

Wrath 161

Chapter 161:

“Absolutely not,” Sierra responded, shaking her head with conviction. “Her manipulation skills are subpar at best. No way she could sway me. I’m firmly in your corner.”

The honesty in Sierra’s expression filled Janice with a comforting warmth. This was the second person who remained unaffected by Delilah’s attempts to sow discord; the first was Aiden.

“Truly, thank you,” Janice said with sincerity, looking into Sierra’s eyes.

Caught off guard by the gratitude, Sierra waved her hands dismissively. “Janice, stop it. If I were that easily influenced, I’d be a fool.”

“But there are quite a few fools,” Janice remarked, referring to the Edwards family.

Sierra paused, her thoughts also turning to the Edwards family, and she scoffed. “What is it with the Edwards family? How can they be so blind to such obvious schemes?”

Reflecting on Laurie, Janice explained calmly, “It’s not that they don’t see it; it’s that they choose to ignore it. Acknowledging it would only bring them shame.”

While Sierra didn’t grasp everything, she sensed that it somehow added up.

Just then, Janice snapped her laptop shut and rose from her seat. “I have to step out for a bit. I won’t return this afternoon.”

“What?” Sierra was momentarily stunned. “Janice...”

“No,” Janice interrupted, placing a finger on Sierra’s lips to silence her. “You should stay here at the office.”

Feeling the coolness of Janice's finger against her mouth, Sierra's heart skipped a beat. Despite both being women, Sierra found Janice's touch irresistibly charming, leaving her no room to argue.

"Remember the Diamond VIP room you reserved for Delilah?" Janice pointed out, nodding towards Delilah, who was exiting the break room. "You need to be there to make sure she doesn't change her mind."

Understanding dawned on Sierra, and she nodded with determination. "I get it. I need to play my part to make sure our colleagues have a great time."

"That's right," Janice said with a reassuring smile.

"But..." Sierra's voice trailed off as she gave Janice a beseeching look. "Once you're back, could we possibly go shopping together?"

For a moment, Janice was swayed by Sierra's charm, which reminded her of Leah, who also knew how to seem endearing. However, Sierra's cuteness felt sincere, unlike Leah's, which always carried a hint of manipulation.

In Janice's eyes, Leah was like a sister, endearing yet potentially troublesome.

"Sure, I'll text you when I'm back."

"Yay!" Sierra exclaimed, jumping with joy.

Amused by her enthusiasm, Janice tousled Sierra's hair affectionately.

Onlookers in the office, observing their interaction, pondered the influence Janice held over Sierra, realizing the necessity to remain on Janice's good side to avoid displeasing Sierra inadvertently.

While they might look down on someone dismissed by the Edwards family, they knew better than to underestimate Sierra's good friend.

After exiting her office, Janice spotted a familiar black SUV parked a short distance away. Upon seeing her, Costello quickly stepped out of the vehicle and courteously held the door open for her.

This imposing figure, marked by a buzz cut and a stern expression, usually seemed unapproachable. However, his demeanor softened considerably around Janice. One might even notice a subtle glint of admiration in Costello's eyes as he watched her.

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"Janice, everything is ready for the operation. We can proceed the moment you arrive," Costello said as he climbed back into the driver's seat.

With a nod, Janice settled into the back seat, elegantly crossing her legs and browsing through the medical updates Leah had forwarded on her tablet. The health metrics for Glenn were promising. Provided the operation and his recovery progressed without complications, he was expected to maintain his health for years to come.

Yet, despite the optimistic health reports, the complexity of the surgery at Glenn's age posed a significant challenge, one that local surgeons were hesitant to accept lightly. Given Glenn's mentorship of several influential individuals, the potential fallout from an unsuccessful surgery was a daunting prospect.

Soon, Costello drove up to the hospital.

"Costello, please take this necklace to Leah," Janice instructed, handing him a box containing the Blue Heart. "Remind her that it's her first piece and to handle it with care."

"Absolutely," Costello responded, accepting the Blue Heart and watching as Janice stepped into the hospital's elevator.

