

Wrath 1231

Chapter 1231:

Even Nina, no stranger to extravagance, was breathless at the sight of the queen's birthday banquet—a vision so mesmerizing that it made the impossible seem within reach.

"Alcott, when Aiden and Janice marry, wouldn't it be amazing to gift them a wedding as enchanting as this?" The romantic in Nina awakened, her heart fluttering as a whimsical thought escaped her lips.

Alcott made no protest to her dreamy suggestion. His smile was gentle. "I'm no expert in such matters, but if it brings them joy, count me in."

"Perfect. When we're home, I'll contact a design team and see if we can bring this vision to life." Nina never let inspiration gather dust—once it hit, she moved like wildfire, ready to turn her plans into action.

Aiden, standing nearby, felt a shiver trace his spine as fragments of their conversation reached his ears.

He wasn't in a hurry, but it was clear his parents were already planning a wedding in that very moment. Yet Janice had disappeared without a word, and whether they would weather the storm that was rapidly approaching was a question that lingered in the air.

His eyes moved to the masked woman at his side—Janice's so-called ace, the one she believed could tip the odds in their favor when nothing else would. Yet her identity remained shrouded in secrecy. From the very beginning, she had hidden behind that mask, keeping everything about her veiled.

In that instant, Aiden's phone vibrated, pulling him from his thoughts. He picked up immediately. Lancelot's voice crackled through, laced with tension.

"Aiden, Farrah's run away."

"What? How did she get away?" Aiden's brows furrowed, his voice tightening with irritation. "Weren't you keeping an eye on her? With all those bodyguards, how did she vanish?"

Lancelot's voice faltered, tinged with regret. "Farrah was behaving completely normally, following every rule, so I relaxed. But the moment I stepped into the restroom, she disappeared."

Aiden's brow furrowed in thought, but he understood the situation—this wasn't entirely Lancelot's fault. From the signs, it was evident that Farrah had somehow learned of her father's death, and it had sent her fleeing in panic. As a crucial witness, Farrah had become an obvious target—Wells would no doubt try to silence her before she could speak.

"Lancelot, get here now. I'll have someone else find Farrah." Aiden's voice was resolute. "As a prince, you need to show up at the queen's banquet. And you need to face Wells."

As the call ended, a brief flicker of unease crossed Aiden's face.

"Aiden, what's wrong? Has something happened to Janice?" Nina spun around, noticing the worry etched on his face, her heart tightening with concern.

"It's nothing major, Mom. Just a minor hiccup. Janice has it covered. Let's head inside," Aiden reassured her, his tone steady. He shot Sloane a quick glance, and she silently positioned herself near Nina and Alcott. "Stick close and make sure my parents are alright," he urged. "Got it."

Aiden threw one final glance at the masked woman before turning on his heel and walking away.

The grand banquet hall buzzed with life, its glittering guests dressed in their finest garments, their conversations flowing with refined grace and aristocratic charm.

Chapter 1232:

At that moment, Lancelot, impeccably dressed in formal attire, approached with a warm, radiant smile. "Mr. and Mrs. Green, welcome."

Nina assessed Lancelot with a discerning eye, nodding in approval. “You truly embody the role—handsome, regal. No wonder you once gave my son a challenge.”

Lancelot blinked in surprise, then understood her meaning, smiling awkwardly. “Please, Mrs. Green, don’t tease me. That was just youthful folly—nothing more.”

“What are you rambling about?” Alcott laughed, teasing. “You’re hardly old enough to talk about youthful folly. I’d call it the exciting rush of chasing love without hesitation.”

A trace of embarrassment colored Lancelot’s features as he looked away—indeed, his younger self had been more reckless than composed. Now that he had come to terms with his true feelings, he couldn’t help but feel he had missed something. Yet, without those missteps, would he have ever gained clarity?

“I am here as Janice’s representative. You may call me X.” The masked woman glided forward with a graceful bow.

