonetheless, that didn’t matter to her, for she was merely there to enjoy the show.

Cedrick didn’t respond to Yael’s words, but the grim look on his face said it all. Obviously, he wasn’t happy with the suggestion.

Right then, Nico said on Cedrick’s behalf, “Mr. Yael, don’t you think you’re being too protective of your son? If Boss weren’t so lucky, the Jensons might need a new head of the family now. I think what Boss wants is for Mr. Xander to receive a whipping punishment. Ten strokes, and we’ll let this matter slide.”

“A whipping punishment?” Xander gritted his teeth in anger. “Aren’t you alive and well, Cedrick? Why do you want to punish me so severely? You’re crossing the line!”

With an icy look in his eyes, Cedrick added casually, “You should be grateful I’m alive. Otherwise, you might receive a punishment worse than that. If you continue talking nonsense, I’ll add five strokes for every word you speak.”

Logan was in charge of executing the punishments, so after he sent Valentino back to the room, he came back to the ancestral hall.

Since Logan had already heard it, there was no way Xander could get out of the punishment.

The latter had to remove his shirt to receive the Jenson family’s whipping punishment.

At that moment, Gwendolyn was still sitting on Cedrick’s lap.

Patting Gwendolyn on the waist, Cedrick turned to Nico. “Bring Gwenny out of here. I’ll be right there,” he instructed.

“Understood,” Nico answered.

However, Gwendolyn protested, “I don’t want to leave! Does he need to remove his shirt? There’s no way his build is sexier than yours, so I’m not interested at all. I just want to watch him suffer.”

That wasn’t the only reason she wanted to stay. Another reason was that Nico once told her that six months ago, Cedrick had received the same whipping punishment for her sake. Needless to say, she was very curious about the severity of the punishment.

Cedrick didn’t say a word in response.

As such, Gwendolyn grabbed his arm and pouted, acting coy. “Please trust me, Ceddy! You’re the best!”

Ultimately, Cedrick caved in because he couldn’t say no to her sweet voice.

Xander was forced to kneel in the center of the ancestral hall, and his shirt was torn apart to reveal his skinny back. Before the punishment even started, he was already trembling all over like a leaf. Apparently, he feared the whip to his bones.

Yael couldn’t bear to watch his son getting whipped. However, Logan’s presence meant that Valentino had consented to the punishment. In other words, there was nothing Yael could do to save his son.

First, Logan took out the whip from a wooden box and bowed before the altar in the ancestral hall. He then bowed at Xander and said, “I’m sorry, Mr. Xander.”

As soon as Logan finished his sentence, a sharp sound rang out, and the skin on Xander’s back was torn open by the whip, with blood trickling down from the cut.

Due to how skinny he was, the whip seemed to strike his bones every single time. Blood splattered everywhere, making for a horrible sight.

Xander endured the first couple of strokes in silence but broke down after the fifth stroke. He was in so much pain that he was crying out in agony and rolling around on the ground. He could no longer be bothered about his dignity and image because the pain was too much to handle.

Meanwhile, Cedrick remained expressionless. A ruthless, frosty glint flashed in his eyes as he ordered his subordinates to hold Xander still.

After seven strokes, Xander fainted on the spot.

Cedrick then got someone to wake Xander up by splashing a bucket of cold water onto him before Logan delivered the final two strokes.

By the time Logan was done, Xander's face was as pale as a sheet, and he lost consciousness, sprawling on the ground. In the end, Yael had to get the bodyguards to carry Xander back. Xander merely received ten strokes, but his back was already covered in gaping wounds and lacerations.

Gwendolyn silently watched everything unfold. Although she looked calm on the outside, she was actually in shock.

After having a firsthand view of Xander's punishment, she finally realized how terrifying the Jenson family's whipping punishment was. Xander lost consciousness, and his back is covered in severe wounds when he only received ten strokes! Caddy endured twenty strokes while being injured back then, and he even walked me back to the villa after the punishment, all the while bearing with the pain. I can't even imagine how much pain he was in at that time.

Chapter 236

Gwendolyn's heart was broken. If I didn't see the punishment with my own eyes, I would never know how much pain Cedrick suffered because of me!

At that moment, she was filled with guilt and sadness.

Her mind was a jumbled mess, and she was in a daze when she left the Jenson residence while holding Cedrick's hand.

Like a frightened little bunny, her eyes reddened after they got into the car.

Cedrick then pulled her into his embrace, kissed her forehead, and uttered guiltily, "You're scared, aren't you? It's my bad. Such a gory scene isn't for the faint of heart. I should've asked Nico to bring you away."

Choking back on tears, Gwendolyn buried her face in his neck and sobbed. "I should be the one apologizing. I've only realized the severity of the punishment you went through. Instead of comforting you back then, I even scolded you. I'm such a terrible person."

"Don't say that." Cedrick cradled her tear-streaked face and said in a serious tone, "You scolded me because you cared about me. Therefore, I couldn't be happier when you scolded me."

What nonsense is he talking about? With tears shining in her pretty eyes, Gwendolyn knew he was trying to console her and make her feel better. However, it didn't make her feel less guilty.