As Costello prepared to return to the vehicle, a sense of being observed halted him momentarily. He scanned the area with a vigilant eye but spotted nothing out of the ordinary. With a slight frown, he lingered momentarily before entering the SUV and driving off to Freak Design's headquarters.

Upon learning from Costello that Janice had arrived safely at the hospital, Leah breathed a sigh of relief.

With Janice by his side, Glenn's well-being seemed assured.

"Leah, Janice instructed me to give you back the Blue Heart," Costello said, handing over the box.

"Really?" Leah responded, clearly surprised. "Did she say anything else?"

"Yeah, she said it's your first creation. She advised handling it cautiously."

Leah let out a soft laugh, understanding that Janice had uncovered her scheme. She had intentionally placed the Blue Heart in the auction. Knowing Aiden would be at the Bridgeway Auction to pick out jewelry for Janice, Leah had made sure the Blue Heart was up for bids there.

Her goal was to assess Aiden's feelings for Janice by observing his behavior at the auction. Aiden's actions at the auction confirmed his serious intentions. He pursued the Blue Heart relentlessly, outbidding others determinedly, and ultimately acquired it for more than twenty million.

"Is this marriage merely a business deal?" Leah wondered aloud, her lips brushing against the wine glass as she leaned back against the expansive window, the wine swirling slowly in her hand. She hoped for something more genuine.

Aiden, with his status, seemed a suitable partner for Janice. If his affection was genuine, Janice would experience true familial warmth.

Leah's expression grew intense as she tightened her hold on her wine glass, troubled by a recent discovery about Aiden—he had been looking for a woman. The identity of this woman was unclear, but Aiden's persistent search indicated she was profoundly significant to him. This woman could be Aiden's first love or someone else he deeply cared about.

“Annoying,” Leah murmured, finishing her wine in one gulp. Her expression turned cold. “If you ever harm Janice, I’ll make you regret it.”

On his way to Auburn Hospital, Aiden’s mind was swamped with mixed emotions. For reasons he couldn’t identify, his earlier sense of eagerness had turned to frustration. This time, the woman they’d found matched his description exactly, but his previous excitement had vanished.

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Aiden noticed the odd look on Braylen’s face, furrowed his brow, and asked, “What’s troubling you?”

“Mr. Green, there’s someone I just spotted,” Braylen said gravely. “That individual is not someone ordinary.”

Aiden arched an eyebrow. For Braylen to make such a comment, the person must truly be noteworthy.

“When our eyes met, I felt a shiver. This man seems as seasoned as I am, possibly a seasoned warrior.” Braylen’s eyes narrowed, shining with an intense gleam.

Aiden’s curiosity grew. “People like him are often guards for VIPs. Did you catch who he was guarding?”

Braylen shook his head. “He was by himself when I noticed him. He’s already left. Should I look into him?”

“There’s no need,” Aiden said with a shake of his head. “Efrery is a city that never fails to surprise. It’s common to encounter a few impressive characters. We shouldn’t worry too much.”

“Got it!” Braylen regained his composure and assisted Aiden as they exited the vehicle. Even though Aiden was capable of walking on his own, the crowded hospital and the risk of recognition made him cautious, as it might expose years of secrecy.

Lately, Bart had been holding secretive meetings, hinting that several covert players were on the brink of emerging. Being ousted from the Green family seemed to have shaken Bart deeply. It appeared he was biding his time, waiting for an opportune moment to act.

Braylen pushed Aiden's wheelchair to the hospital's fourth floor, home to many surgeons' offices, as they searched for a surgeon named Tess Newman. Years earlier, the woman they sought had demonstrated remarkable prowess in wound treatment, confirming her surgical expertise.

"Hello, we're looking for Dr. Tess Newman," Braylen said, approaching a passing nurse.

"Dr. Newman is currently making her rounds. You might need to wait a little to see her," the nurse answered, her gaze shifting between Braylen and Aiden. She seemed visibly struck by Aiden, her heart fluttering at the sight. Despite being seated in a wheelchair, Aiden maintained a dignified, commanding aura that immediately captivated her.

"Okay, we'll stay here and wait."