“X?” Lancelot raised an eyebrow. The name carried Janice’s trademark flair. “You’re fully briefed, I assume?”

X nodded with composure. “Janice has fully briefed me. Everything will unfold as planned.”

Unfold as planned?

Lancelot’s expression shifted slightly. This meant X would be replacing RAIN in performing for the queen.

But RAIN was a giant in the music world. Replacing her with X could be seen as an insult—and the queen’s wrath was not something to provoke.

X seemed to sense Lancelot’s unease, speaking with unwavering composure. “Don’t fret. Janice sent me, and she’s already accounted for every possible outcome. You can trust her judgment.”

“Alright!” Lancelot exhaled deeply, nodding at X with newfound resolve.

Nina and Alcott moved gracefully among the guests. While they primarily operated within domestic circles, they easily recognized international faces mingling in the crowd. With Sloane close by, there was no concern for their safety. X remained by Lancelot’s side, a steady presence.

“Lancelot, how dare you show your face here?” Wells sauntered over, his expression laced with mockery. “RAIN is now a fugitive. Instead of aiding the investigation, what are you doing here?”

“As a prince, it’s only fitting for me to attend our mother’s birthday banquet and offer my congratulations.”

“But without RAIN, what exactly do you think you can do?” Wells’ face twisted with mockery and contempt.

“You’ll see what I can do when the moment arrives,” Lancelot responded, his voice low and confident. “And remember my words—you’ll be the one shedding tears.”

“Really?” Wells snapped his fingers, and Eleanor promptly joined him, linking her arm with his. “But why do I have the feeling it’s you who’ll be crying?”

Chapter 1233:

Lancelot’s pupils contracted as his gaze locked onto Eleanor, filled with an intense, unspoken apology.

Eleanor met his stare, feeling the heat of his gaze. Her heart fluttered with emotion, and her eyes quickly welled with unshed tears.

She had waited for this moment so long, and now, finally, she had it.

Yet, recalling the situation she was in, she had to silence the rush of emotions threatening to rise within her.

Their paths had already split long ago. Even though they now understood each other, perhaps in this lifetime, they would never get back together again.

“Oh, is this your companion?” Wells’ eyes flicked to X standing beside Lancelot, a sneer tugging at his lips. “Wearing a mask, are you planning to have her replace RAIN in presenting a gift to our mother?”

“You’re right. X is the esteemed guest I invited, and she will, in fact, offer a gift to our mother.”

Wells’ gaze darkened as he stepped closer to Lancelot. “You’re dragging the royal family’s name through the mud! Your actions abroad were one thing, but now you want to disrupt our mother’s birthday celebration?”

“I don’t!”

Wells’ glare was imposing, making Lancelot shift uncomfortably.

“Hah, you’re slowly ruining the royal family’s reputation.”

“I believe you’re mistaken.” X advanced with measured steps, her voice sharp. “Prince Lancelot has always prioritized the royal family’s well-being. Without his initiative to foster a relationship with RAIN, do you think the royal family could have forged ties with JE Consortium? Have you truly considered the immense worth JE Consortium has brought to Aerith over time?”

Lancelot was surprised, his gaze fixed on X in astonishment. She had skillfully turned Wells’ mockery on its head.

In that instant, he felt a surge of admiration for X. It became clear why Janice had chosen her; her aura matched Janice’s.

“JE Consortium saw only potential gain, which is why the partnership happened,” Wells muttered, his brow furrowing. “Lancelot’s involvement or lack thereof wouldn’t have changed a thing.”

“Oh, really?” X’s lips curved into an enigmatic smile. “Why not ask Ms. Sugden and see if she ends the collaboration with the royal family?”

Wells’ eyes narrowed, his gaze sharpening with suspicion as he studied X. This woman wasn’t Janice, yet she radiated the same powerful presence. Who was she, truly?