"That's all in the past now. My wounds are all healed, and none of them left a scar. It doesn't hurt anymore." Cedrick leaned in and kissed her tears away. "Your tears are as precious as gems to me, so stop crying, okay? Otherwise, I might go bankrupt."

"Who taught you all these sweet nothings?" Gwendolyn chuckled, amused.

Nico was focusing on the road when he noticed Gwendolyn looking in his direction. "It wasn't me! I've never even been in a relationship. I'm a pure and innocent boy!" Nico quickly explained, trying to clear his name.

Fine, then. He hasn't even fallen in love before. What a poor guy. Perhaps I shouldn't make things difficult for him. Gwendolyn chose to believe Nico.

Afterward, Cedrick grabbed her hand and placed it over his chest. "I'm speaking facts. Can you feel my heartbeat to know that I'm being honest?"

Gwendolyn leaned in carefully to feel his heartbeat as a blissful sensation washed over her.

“Ceddy, let me shower you with love from now on!” Gwendolyn smiled mischievously and kissed him on the lips.

In response, Cedrick closed his eyes and deepened the kiss. The two soon engaged in a passionate and intimate session, and the atmosphere in the car grew sickly sweet.

Nico tightened his grip on the steering wheel and stole occasional glances at the rear-view mirror, feeling devastated. What the f*ck? They’re tormenting me with their public display of affection! This is so hurtful... Can’t they consider my feelings? I’m still single, after all.

Cedrick finally pulled away from Gwendolyn after a few minutes of making out in the car.

She then touched his cheek and noticed something was amiss. “Why is your face so pale? Your body is icy-cold! Are you feeling unwell?”

“I’ve just gone through surgery, remember? It’s only normal that I look pale.” Cedrick shook his head.

“But—”

Gwendolyn wanted to question further, but Cedrick cut her off by asking, “Are you going back to the Harris residence?”

Nico took a glance in the rear-view mirror and noticed Cedrick’s hint. “By the way, Boss, you have to attend an important meeting at Jenson Group today,” Nico immediately voiced before pretending to check the time. “We have two hours before the meeting starts. When will we be heading over?”

Hearing that Cedrick had business matters to attend to, Gwendolyn had no choice but to say, “I see. I’m not going back to the Harris residence, though. Please send me to Angle Corporation. The ribbon-cutting ceremony is in two days’ time. I need to make some arrangements.”

Nico turned the car around and drove to Angle Corporation.

Cedrick kissed Gwendolyn on her forehead before she exited the car. "Don't leave the office right after work. I'll come fetch you, and we'll have dinner together."

Gwendolyn nodded obediently and hopped off the car. Wearing a sweet smile, she kept looking back and waving Cedrick goodbye as she made her way into the building.

Cedrick rolled down the window and waved back at her, beaming as he watched her enter the building.

As soon as she disappeared into the building, Cedrick could no longer suppress the metallic taste in his throat.

He quickly rolled the window back up and coughed lightly with his fist over his lips.

Instantly, his slender fingers were covered in blood.

Nico jumped in alarm. "Why are you coughing up blood again, Boss?"

"Go to the laboratory." Cedrick furrowed his brows and elegantly wiped the blood off his lips and fingers with a napkin. There was nothing but grimness in his eyes as he stared at the blood-stained napkin.

Upon arriving at the laboratory, Joshua conducted another virus serum test on Cedrick.

Half an hour later, the atmosphere in the laboratory became tense.

"Everything was fine before this, so why is your condition worsening? Did you suffer any heavy injuries, Cedrick?" Joshua questioned.

Cedrick didn't say a word in response.

Suddenly, Nico revealed, "Boss got shot during a mission yesterday. The bullet missed his heart by two centimeters. He even purposely delayed treatment just to win Gwendolyn back!"

Joshua's expression turned grim, and he went on to take off Cedrick's suit and shirt to examine his wound.

To Joshua's surprise, Cedrick's body was filled with love bites. What the f*ck? This man sure is thirsty for sex!

"You knew your immune system would be weak after surgery and losing so much blood, but instead of recuperating, you went out in the cold, moved around, and even... did exercise! Do you have a death wish?" Joshua grumbled.

In the face of his doctor, Cedrick explained sheepishly, "As you can see, Gwenny came on to me. I didn't initiate it."

Upon hearing that, Nico lowered his head and chuckled silently before exchanging glances with Joshua.

Joshua couldn't help examining the love bites on his body once more and sighed enviously. "Way to go, Cedrick! How did it feel to have a girl coming on to you? Was it amazing?"

Since they were all men, Cedrick didn't mind sharing his feelings.

With a dark look on his face, he uttered aggressively, "It was fabulous!"

Joshua and Nico burst out laughing in response.

Cedrick shot them a stern look.

Joshua immediately put on a serious expression and said, "Um... Well, please try your best to suppress your urges in the future. Even if you don't move your upper body, sexual intercourse can increase the rate of your blood flow. Your body is too weak now because you've just undergone surgery."