"This is the corridor. Dr. Newman's office is available for you to wait in. She's not in her consultation hours right now."

"No problem, we just need to ask her something. We talked with her yesterday." Braylen offered a smile, but despite his efforts to appear friendly, his rugged features still gave off an intimidating vibe.

"I'll let Dr. Newman know you're here. Please wait in her office for a moment," the nurse said, her tone laced with a hint of nervousness.

"Thank you."

Braylen then wheeled Aiden into the office. Aiden observed the desk cluttered with medical records and papers. A nameplate clearly labeled "Tess Newman" caught his eye. He looked around the office, noting its similarity to others with its predominant white color scheme. The exception was the walls, which were decorated with red banners, traditional tokens of appreciation from patients.

“Mr. Green, it looks like Dr. Newman is very close to the woman we’ve been trying to locate,” Braylen said with a hint of excitement. “After all this time, you might finally meet her.”

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Aiden’s expression turned somber, his silence heavy. As he neared the truth, his agitation grew, contrasting sharply with his prior eagerness to find the woman and thank her. Previously, he had looked forward with great eagerness to meeting the woman and expressing his gratitude, but now... Without warning, Janice’s image flashed across his mind. When did he start caring so much about her?

“Mr. Green?” Braylen, observing Aiden’s troubled look, felt compelled to check on him. “Is something wrong?”

Aiden gave a slight shake of his head. “Go outside and keep an eye on things. I need a moment to myself.”

“Understood!” Braylen exited the room, making sure to close the door softly behind him.

Tess was busy with her rounds, ensuring every patient was well attended to. Once satisfied, she made her way back to her office, feeling somewhat relieved.

At that moment, a nurse came up to her, saying, “Dr. Newman, there are two gentlemen asking for you.”

“Two gentlemen?” Tess’ brow creased. Her first thought was that they might be admirers, which made her heart sink a little. “My consultation hours have ended. Could you ask them to make an appointment?”

As an accomplished and strikingly attractive doctor, Tess had always stood out in her field across all hospitals. Since her arrival at Auburn Hospital, both her colleagues and patients had looked up to her with great admiration. She found it bothersome that many of them attempted to pursue her.

“They mentioned that they informed you of their arrival yesterday.”

“They did?” Tess paused, her memory jogging back to a conversation she had with a man the previous day. They had discussed some matters and agreed to meet today. Could it be the same man? “Alright, I’ve just wrapped up my rounds. I’ll go see them now.”

As she prepared to head out, a group of people rushed past her. “Is that Mr. Debenham? What’s the hurry? Is there an emergency?” Tess’ brow furrowed. Judging by Brent Debenham’s anxious expression, she suspected an emergency was at hand, but what could be so urgent at Auburn Hospital? Surrounded by experts and professors, Brent’s group looked deeply worried.

“Have you heard anything about this?” Tess asked the nurse.

“The head of Generous Lives Orphanage requires surgery. Weren’t you aware?”

Tess was taken by surprise.

Glenn, the head of the Generous Lives Orphanage, had suffered a heart attack and urgently needed surgical intervention. Yet, the specialists at Auburn Hospital hesitated to undertake such a perilous procedure. Regarded as a top talent, Tess had glanced at Glenn’s medical files and was alarmed by the risks involved.

“I headed out early yesterday, so I wasn’t around to catch this news,” Tess explained, her voice laced with concern.

“I understand. Well, there’s talk of a remarkable surgeon who has come to operate on Glenn. Mr. Debenham and the professors are likely headed to observe the surgery,” the nurse informed her.

Tess’ expression clouded with worry. “It’s absurd! Someone just appears, claims they can handle this risky surgery, and they’re allowed to proceed? This puts Glenn’s life at great risk!”

Determined to intervene, Tess decided to postpone returning to her office and made her way to the operating room.

As a distinguished surgeon, her reputation as a genius had earned her widespread respect in the medical community. Her skills surpassed even those of some of the top experts at the hospital. Yet, here was someone who had just shown up, boldly claiming they could handle a surgery she wouldn't dream of attempting. Naturally, she felt offended. She couldn't shake the feeling that this was someone looking to boost their own reputation, potentially risking Glenn's life in the process.