“Lancelot, it seems you have quite the formidable ally in addition to RAIN,” Wells remarked, his hand resting on Lancelot’s shoulder. “I do hope you excel at the banquet.”

With a dismissive gesture, he brushed past Lancelot and strode ahead. As Eleanor and Lancelot brushed past each other, their gazes avoided, but a subtle tremor ran through both their forms.

“Wait for me,” Lancelot whispered.

Eleanor slowed for a moment, a smile playing at the corners of her lips as she murmured a soft “hmm” before following Wells.

Chapter 1234:

Lancelot tilted his head back, inhaling deeply, and in that instant, the weight on his heart lifted.

Aiden exited the palace, his mind set on reaching Morpheus’ residence. As he arrived, he spotted Farrah’s silhouette.

Morpheus’ coffin lay solemnly in the grand hall. To preserve the queen’s birthday festivities, his funeral had been postponed and was now set to take place three days after the banquet.

Farrah stood beside the coffin, her tears cascading down her cheeks as she gazed at Morpheus’ still form within.

“My deepest condolences,” Aiden said as he approached, not attempting to pull her away but standing in quiet solidarity by her side.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Farrah’s voice trembled with grief she could barely contain, her fists clenched tightly as she fought back a cry. “Were you afraid I’d lose control and do something impulsive?”

“Yes!” Aiden confessed without a moment’s hesitation, his voice unwavering. “Things escalated too quickly. If you were to learn the truth, it could unravel everything we’ve carefully set in motion.”

Farrah let out a bitter laugh, relaxing her fist and extending her hand towards Morpheus, lying still in the coffin.

Her hand never made contact, lingering above him like a quiet gesture of solace. “I may act on impulse, but I’m not foolish. I know exactly who took my father’s life.”

Aiden stayed silent, his gaze unyielding.

His openness came from a deep trust that Farrah remained in control of herself.

“Tell me, what must I do to avenge him?” Farrah pulled her hand back, pivoted, and locked eyes with Aiden, her resolve unshakeable.

“Wait,” Aiden responded, his voice steady. “Wait for Janice’s return.”

Farrah faltered for a moment, her disbelief clear. “She’s a fugitive. Does she even stand a chance to fight back?”

“I believe in her.” Aiden’s eyes were steady, unwavering. “As long as it’s her, no matter the cost, I’ll follow through.”

A trace of envy flashed in Farrah's eyes. She could feel the unbreakable bond between Aiden and Janice, a love far deeper and more powerful than anything she had seen on screen.

"How did you find out Morpheus was dead?" Aiden asked suddenly, his voice tight.

"A hotel staff member informed me," Farrah responded quietly. "He brought me breakfast and said my father had passed the night before."

"I see." Aiden nodded, understanding that this was likely Wells' doing. He hadn't silenced Farrah for good but intended to use her potential loss of control to disrupt their plans.

Yet he had underestimated her resilience. Even in the face of her father's death, Farrah's composure remained unshaken, not a single thread of control unraveled.

"They truly underestimated me," Farrah scoffed. "Years ago, I weathered the storm of my mother's death, and that soul-shattering grief has forged my heart into steel. I loved my father with all my being, but I'm not naive enough to cast blame on you for his death. I won't allow myself to be swayed into recklessness."

Chapter 1235:

"I'm glad you see it that way. Now, it's time for us to strike." Aiden nodded, his voice resolute. "Go change and come with me to the queen's birthday banquet."

Meanwhile, Wells lingered at the banquet, idly swirling a wine glass between his fingers.

Beside him sat a man, dark and brooding, his eyes sharp and menacing, like those of a snake.

"Leonidas, where is the person you've recommended?" Wells inquired, a flicker of impatience in his tone.

Leonidas took a casual sip of wine and replied, "Just look to your left."

Wells glanced over and saw a mysterious masked woman, raising her glass towards him.

“Interesting,” Wells responded, raising his glass and downing his wine in one gulp. “Are you trying to have her mimic RAIN?”