Cedrick merely hummed in acknowledgment.

Afterward, Joshua conducted another full-body checkup on Cedrick.

Another half an hour later, the results came out, and the atmosphere in the room became tense once again.

The air was filled with a deathly silence when Joshua eventually heaved a sigh and said, "The virus spread too fast because your immune system is weak, and now, it has affected the blood supply to your heart. You might experience chronic chest pain after this."

Cedrick pursed his lips with a grim look in his eyes. There was no telling what was on his mind.

Meanwhile, Nico was worried sick. "Is it life-threatening?"

"Not for now, but you have to keep your emotions under control. I'll prescribe you some medicine. Take a pill whenever your chest hurts instead of enduring the pain and waiting for it to pass." Joshua then added, "Also, my suppressant still works on you for now, but if the virus continues to spread, I can't guarantee you won't suffer any side effects. In other words, I won't know how long you'll have to live."

A blanket of silence fell over the room once again.

Chapter 237

Cedrick maintained an indifferent expression, as if he wasn't the one the doctor had just pronounced a death sentence upon.

"Are you saying that if I fail to suppress the virus, I might die at any moment?"

Joshua lowered his head without answering, seemingly replying in the affirmative.

His response caused Cedrick to fall silent, as he had assumed that the suppressant would easily help him live decades more.

If he had known about it earlier, he wouldn't have let Gwendolyn know that he was still alive. The last thing he wanted was for her to be once again devastated by his death.

Overwhelmed by the grim atmosphere, Nico failed to keep his emotions in check and began tearing up.

Hearing his assistant's sniffles, Cedrick shot him a glare. "What are you crying for? I'm not dead yet."

"I... I just feel..."

I just feel pity for you, Boss... You're barely thirty. Yet you're tormented by your illness and have to live out your days in suspense. I can't believe how cruel life is to you!

Scratching his head, Joshua remarked awkwardly, "Actually, the situation isn't as bad as you think. I was just painting a hypothetical scenario. As long as Cedrick gets his treatment on schedule and maintains a strong immune system, my suppressant can keep him alive for at least twenty more years."

The look on Nico's face was still depressed. "What happens after that?"

Joshua threw Cedrick a confident look. "With twenty years to go, I'm sure I'll come up with an antidote that will help Cedrick live a long life."

The tension in the room gradually eased when everyone learned that there was still hope for a cure.

Blowing his nose with a tissue, Nico complained, "Prof. Mallory, can't you tell us everything in one go? You scared us to death!"

Joshua chuckled as he injected another dose of the suppressant into Cedrick to enhance the drug's effects. On top of that, he prescribed medication to help the latter's wounds heal and painkillers for Cedrick's chest pain.

Finally, he reminded his patient to restrain his lust and refrain from doing intense "bed exercises."

Despite agreeing on the surface, Cedrick was actually not paying much attention.

By the time they emerged from the lab, it was almost time to get off work.

Cedrick was heading to his car to pick Gwendolyn up from Angle when he encountered Asher walking in his direction in a pilot's uniform. The latter was wearing an insidious look, while his wife, Sienna, was also beside him.

One could tell that they had just disembarked from the plane, and from the scowl on their faces, it was clear that both of them were here looking for trouble.

Nico greeted them politely, "It's a pleasure to see you, Mr. Asher, Mrs. Harris."

While Sienna nodded in acknowledgment, the glowering Asher paid him no heed and approached Cedrick directly.

Since Asher was his former brother-in-law, Cedrick had to build a good rapport with him. Concealing the weird look in his eyes, he asked, "What brings you to Salinsburgh, Mr. Asher?"

Stopping in his tracks a meter away, Asher pulled out a gun and pointed it at Cedrick's head. The murderous look in his eyes couldn't be any more obvious.

"Mr. Asher?" Nico was stunned by the sudden turn of events.

Cedrick was a sea of calm as a smirk broke out across his lips. Appearing relaxed with his hands in his pockets, he locked gazes with Asher. "What's the meaning of this, Mr. Asher?"

Brimming with murderous intent, Asher answered, "I'm going to kill you!"

Meanwhile, Gwendolyn had waited for Cedrick for five minutes at her office, but there was still no sign of him.

Ceddy promised to come and pick me up for dinner. He has always been punctual.

Just as Gwendolyn was about to give him a call, she received a message from Nico.

It read: Mr. Asher is trying to kill Mr. Jenson at the lab.

Gwendolyn was shocked. Why is Asher back so suddenly?

She knitted her brows as she remembered seeking Asher's help to check Cedrick's travel records.

"Oh no!"

Without a moment's hesitation, she grabbed her handbag and took a taxi to the lab.

Before the car came to a stop, she could already see, through the car window, Asher pointing a gun at Cedrick's head. The murderous look on his face was unmistakable.

"Asher, what are you doing?"

Gwendolyn grabbed the barrel of the gun with one hand and shielded Cedrick behind her with the other. She then suggested with a smile, "Whatever it is, why don't we talk about it? There's no point in resorting to violence. Bullets won't solve anything."