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Upon reaching the operating room, she found many of Auburn Hospital's leading personnel already present.

"Mr. Debenham, what are you thinking?" Tess confronted him as she approached. "Glenn might not survive this procedure. You're disregarding human life!"

"Tess, hurry over here. We have a top surgeon at the hospital ready to perform the procedure," Brent said, guiding her to the observation deck rather than placing blame.

Tess' expression shifted to one of displeasure. "Mr. Debenham, don't be deceived by someone who's up to no good. Consider Glenn's situation. Neither our team at the hospital nor I have any confidence in this..."

She was interrupted by the arrival of a tall figure in the operating room.

On the operating table lay Glenn, unconscious under general anesthesia, his expression serene. The newcomer, poised at his side, was remarkably calm.

Though her face was obscured by a surgical gown, cap, and mask, Tess could discern that the surgeon was a very young woman, barely older than herself, poised to operate on Glenn. Could this mean she was less capable than this young surgeon? "Absolutely not! This surgery has to be stopped," Tess said, clenching her teeth. "Mr. Debenham, call off the operation right now. You're risking Glenn's life. He's a mentor to many community leaders; he can't just die here."

Brent's expression showed a trace of displeasure for the first time. "What are you suggesting, Tess? This surgeon was recommended by Ms. Sugden herself. How could she be irresponsible?"

“Ms. Sugden?” Tess was startled. “Do you mean Leah Sugden, who contributed five hundred million to Auburn Hospital?”

“Who else could it be?” Brent replied with a roll of his eyes, his tone cold. “To Ms. Sugden, Glenn is like a father. She wouldn’t just send someone to endanger him. Besides, the surgeon is MO.”

“What?” Tess’ eyes widened in disbelief. “Are you certain this surgeon is MO?”

Brent’s voice remained low as he shook his head. “Ms. Sugden said she is MO. If this woman is indeed MO, she’s the only one qualified for the surgery.”

Tess cast another glance at the figure standing by the operating table.

MO’s name was tied to surgical excellence, her reputation a quiet legend within the medical community.

Yet, MO seldom made public appearances, and whispers about her typically involved critical cases involving distinguished individuals with grave illnesses.

Among her peers, MO’s mystique solidified into the stuff of legends.

Tess herself held great admiration for MO, dreaming of the day she might meet her and receive her wisdom. Yet now, MO was there in the flesh, only a glass pane away, which somewhat disoriented Tess.

“Tess, your respect for MO is no secret, which is why I must share this. MO rarely makes an appearance. Take this moment to learn.”

Clarity returned to Tess’ eyes after a moment. While she revered MO and yearned to emulate her, the reality of MO’s youthful appearance made Tess realize she was merely human, not a deity.

Concerned about Glenn’s condition, Tess doubted that even MO’s reputed expertise could guarantee a successful surgery. In a grave tone, Tess said, “Even with MO in charge, I can’t see her pulling this off.”

"Tess, what's wrong?" Brent looked at her, puzzled. "You've always been one of MO's biggest supporters. Why the doubt now?"

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"I've just come to see that MO is a normal person, not a god," Tess replied with a smile. "She's so young. Can she truly have amassed extensive surgical experience? I think her fame might be a bit exaggerated."

With a shake of her head, she added, "I need to leave. If the operation goes south, I might just barge in to express my concerns."

Brent's brow furrowed in concern as he observed Tess storm out of the observation deck.

"It appears Tess might be grappling with some jealousy," noted Hodge Perry, a professor, his voice laced with a hint of sympathy as he neared. "It must have stunned her to discover that MO is just another woman her age."

"Jealous, you think? Tess has always looked up to MO," Brent responded, his tone filled with confusion.

"You're seeing it all wrong." Hodge cast a glance towards MO, who was engrossed in surgery. "Tess herself is a marvel in surgery. The thought of another shining as brightly as her? It must be hard to swallow."

Brent opened his mouth to object but instead let out a long, heavy sigh, his gaze returning to the ongoing operation.