“Indeed,” Leonidas replied with a playful grin. “RAIN thrives on mystery, so we’ll match her intrigue and outshine her at her own game.”

“But she won’t appear,” Wells muttered, his brow furrowing in confusion. “You’re only defeating a substitute. Are you truly unaware of that woman’s background?”

Leonidas shook his head with a resigned look. “From the moment she appeared, she’s kept her face hidden. Even Aiden hasn’t seen her face. Janice has clearly gone to great lengths to keep it concealed. But it doesn’t matter. Apart from RAIN, no one else stands a chance against Olynn.”

“Olynn?” Wells’ expression shifted, disbelief flickering in his eyes. “Are you telling me the woman challenging RAIN is Olynn Griffin?”

“Yes!”

“You’re mocking me!” Wells’ face reddened with fury as he glared at Leonidas. “Olynn was once crushed by RAIN. You’re allowing a former failure to challenge her? This is madness!”

Leonidas stayed calm, unaffected by Wells’ outburst. “Patience,” he said with a casual sip of wine. “Didn’t I just say? Our goal is to beat RAIN at her own game. If the one who defeats her is a former loser, wouldn’t that make it all the more satisfying?”

Wells narrowed his eyes at Leonidas, studying him for a long moment before muttering in disbelief, “You’re completely mad.”

“Thank you for the praise,” Leonidas said with a smirk, raising his glass in acknowledgment and clinking it against Wells’. Then, he closed his eyes and hummed a soft tune.

He appeared as a general with a meticulously crafted strategy, already picturing the outcome of the battle in his mind. As long as RAIN was removed from the equation, victory was assured.

Yet a knot of unease tightened in Wells’ chest. Could a former failure truly defeat RAIN? Though RAIN was currently out of the game, the woman known as X stirred a sense of unease within him.

Soon, every guest had made their entrance.

Elizabeth appeared, drawing the gaze of every eye in the room.

Chapter 1236:

Draped in a gown befitting her regal stature, a crown perched atop her head, she descended the spiral staircase with graceful, sovereign elegance.

For a brief, breathless moment, the crowd erupted in deafening applause, their sincere admiration swelling like an unstoppable tide for the queen.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am so pleased to have you here for my birthday celebration.” Elizabeth’s face beamed with a warm, inviting smile, her voice gentle and reassuring. “Here, there is no need for ceremony. Make yourselves at home, and enjoy the feast and drinks.”

With this somewhat ceremonious greeting, the birthday banquet began.

Before long, the guests began offering Elizabeth their gifts. Precious gemstones and priceless antiques were presented as if they were common trinkets.

Lancelot began, “Mother, you always enjoy RAIN’s performances...”

“Lancelot, watch your words!” Before Lancelot could finish, Wells strode forward, cutting him off. “RAIN is now a fugitive. Are you suggesting inviting a criminal to perform for Mother?” The room buzzed with stunned whispers.

“What’s happening? RAIN’s a fugitive now?”

“I heard the news. Morpheus died last night, and RAIN’s the prime suspect. It looks like she was trying to clear a path for Prince Lancelot, but someone caught her!”

“Such a huge event, and I didn’t hear a word about it.”

The crowd erupted in hushed chatter, shocked by the unexpected twist in the tale.

Morpheus had been Wells’ trusted ally, and his death dealt a crushing blow. Given the ongoing power struggle between Wells and Lancelot, and RAIN’s connection to Lancelot, this theory carried weight.

“Wells, the investigation is still underway, yet you hastily accuse RAIN. What are you really trying to achieve?” Lancelot’s calm voice betrayed no hint of agitation. “Or is this part of your plan?”

“I’m simply reminding you,” Wells retorted sharply. “This is Mother’s birthday celebration. Inviting RAIN to perform would be absurd and shame the royal family.”