However, when Asher refused to budge, Sienna helped persuade him, “Hubby, why don’t you put away the gun? You might hurt Gwendolyn.”

Only then did Asher holster his gun. Yet the hostility he exuded didn’t diminish one bit.

Gwendolyn quickly turned around to check on Cedrick. “Did my brother hit you? Are you hurt?”

Shaking his head, Cedrick held her warm and dainty hand as he curled his lips into a smile. “There’s no way I would allow anyone other than you to lay a finger on me.”

His lighthearted joke brought Gwendolyn a sense of relief. He appears fine.

Asher frowned upon seeing the two interacting intimately with each other. Narrowing his eyes, he thundered, “Gwendolyn, do you know that he has been lying to you all this time and manipulating your emotions?”

Just a few days ago, he was still wondering why Gwendolyn was suddenly so intrigued with her fiancé. Upon further investigations, he discovered that Cedrick was actually her ex-husband.

Gwendolyn retorted, “I’ve already found out about that a long time ago, Asher. Everything that happened back then was nothing but a misunderstanding. It no longer bothers me now.”

Asher’s tone remained just as frosty. “That’s because he tricked you! You can’t forgive him for wasting three years of your youth just like that. I’m going to cancel the wedding for you.”

“No, Asher!”

Gwendolyn hugged her brother by the shoulders. “I have already beaten him up for his betrayal. On top of that, he has rescued me thrice in Fairlake. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t have returned to Salinsburgh in one piece. Even Treyton has been moved by his actions, so please don’t hold it against him anymore.”

Asher simply gave her a silent stare.

Recognizing his silence as a sign of his wavering stance, Gwendolyn pressed on. "By the way, our marriage is a commercial alliance. It can't be canceled without proper reason, Asher. Please reconsider your decision."

"What are you worried about? I'm more than capable of paying the compensation fees as long as that's what you want."

Gwendolyn subsequently resorted to pouting and speaking in an adorable voice. "But Asher, that's not what I want. I want to be with him."

Cedrick, whose attention was on Gwendolyn throughout the exchange, felt his heart warmed by her words.

As Asher contemplated what he heard, Gwendolyn held his arm and continued nuzzling her head against it like an adorable kitten. "I'm serious, Asher."

When Asher turned to his wife, Sienna nodded with a smile to indicate her approval.

Finally, he let out a long sigh and relented, albeit reluctant. "Since you insist, I'll observe him for a while. Until you have my permission, the wedding will be put on hold just like Kieran's. You're not allowed to secretly register it or sleep with him behind my back. Otherwise, I'll break both your legs!"

Gwendolyn felt a chill down her spine as she gulped by reflex.

D*mn! I've already done it with him. What am I going to do? Are my legs doomed?

Cedrick's expression froze at the same time.

When Gwendolyn didn't say anything in response, Asher shifted his gaze between the two and noticed something amiss. He was alarmed, especially when he recognized the guilty look on his sister's face that indicated she had done something wrong.

“Have you registered your marriage?”

Gwendolyn waved her hands frantically and shook her head. “No, we haven’t. I wouldn’t dare!”

Asher’s expression turned grimmer at that. “Don’t tell me you slept with each other?”

“When we were married... Does that count?” Biting her lip, she swiftly averted her gaze.

“You weren’t using your real identities back then. Moreover, you’re divorced now, so it doesn’t count. I’m asking about now.”

Gwendolyn fell completely silent.

All she could do was lower her head and stare at her toes anxiously with her ears flushed red.

As the answer dawned upon Asher, rage ignited in his eyes and the murderous aura he emitted was enough to strike fear in everyone around him.

For the second time, he raised his gun and pointed it at Cedrick.

“How dare you sleep with her when you’re only engaged! I’m going to kill you!”

Chapter 238

Gwendolyn’s face lost all color when she heard her brother’s angry roar.

Oh no! I should’ve been more disciplined. This is getting out of control!

Nevertheless, Cedrick continued to maintain a defiant stance with his eyes showing no fear at all. In fact, he looked as if he would do it all over again even if given a second chance.

Asher perceived Cedrick's demeanor as provocation.

Overwhelmed by rage, Asher prepared to pull the trigger.

"No, no! You're making a mistake, Asher! It's me. I'm the one who came onto him!" Gwendolyn mumbled as her toes clenched in embarrassment.

When forced to choose between sacrificing Cedrick's life versus her legs, it made more sense to go with the latter.

Asher was baffled.

"If you don't believe me, you can check his neck. It was I... who couldn't hold myself back."

Gwendolyn's voice grew increasingly faint toward the end of her sentence. Covering her cheeks in embarrassment, she could feel a burning sensation spread from her cheeks to her neck.

Filled with skepticism, Asher gradually approached Cedrick with the gun still in his hand.

In the meantime, Cedrick remained motionless as he allowed Asher to unravel his woolen scarf.

Finally, Asher was stunned by the sight of the other man's hickey-covered neck.

This is f*cking outrageous...

As the air seemed to be frozen still, a strange atmosphere surrounded them.