Meanwhile, Tess paused just outside the observation deck, her back to the door. She inhaled deeply, her mind churning. "So, the legendary MO is merely a young woman. The tales really did stretch the truth. Soon, they'll all see. If Glenn succumbs during this operation, Auburn Hospital will face the wrath of losing Ms. Sugden's backing."

For years, Leah's generous funding had bolstered Auburn Hospital, spurred by her dedication to Glenn. With Glenn alive, Leah's support guaranteed the hospital's superiority in Efrery, securing the finest care for him.

What a shame!

Tess let out an icy chuckle, shaking her head as she made her way to her office.

When she arrived at her office, she found Braylen standing sentry by the door, his intense stare casting an unsettling shadow over her mood.

"Were you looking for me?" Tess asked, her voice steady as she approached the imposing figure.

"Are you Tess Newman?" Braylen inquired, his eyes briefly meeting hers.

Tess' brow furrowed at his brusque manner, and a frown took shape on her face. "Yes, that's me."

"Mr. Green is awaiting your arrival inside," Braylen informed her, stepping to the side to swing the door open.

As she entered, Tess felt more like an interloper than the rightful occupant of the space. Her annoyance deepened at the audacity of the visitor.

"Was it you who asked to meet with me?" Tess asked in a composed but frosty tone.

Aiden, who had been facing away, turned to regard her with a look of utter neutrality, neither welcoming nor unwelcoming. However, the moment Tess' eyes fell upon Aiden, a spark ignited within her.

He sat there, embodying an exceptional blend of handsomeness and aristocracy. His serene yet authoritative demeanor captivated her, stirring a rush of admiration for his evident strength. Though confined to a wheelchair, Aiden had an air of a celestial being cast from heaven, his presence shimmering with a subdued, ethereal glow.

"Dr. Newman?" he called out.

“Hmm?” Caught in a reverie, Tess snapped back to the present, her breath stabilizing quickly. “Yes, that’s me. How can I assist you today?”

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Aiden’s brow creased slightly. Observing Tess, his demeanor remained composed, tinged with a faint trace of disappointment. It was a stark contrast to what he had anticipated. After all, one might expect a surge of emotion upon meeting the doctor who had once saved his life, yet his heart felt oddly calm.

“Three years ago, did you happen to witness a car accident and save someone involved?”

Tess’ brow arched slightly as memories from three years prior began to resurface. Indeed, she had stumbled upon a car accident and provided critical emergency aid to the injured. However, the man before her wasn’t the one she had saved.

“Yes,” Tess responded after a brief pause, her voice steady. “At that time, I had recently begun my tenure at Auburn Hospital. During one of my shifts, I encountered a horrific accident. As a doctor committed to my oath, I didn’t hesitate to deliver first aid to the injured party.”

Aiden’s gaze lingered on Tess, now imbued with a discerning quality. “Do you recall what that person looked like?”

Tess paused, then shook her head. “It all happened so quickly, I didn’t get a clear look at the person’s face, especially since he was covered in blood. When the ambulance arrived, I stopped giving first aid because I was worried it might affect my new job, so I slipped away unnoticed.”

Aiden furrowed his brows as he listened. Tess’ account of his rescue that day was accurate. He had been covered in blood on that concrete road, fighting for his life, and unable to catch a glimpse of his savior’s face. But it wasn’t enough to confirm that she was the woman who had saved him.

According to her, she had slipped away as soon as the ambulance had arrived to avoid risking her new job.

“Judging by your expression, were you the person in the accident?” Tess asked, tilting her head curiously. “Are you here to express your gratitude?”

Aiden met her gaze, a complicated look on his face. “I slipped in and out of consciousness at that time. I couldn’t see that person’s face clearly.”

Tess waved her hand casually. “You didn’t need to come and thank me personally. Saving lives is a doctor’s duty.”

Aiden pressed his lips together, her words stifling his own. His gaze dropped to her bare wrist, and he asked, “Do you wear bracelets?”

Tess was about to say no but stopped herself. Instead, she said, “I used to, but after becoming a doctor, I refrained from wearing one.”