Wells observed with intrigue as Lancelot, usually flustered by his jabs, now stood firm with an unexpected calm, countering every argument with icy logic.

“As a prince of this royal family, I fully understand the implications. That is why I did not invite RAIN to perform for Mother.” Turning to Elizabeth, Lancelot spoke earnestly. “Mother, the circumstances surrounding Morpheus’ death are still unclear. We cannot yet label RAIN as the culprit. However, RAIN’s musical talent is widely regarded as unparalleled. Music...”

“Music is borderless, and despite her current status as a suspect, the art itself should not be tainted. Therefore, I have invited a musician who rivals RAIN’s skill to perform today.”

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Is there really someone who can rival RAIN?”

“Whether or not there is, I believe only you can decide after hearing it yourself.” Lancelot gave a slight bow, his demeanor radiating respect.

“Mother, this seems inappropriate.” Wells frowned, his tone disapproving. “Lancelot found someone at the last minute to replace RAIN. His hasty decision and thoughtless actions should not be made a spectacle.”

Chapter 1237:

“Enough.” Elizabeth waved her hand dismissively. “Whether it’s reckless or not will be clear once we hear it.”

Lancelot let out a quiet sigh of relief at her words before gesturing toward X. As X entered, the crowd gasped in shock. The figure was a perfect replica of RAIN from before.

Elizabeth furrowed her brow, unsure if this was merely an imitation.

“Your Majesty, my name is X. May I present to you my piece, ‘Redemption’?”

Elizabeth waved her hand, granting permission. “Go ahead. But don’t disappoint me, or I’ll have you removed for disturbing the banquet.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” X remained poised, showing no hint of nervousness, and seated herself at the piano.

Wells couldn’t resist a smirk as he observed the scene, noticing the queen’s clear displeasure with X. After all, the queen had always held RAIN in high esteem, even showing leniency despite her being the prime suspect in a murder case. But now, Lancelot brought someone who copied RAIN’s looks and mannerisms, clearly courting trouble.

“Perhaps we won’t need to intervene. Lancelot’s claim to the throne could soon be stripped away,” he murmured.

Meanwhile, Leonidas kept his gaze locked on X at the piano, his eyes sharp and calculating. There was something oddly familiar about her. Could it really be her?

As X struck the first note, the room fell into an anticipatory silence. A familiar melody flowed like waves, reaching everyone’s ears, slowly making their eyes widen in disbelief.

“Are you sure this isn’t RAIN herself?”

“No way! I’m a die-hard RAIN fan. I’ve listened to ‘Redemption’ so many times, and this is definitely RAIN!”

“But RAIN’s a fugitive now. How could she be here? Could it possibly be...”

All eyes immediately turned to Lancelot.

Lancelot felt a cold shiver snake down his spine beneath the weight of those piercing stares.

He couldn’t shake the creeping suspicion—was the woman on stage truly RAIN in disguise?

The style, the flair, even the soul-stirring emotion in every note echoed RAIN so strongly that denying it felt like denying daylight.

Elizabeth remained still, eyes shut as she soaked in the melodic beauty. Though questions buzzed silently, not a soul dared to interrupt her tranquil reverie.

At last, as X struck the final chord, the room held its breath—no applause followed.

Instead, a storm of suspicion and restrained fury swirled among the gathered elite.

“Impressive.” Elizabeth opened her eyes and studied X. “Your performance of ‘Redemption’ mirrors RAIN’s spirit—down to ninety-nine percent.”

“Thank you for the honor, Your Majesty.” X bowed slightly, her voice calm with humble appreciation.

Yet murmurs rippled through the room. Could the queen not see it was RAIN herself? Ninety-nine percent? To them, the performance was indistinguishable from the real thing.

Chapter 1238:

“Mother!” Wells stepped forward, finger raised in sharp accusation. “This woman is clearly RAIN! I have no doubt Lancelot disguised her as X to trick you—and every guest in this room. I implore you to hold Lancelot responsible for this blatant deceit.”