With her face buried in her hands, Gwendolyn wished for the ground to open up and swallow her whole.

D*mn it. This is just great. Now everyone knows how daring I was at the hospital! Argh, this is so embarrassing!

Just as she was screaming inwardly, she suddenly felt someone twist her right ear forcefully.

It was so painful that her already reddened ear took on a deeper hue.

“Ouch! It hurts! We’re in public right now, Asher! Can’t you save me some face?” she exclaimed. Cedrick and Nico are watching!

Asher was overwhelmed by anger. “Well done, Gwendolyn! Should I then sing your praises for the glory you have brought me?”

“Oh, you don’t have to praise me. I’m, after all, someone who keeps a low profile,” she replied mischievously. Just don’t punish me too harshly.

“Hmph! Still spouting nonsense, eh?”

With a dangerous glint in his eyes, Asher released Gwendolyn’s ear and grabbed the back of her collar like he was scruffing a kitten.

“You’re coming home with me! Also, you have three minutes to say goodbye to your legs!”

With her face buried in her hands, Gwendolyn was in despair.

Asher is really mad. Is he going to kill me when we’re home?

Exuding an icy air, Asher turned around and walked back to his car with Gwendolyn in tow. All of a sudden, he felt someone grab his wrist.

Cedrick's narrowed eyes emitted an aura that was equally frosty. "Mr. Asher, Gwenny is an adult who has the right to make her own choices. On top of that, she's my fiancée. Nothing about what she has done is inappropriate."

"Outsiders aren't allowed to interfere with how I discipline my sister!"

Asher gave him the side-eye as he sneered, "I heard that the Jenson family is strict with their upbringing. Little did I expect them to have raised such an unscrupulous failure of a man like you. Don't think I'll forget how you cheated on her just because she's defending you! I'll first break her legs before coming to kill you!"

As both men were locked in a staredown, sparks could be seen flying in the air.

Just as Asher turned to leave again, Cedrick tightened his grip on the former's wrist, refusing to back down.

In a fit of rage, Asher released Gwendolyn and swiftly shoved Cedrick back with his palm, exerting considerable force.

Cedrick didn't fight back and allowed Asher to strike his chest.

Groaning in pain, he staggered backward as his face turned pale from the excruciating pain. Asher had inadvertently struck his gunshot wound.

He tried his best to swallow the blood that rushed up his throat but to no avail. The blood ended up trickling down the corner of his lips.

"Ceddy!"

Gwendolyn rushed to his side to support him, her eyes reddening out of concern. Seeing him cough up blood, she could tell how heavy-handed Asher's strike was.

“Asher! He just had surgery after being shot yesterday. How could you hit him?”

Asher took a look at his hand before shifting his gaze to the grimacing Cedrick. Noticing the cold sweat on Cedrick’s forehead and how feeble he looked, Asher realized he wasn’t pretending and felt somewhat guilty. “I thought he would fight back.”

He knew that Cedrick was good with his fists and could go toe to toe with him. Thus, he was caught by surprise when Cedrick didn’t dodge his attack.

Once the pain had passed, Cedrick pulled Gwendolyn into his arms and declared defiantly, “Mr. Asher, I’m Gwenny’s fiancé, and I have borne your punishment on her behalf. Is that palm strike enough? If it isn’t, I’m willing to sacrifice both my legs.”

“No! Cedd...” Gwendolyn shed tears as she stared at the man, heartbroken and moved at the same time.

Forcing a smile, Cedrick wiped away her tears with the tips of his fingers.

It really hurts. I can’t hold on any longer.

“Gwenny, give me a hug...”

As soon as Gwendolyn held out her hands to him, he slumped weakly into her embrace. Leaning against her shoulder, he tried his best to catch his breath.

Meanwhile, Asher maintained a complicated expression as he stared blankly at the two lovebirds.

He was at a loss for words after making his own sister cry.

Finally, Sienna came forward and let out a sigh. “All right now. We are no longer living in the olden days. Both of them are already engaged, so why does sleeping with each other before marriage matter

anymore? Cedrick is willing to suffer on Gwendolyn's behalf, which should be good enough for all of us. You should stop meddling with their affairs."

Rendered speechless, Asher turned to give his wife a look.

Why isn't she on my side? Instead, she's making me look like the bad guy here.

Thereafter, he shifted his gaze toward his sister and Cedrick.

One was crying her lungs out, while the other was in agonized pain.

Why does it look like I'm the villain breaking up a pair of lovebirds?

In the end, Asher, too, let out a sigh. "Fine. I'll let it slide this time since he's injured. Just behave yourselves, all right?"

"I understand." Gwendolyn gave Asher a pitiful look, leading him to soften his tone.

"Take him to have his wound examined, but you're not allowed to stay over at the Jenson residence. You have to come home after that. Do you understand?"

The elated Gwendolyn felt that her tears were not shed in vain. "Thank you, Asher."

"Mmm-hmm."

Upon retracting his gaze, Asher turned and left.

Sienna hurried up to Gwendolyn's side and whispered, "Asher is just being strict on the surface. You know how he always has a soft spot for you, so don't be angry at him, okay?"