Aiden fell silent, his expression pensive. Something felt odd, but he couldn’t pinpoint why or what. All he knew was Tess’s responses still didn’t confirm anything to him. But were the similarities just a coincidence?

Aiden pressed his temples, feeling a headache coming on. He had been eager to find that woman, but now that he was in front of Tess, he felt hesitant to draw confirmation despite the connection.

“Sir, if you’re unsure of your savior’s identity, then I won’t take credit for such a heroic act,” Tess said. “As I’ve mentioned before, saving lives is a doctor’s duty. I don’t expect any reward for the work I do, inside or outside of the operating room.”

Aiden’s gaze flicked to her, sharp and piercing. “I apologize. But if it weren’t for that person, I wouldn’t be here today. I vowed to repay her kindness once I found her.”

Tess’ heart skipped a beat at his words, but she kept a composed expression as she said, “Didn’t you get what I said? I’m not her, so you can leave now.”

“One last question,” Aiden said, drawing a breath. “What does your bracelet look like?”

Tess' heart dropped to her throat. She had feigned indifference to keep Aiden's attention, not expecting him to pry into her responses.

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She had assumed he was like the rest—charmed by her beauty—and would ignore all doubt and claim she was the same person just to get her attention.

But Aiden's question caught her off guard. What would she say? She had never liked bracelets, as they were uncomfortable. But at that moment, she wished she did, just to match the description of the woman Aiden was looking for.

Watching her closely, Aiden narrowed his eyes. "Dr. Newman?"

Tess shook her head, her faint smile tinged with bitterness. "Sir, I don't recall the bracelet I wore three years ago. If I do, I'll let you know."

"Dr. Newman!" Aiden called again, his voice sharp and cold. The intensity of his presence made Tess' heart race.

A sudden loud commotion erupted outside.

"Glenn's surgery succeeded!"

Tess' expression shifted, and she quickly replied, "I'm sorry, but I have something urgent to handle. I need to go now. Like I said, I wasn't the one who saved you, so there's no need to thank me."

Without waiting for a response, she opened the door and hurried out.

Aiden watched her disappear, his eyes darkening. He didn't want Tess to be the woman from before, but her reaction unsettled him.

He was a man who never forgot kindness and always remembered those who helped him.

“Mr. Green, that woman...” Braylen said, glancing curiously at Tess’ retreating figure.

Aiden toyed with the bracelet on his wrist and murmured, “We’ll wait and see. Some things align, but one crucial detail is still unclear.”

“I see,” Braylen replied, nodding as he pushed Aiden’s wheelchair toward the parking lot.

As Aiden reached the car, a familiar figure caught his eye.

“Janice?” Aiden murmured, frowning deeply. The figure appeared for only a moment, but he was sure it was her. But why would Janice be at Auburn Hospital when she was supposed to be working at Delgado Jewelry?

“Mr. Green?” Braylen asked, holding the car door open, unaware of the figure Aiden had seen.

Aiden took a deep breath and said firmly, “Check the surveillance at Auburn Hospital. I need to know if my wife was here.”

Despite his confusion at the request, Braylen nodded and left to handle it.

Meanwhile, Tess, as a surgeon, understood the complexity of Glenn’s operation. It was an extremely high-risk procedure. Yet, MO had completed it with ease, and Glenn’s...

Tess’ face went pale as she stood before Brent, looking utterly shaken. “Impossible! This can’t be true! I had already decided that Glenn’s surgery was not possible.”

“Tess, you’ve disappointed me,” Brent said with a sigh, lightly tapping the desk. “That was your judgment. But it was MO who performed Glenn’s surgery—the very person you once looked up to.”

"I don't believe it!" Tess exclaimed, panic in her eyes. "The stories about her are just rumors, probably exaggerated. MO is simply an average woman, around my age. How could she possibly be so much better than me?"

Brent shook his head, his disappointment evident.

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As Hodge had pointed out, Tess struggled to accept that the person she had admired so deeply could be a woman her age. The glaring difference was too much for Tess' pride to handle. As a proclaimed genius, the weight of that title had fed her ego, making it nearly impossible for her to admit that MO was far superior.

"You need to see this for yourself," Brent said, placing a video in front of her.