The room erupted in agreement, voices rising in a chorus calling for Lancelot’s punishment.

Deceit at the queen’s birthday banquet—an occasion of grand significance—was intolerable, even if the one behind it bore the title of prince.

“You believe she is RAIN?” Elizabeth gave Wells a measured look. “And yet, I notice differences. The performance may be strikingly close, but there are subtle distinctions.”

“Mother, RAIN’s doing this on purpose to hide who she really is.” Wells spoke with unwavering confidence. “And proving who she is? That’s easy. Just ask her to take off the mask.”

“Wells, you’ve gone too far!” Lancelot shot back, his voice laced with anger. “Back then, RAIN chose to wear a mask to stay hidden, and we all agreed to honor her need for privacy. Forcing X to remove it now goes against everything we agreed upon.”

Wells let out a cold sneer. “This isn’t the same anymore. That girl up there might be the wanted fugitive RAIN. If we can’t confirm who she is, the blow to our name could be irreversible. Isn’t it absurd that you’re letting someone possibly on the run perform in front of our mother?”

“You—”

“That’s enough.” Elizabeth lifted her hand, cutting through their argument like a blade through fog.

She turned to X, offering a gentle smile. “Many here are wondering who you truly are. Would you be willing to take off your mask and show us? You don’t have to—I won’t compel you. I trust you’re not RAIN.”

X’s eyes lit up, clearly caught off guard by Elizabeth’s kindness. While the crowd drowned in suspicion, Elizabeth placed her faith in her—or perhaps, in RAIN herself.

Maybe Elizabeth already knew Morpheus’ murderer and believed in RAIN’s innocence, but with the nation watching, she had to stay silent—for the sake of peace.

“I’ll take off the mask,” X said calmly.

Her words stirred confusion. Was she seriously about to unveil herself? Could it be true—that she wasn’t RAIN?

Even Wells’ expression darkened. He glanced over at Leonidas, who simply sipped his drink, detached from the rising tension around them.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m not RAIN. But I share a connection with her,” X lifted her hand, gripped the mask, and began to peel it away. As the mask slipped off, a striking face emerged, instantly scattering the shadows of doubt from the room.

"My name is Liliana Harvey. I am her student."

Liliana?

Chapter 1239:

It was Liliana!

Lancelot's eyes widened, stunned as he stared at Liliana like he was seeing a ghost.

Janice had actually sent her own student in her place. But Liliana's abilities had once lagged so far behind hers. How had she bridged that gap so suddenly?

Nina and Alcott were just as shocked to see Liliana standing there. But alongside the surprise came unease. Wells had mentioned Janice as a wanted criminal. Could it be true?

"Lancelot, what in the world is happening?" Nina asked, her voice laced with worry. "Why is Janice suddenly a wanted woman? And why is she not the one performing for the queen?"

"Mrs. Green, it's a long and tangled story. It's not something I can explain in just a few words."

"You owe me an explanation." Nina's eyes narrowed, her voice turning cold and fierce. "If anything happens to her, I promise you—I'll come after you myself. I don't care if you belong to Aerith's royal bloodline. I'll make sure you regret this to your very core."

A chill coursed through Alcott as he sensed the sudden shift in Nina's demeanor, her usual warmth replaced by a commanding intensity. His gentle wife, typically a beacon of calm, had been roused to agitation by concerns for Janice's safety. Yet, a deeper unease gnawed at him. If Nina chose to lock horns with the Aerith royal family, it would inevitably draw her back into the tangled web of her own kin—a prospect that filled him with dread.

"Nina, take a deep breath. There are likely some misunderstandings," Alcott urged, gently clasping her hands to anchor her. "Let's not let emotions stir up a hornet's nest."

“Mom, Dad, Janice is safe and sound,” Aiden announced as he hurried back into the room, his words a soothing balm to Nina’s frayed nerves.