“Let’s go!”

Asher’s annoyed voice could be heard from the front.

“Coming!”

Sienna comforted Gwendolyn by patting her on the shoulder before giving Cedrick an approving look. Only then did she rush back to Asher’s side.

It wasn’t until their car drove away that Gwendolyn checked on Cedrick’s condition.

“Does it hurt badly? Can you still walk? Should I have Nico carry you to the car?”

Already worried sick, Nico nodded vehemently, agreeing with Gwendolyn’s suggestion.

Joshua had just reminded Cedrick not to get himself hurt. Yet the latter ended up being struck the moment they left the lab.

Thus, Nico hurried forward and offered his shoulder for support.

Unexpectedly, Cedrick ignored Nico and gave Gwendolyn a mischievous look. “Actually, I stepped back a little when your brother hit me, so the injury isn’t serious. It was just a charade. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“Really? Don’t you dare lie to me.”

“I swear I’m telling the truth.”

Gwendolyn snorted in laughter. “I’ll be calling you Liar Ceddy from now on!”

Chapter 239

"No, please don't..."

Cedrick kissed her on the neck and, with a weak voice, whispered in her ear, "I like hearing you call me Ceddy, Gwenny."

Gwendolyn cradled his face with both hands and kissed his bloody lips. "Sure thing. I'll keep calling you Ceddy for as long as you like."

Cedrick's pale lips curled into a satisfied smile when he heard that.

"Are you able to walk?" Gwendolyn asked while carefully adjusting her posture to support him.

"Yeah."

Just like that, the two of them clung tightly to each other as they slowly made their way toward the car.

Nico was frozen in place as he watched the two of them from behind.

He couldn't help but feel as though he was being a third wheel there.

After returning to the Jenson residence, Gwendolyn began removing Cedrick's clothes the moment he lay on the bed.

"Take it easy, will you? Nico can handle this stuff."

Gwendolyn shot him an annoyed glare. "What, are you afraid that I would ravage your body? Don't worry; I'm not so desperate that I would take advantage of a severely-wounded man!"

"Oh? In that case, I guess I'm still not charming enough."

Cedrick sounded a little disappointed when he said that.

Holding back her laughter, Gwendolyn smiled and gave him a peck on the lips as a reward.

That was clearly not enough for Cedrick, though.

Is that all I get?

Gwendolyn flashed him a sweet smile when she saw the resentful look in his eyes.

Her sparkly eyes were then filled with seriousness as she spoke. "I'd feel bad for taking advantage of you while you're injured, Ceddy! We can't do it just yet, so stop seducing me!" Frowning slightly, she puffed her cheeks.

Nico, who was standing at the corner of the bed, simply stared at the lovey-dovey couple in awkward silence.

Tsk, tsk, tsk... Taking advantage? Seducing? What an interesting way to use those words! Well, given how Boss is all weak from his injuries, I suppose those words would fit the scenario perfectly!

He was snapped out of his train of thought when the two of them glared coldly at him and shouted in unison, "Get out!"

Nico let out an awkward chuckle and scratched the back of his head as he said, "And here I thought you would need my help applying the medication, Boss. Well, I suppose I have no reason to stick around now that Gwendolyn is here. Very well, then. I shall take my leave now, so you two can carry on."

He then put the medication and first-aid kit down on the nightstand before stepping out of the bedroom and closing the door behind him.

Gwendolyn waited until he was gone before she continued taking Cedrick's clothes off.

Sure enough, the wound had ripped open, and blood had seeped through the bandages, staining it red along with his dress shirt.

"I knew it! You were lying to me again! How could you call this a minor injury?" she exclaimed, her eyes reddening.

"Don't worry; it'll take a lot more than this to kill me," Cedrick comforted her calmly.

"Shut up! You're such an idiot! Asher loves me a lot, so I'd be fine even if I did go home with him! Dad and Sienna are very protective of me, so Asher would just give me a few smacks at best! It's a different story with you, though. Why did you have to stop him?"

Cedrick gently caressed her ears that Asher had pinched earlier. Although they were no longer red, he was still heartbroken to see her get hurt, even for a little bit. "Just think of it as me being impulsive. I won't do it again next time."

He had fallen deeply in love with Gwendolyn before he even realized it.

She was the one woman he wanted to love and spoil for the rest of his life.

Even I can't bring myself to hurt her, so I won't let anyone else do so, including her brother!

Gwendolyn knew he wasn't actually listening to her, so she simply let out a sigh and shifted her attention toward the medication Nico had left them with.

Since she had no experience with helping someone bandage their wounds, Cedrick had to guide her and assist her at times.

A few hours later, they were finally done with applying the medication and bandaging the wound.

Cedrick looked a little better after taking the medication. Exhausted, he then rested his head on Gwendolyn's lap and fell asleep shortly after.

Gwendolyn felt conflicted when she glanced at the clock and saw that it was really late. She knew that she would definitely wake Cedrick up if she left, but Asher would get mad at her if she didn't go home.

Feeling a little hesitant, Gwendolyn lowered her gaze and took a good look at Cedrick.

He seems to be sleeping pretty soundly. Even when he's asleep, his facial features look as exquisite as ever.

She got so mesmerized by his face that she just sat there staring at him until her phone rang.

Having been snapped out of her dazed state, she glanced at the screen and saw that it was a call from Sienna.

"How is he doing, Gwendolyn? Are his wounds serious?" she asked.

Gwendolyn cleared her throat and pretended to sob as she replied, "You know how hard Asher can hit, Sienna. Ceddy already had existing injuries, and Asher worsened things by injuring him even further! He has been unconscious ever since we reached the Jenson residence!"

Sienna knew what Gwendolyn was getting at and pretended to ask out of concern, "That bad, huh? I guess Asher did go a little too hard on him. So, what do you plan on doing now? Will you be coming home tonight?"

Seizing the golden opportunity that had presented itself, Gwendolyn said, "Ceddy got hurt because of Asher, so I want to stay with him and take care of him for a few days. I'll head back to the Harris residence once he's all better! Will that be okay?"

"Um..."

Sienna held the phone near her mouth and covered it with her other hand as she whispered, "You can stay with him if you want. I'll talk to Asher about this, but you need to behave yourself as well. Don't—"

Asher cut her off by yelling angrily from afar, "I'll break your legs if you dare sleep with him again, Gwendolyn! No one will be able to save you when that happens!"

His voice was so loud that Gwendolyn had to move the phone far away from her ear.

She then glanced at Cedrick and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that he was still asleep.

Why did Asher have to word it like that, though? He makes it sound like I'm some kind of rapist who's trying to defile a demure woman!

Of course, Gwendolyn didn't dare say any of that to Asher. "He's an injured man, Asher! I would never take advantage of a guy while he's injured! I'm not that desperate, okay?" she protested softly.

Asher simply snorted in disdain and walked away.

"Don't worry, Gwendolyn. Your brother and I haven't had sex tonight, so I'll be sure to placate him and keep him under control. You just make sure to take good care of Cedrick. He's a handsome and responsible young man. I kind of like him," Sienna reassured her.

"How dare you say you like him, Sienna? You've gotten rather bold lately, huh? Come here!"

"Huh? Hey! Wait! I'm not done talking to—"

The line went dead all of a sudden.

Gwendolyn froze for a few seconds before blushing really hard.

What did Sienna just say? They haven't had sex tonight? Is it a thing for married couples to openly talk about their sex life like that? Asher seemed pretty angry, though. Will Sienna be able to walk

tomorrow? Oh, well... I'm sorry, Sienna! You're going to have to sacrifice yourself so I can stay here and look after Cedrick!

Suddenly, Gwendolyn noticed through the corner of her eye a smile on Cedrick's face.

Huh? Since when did he wake up? I can't believe he was eavesdropping on my conversation!

"Ceddy?"

In just the blink of an eye, Cedrick's smile disappeared without a trace, and he appeared to be sleeping soundly again.

Wow, he sure is good at putting up an act! Sometimes, I can't even tell when he's lying and when he's telling the truth.

Feeling a little unhappy, Gwendolyn pouted and let out a snort.

Hmph! Had he not been injured, I would have taught him a lesson by now!

Chapter 240

After giving it some thought, Gwendolyn came up with a mischievous idea and said in a reluctant tone, "I'm glad to see that you're sleeping so soundly, Ceddy. You know what? I think it's better if I head back to the Harris residence. Nico can help look after you instead. I'll come see you in a few days, okay?"

Right as Gwendolyn was about to move his head off her lap, Cedrick wrapped his arms around her waist and nuzzled his head against her chest.

"A burly man like Nico can't possibly take good care of me. I want you, Gwenny..." he said in a somewhat childish and adorable voice.

Gwendolyn had to suppress her urge to laugh as she pushed his head away. "That simply won't do. I left all of my luggage back at the Harris residence, so I need to head back."

The next thing she knew, Cedrick sat bolt upright and gave Nico a call.

"I want you to go shopping at the mall tomorrow. Gwenny wears size S clothes and size thirty-four shoes. Oh, and buy all the pretty-looking jewelry you can find. I want all the closets in the villa filled with clothes, you hear me?" he said before hanging up the phone.

Cedrick then buried himself in Gwendolyn's chest once again while she was still stunned.

Despite being a tall and sturdy man, he was so weak and vulnerable while injured that Gwendolyn could easily pin him down if she wanted to.

Unbeknownst to her, Cedrick's lips had curled into a gleeful grin.

Don't even think about leaving after moving in with me!

Oblivious to his scheme, Gwendolyn was still thinking about the instructions he gave Nico earlier and asked curiously, "How did you know that I wear size S clothes?"

"By hugging you."

Um, okay... Fair enough, I guess. I'm skinny, so anyone could easily figure that out if they put some effort into it. However...

Gwendolyn's expression slid into a frown as she pressed on, "What about my shoe size, then?"

Cedrick fell silent the moment he heard that.

Oh, sh*t! Did I just expose myself there?