“What happened to Janice?” Nina pressed, her voice laced with worry as she gripped Aiden’s arm.

With a wry smile, Aiden shook his head. “You’ll see her soon enough, Mom. The show’s still going on.”

At Aiden’s reassurance, Nina’s tension melted away, her familiar grace restored like a calm sea after a storm.

Lancelot let out a quiet sigh of relief. Aiden’s timely arrival had spared him the challenge of handling Nina, who cherished Janice so dearly.

“Liliana, you’re RAIN’s student?” Elizabeth gasped, her eyes wide with admiration. “No wonder your talent shines so brightly. Your performance could rival RAIN herself.”

“My teacher is indeed a master of her craft. She is also a woman of great kindness, who would never harm another without cause,” Liliana replied earnestly, her tone unwavering. “Your Majesty, I implore you to uncover the truth and restore her good name.”

“Liliana, save your pleas,” Wells interjected, his voice as cold as a winter’s frost. “Whether RAIN is guilty or not, we’ll get to the bottom of it. For now, she remains the prime suspect. And I’m here to challenge you.”

His words sent a ripple of shock through the gathered crowd. It was clear Wells sought to clip Lancelot’s wings while elevating his own stature.

Chapter 1240:

Wells pressed on. "Mom, they say RAIN's musical genius is unmatched. Though she is absent today, her student stands in her place and has earned your praise. As it happens, I've recently crossed paths with a friend whose musical gifts are equally remarkable. She wishes to seize this moment to test her skill against RAIN's student. What do you say?"

Elizabeth frowned, sensing the undercurrent of Wells' scheme.

"Refusing would risk whispers that she favored Lancelot, casting a shadow over her impartiality."

"Your Majesty, we're all eager to witness a clash of musical titans."

"Such a contest would be nothing short of legendary."

"Your Majesty, please grant this duel."

The loyal supporters of Wells rallied behind him, their voices ringing with encouragement.

"Liliana, what is your take on this?" Elizabeth inquired, her tone tinged with uncertainty as she turned to Liliana.

Liliana's gaze shimmered with fierce determination, her heart alight with the thrill of Wells' bold challenge. It was precisely the opportunity she craved.

"Janice might have hesitated to accept such a duel, but I'm cut from a different cloth. I thrive on the rush of toppling formidable foes."

Wells' face brightened with exhilaration. "So, you're throwing down the gauntlet?"

"Absolutely," Liliana replied with serene confidence. "Bring forth your champion, and let us clash in a symphony of skill."

“Give it your all,” Wells urged, casting a sidelong glance at Olynn, his trust in her unshakable. Had it been RAIN herself on the opposing side, he might have faltered, but facing her student? That was a challenge he welcomed with open arms.

By having Olynn outshine Liliana and humiliate Lancelot, Wells planned to sway the royal court, rallying them to pressure the queen. He was certain the queen would bow to their unified resolve and strip Lancelot of his heirship.

Olynn ascended the stage, her presence commanding immediate attention.

Her attire—a striking mask—drew gasps and murmurs. “Another masked performer? Is she imitating RAIN?” someone whispered. “It’s as if RAIN’s influence looms large, even in her absence.” Laughter rippled through the crowd. The audience began to see the subtle ripples of RAIN’s influence weaving through the royal tapestry.

It was a revelation they hadn’t anticipated.

RAIN, a virtuoso musician and the visionary behind JE Consortium, wielded a quiet but undeniable power. Her backing made Lancelot’s claim to the throne as heir all but ironclad.

It was clear now why Wells was pulling out all the stops to sideline RAIN. Diminishing her influence was his only shot at unseating Lancelot and claiming the crown for himself.

“Your Majesty, I am Olynn Griffin. It is my profound honor to perform before you and challenge the student of RAIN in this musical duel,” Olynn said, her voice steady as she offered a graceful bow to Elizabeth.