Gwendolyn figured he was probably trying to come up with an excuse when she saw him go silent.

This guy... He's definitely up to something!

She then extended her slender fingers and pinched his face really hard.

"Ouch!" Cedrick winced from the pain and exclaimed, "Don't hurt me! I'm injured, remember?"

Why does she always bully me in my most vulnerable moments?

Gwendolyn ignored his protests and asked, "Be honest with me! Since when did you find out about my shoe size?"

"You got drunk at The Honey Bee, so I carried you to a hotel and spent the entire night looking after you. I helped clean your face and wash your legs. The other time was when you got drunk at the Jenson residence. That's all!" Cedrick replied.

He found her soft and smooth feet to be incredibly adorable, so he decided to measure them with his hands.

To Cedrick's surprise, Gwendolyn's feet were smaller than his palms.

Gwendolyn's face went red when she heard that, and she instinctively curled her toes as well.

I can't believe Cedrick secretly washed my feet while I was unconscious! This is so awkward!

She then exerted more force in pinching Cedrick's cheek, causing him to grimace and yell in pain once again.

“Be honest, Cedrick! What other perverted stuff have you done to my feet? Do you have some sort of strange kink or something?”

Cedrick felt speechless when he heard that.

Huh? What kink? I’m starting to think Gwendolyn is the weird one here!

He was about to explain himself, but Gwendolyn stopped him for fear of hearing something she couldn’t accept.

“You know what? Keep it to yourself for now. I need some time to calm down and process this.”

She then pushed him away from her chest, got on her feet, and stared him down as she continued, “Due to your insolent behavior and the possibility of you having a strange kink, I have decided to observe you for a little while longer! I will sleep in the next room while I am looking after you over here, so you can forget about hugging me to sleep. On top of that, I will also lock the door. If you try to force it open in the middle of the night, I will chop both your hands off! If you dare sneak into bed with me, I will cut your manhood off!”

Gwendolyn even glared at his crotch and made a chopping motion with her hand.

“Gweny...”

Cedrick felt really helpless and speechless.

I’m so close to becoming her husband, and now she’s having second thoughts? I don’t want to get labeled as a kinky pervert!

He reached out to hold her hand, but she pulled it away in time, so he grabbed nothing but air.

Gwendolyn then ignored his pleas and added as she walked off, "Now, behave yourself and go to sleep! Say another word, and I won't talk to you for a month!"

Just like that, Cedrick could only watch on in silence as Gwendolyn left the bedroom and closed the door behind her.

He had wanted to run after her and explain himself, but he didn't want her to ignore him for a month.

In fact, he couldn't even stand her ignoring him for a day.

As such, he had no choice but to accept his fate and suffer in silence.

Cedrick didn't dare misbehave at all after being threatened by Gwendolyn.

She stayed right by his side and took great care of him throughout the next two days.

With her making sure that he was taking his medication and replacing his bandages on time, Cedrick was able to recover fairly quickly.

Despite being busy looking after Cedrick, Gwendolyn did not neglect her work at Angle Corporation at all.

She was talking to Joanne on the phone while Cedrick was taking an afternoon nap.

"Yes, that's right. Joaquin Zipper, Jennifer Weller, and Jayden Connor... Those are the celebrities whom I would like to focus on. Have them transferred over to Salinsburgh so I can supervise them

personally. Also, the opening ceremony for Angle Corporation's branch in Salinsburgh is tomorrow. We cannot afford to have anything go wrong. Have you sent out the invitations? Make sure that all the big shots in the entertainment industry have received the invitations. Oh, I also want a list of those who have confirmed that they will be attending the opening ceremony. All right, then. Keep me updated if anything changes."

Nico snuck into Cedrick's room while she was distracted with her phone call in the garden.

As Gwendolyn was occupied with her work, Cedrick quickly snuck into the bathroom, coughed up some blood, and washed it off to remove all evidence.

Nico happened to see that when he came in.

"Hey, Boss. Maybe you should come up with an excuse to get yourself checked out at the laboratory again tomorrow or the day after. You seem to be coughing up blood a lot more often lately."

Cedrick shook his head. "That won't be necessary. I know my body very well. It should be fine for the time being. Did you bring the suppressant?"

Nico whipped out the syringe containing the suppressant and quickly disinfected the needle before injecting it into Cedrick's neck.

Cedrick frowned slightly as it hurt very much, but he had gotten used to living with the need for regular injections.

Nico had displeasure written all over his face when he recalled Asher striking Cedrick the other day. "Please don't do anything reckless, Boss. Given your severe injuries, you would've fainted on the spot if it weren't for the boosted suppressant injection."

He's right. Had I fainted back then, Gwendolyn and the others would probably have found out about my condition.

With that in mind, Cedrick kept his head low and remained silent.

Nico only let out a helpless sigh as he placed the syringe into his pocket and prepared to sneak out of the room with it.

He had just stood up when Gwendolyn's voice rang out behind him.

"What suppressant?" she asked while leaning languidly against the doorframe, staring at Cedrick and Nico, who had tensed up with his back facing her.