Tess watched the tall woman in the footage performing Glenn's surgery with flawless precision and unwavering confidence. Her skill and focus were unmatched, and she moved with absolute confidence.

So fast—unbelievably fast!

MO's surgical procedure was truly incredible. She effortlessly tackled areas Tess had found daunting, executing each move with perfect precision.

It wasn't just surgery; it was a brilliant performance.

In that moment, Tess felt as though a towering mountain loomed before her, leaving her feeling small and insignificant at its base.

Tess crumpled to the floor with a resounding thud, her mind swirling in confusion. "MO really did it!"

"Tess, let's be rational," Brent said, offering his perspective with a weary sigh. "MO is young, which only underscores her exceptional skill. Recognizing the gap in your abilities could prove very educational for you."

Looking up, Tess offered Brent a strained smile. "Thank you, Mr. Debenham."

Brent's expression lightened as he sensed Tess's acceptance. Acknowledging her potential to learn from MO could pave the way for her to become an exceptional surgeon.

"May I take a copy of the surgery video with me?" Tess asked.

"Absolutely," Brent replied with a nod, approving her request.

Tess exited Brent's office after securing the video, a fiery resolve burning in her eyes.

Your imagination thrives at puntocom

"I will not be outdone," she whispered fiercely, clenching her jaw, fueled by renewed determination and a spark of defiance. "If you can master it, so can I. Just wait, and I'll copy your technique."

Meanwhile, Aiden watched the surveillance feed in his car, a video Braylen had provided. He reviewed the footage but found no trace of Janice, which made him frown in concern.

"Mr. Green, could there have been a mistake?" Braylen proposed. "Had Mrs. Green visited Auburn Hospital, it's unlikely she'd dodge every camera. Yet, we've seen nothing of her in the footage."

Aiden shut his eyes and massaged his temples, his voice tinged with strain. "But what if she did manage to evade them all?"

"Well..." Braylen hesitated, finding no argument to counter. Janice might have purposefully avoided being captured on camera if she had specific reasons to remain unseen.

Abruptly, Aiden's eyes snapped open, his mind racing. "Was there any unusual activity at Auburn Hospital today?"

“Right,” Braylen’s eyes sparkled with intrigue. “A top-tier surgeon was here today to operate on a VIP. The details are limited; it seems they’re keeping it pretty secretive.”

A memory flickered across Aiden’s mind. He remembered Tess hastily leaving after a briefing about a notable operation. Could it be related to this?

“Dig up everything you can on this VIP.”

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“Got it.”

Pulling out his smartphone, Aiden browsed through his contacts to find Janice’s number. He hesitated for a split second before making the call.

As the phone rang, a wave of unexpected tension washed over him.

Realizing his own emotions, he shook his head with a touch of self-mockery. Since when had he become so concerned about Janice?

This newfound concern was disconcerting. He was usually the one steering things, but lately, he felt unusually reactive.

“Aiden?”

The call connected. Janice’s voice cut through the line, surrounded by ambient noise that clearly wasn’t coming from Delgado Jewelry.

Aiden focused, maintaining a steady voice. “How’s the new job treating you?”

“Checking in on me, are you?” Janice’s response was light and teasing, seemingly oblivious to Aiden’s deeper motives.

“Have you started playing the devoted husband now?”

“Enough small talk,” Aiden responded with a subdued smile. “Just a reminder—don’t lose sight of your mission. I suspect Bart will act soon.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll seize the right moment to get Kenneth talking,” Janice replied lightly, her tone revealing nothing. “And if that fails, I might just have to use the honey trap.”

“Janice!” Aiden’s voice rose, betraying a flicker of agitation. Realizing his outburst, he quickly composed himself and continued in a measured tone, “You are my wife now, even if in name only. Don’t do anything that could harm my reputation.”

Janice paused before responding, “If I didn’t know this was a marriage of convenience, I might have thought you were jealous just now. But alright, I’ll respect your wishes.”

Aiden exhaled slowly, steadying his emotions. “You’re not at Delgado Jewelry, are you?”

“No,” Janice replied without hesitation. “I’m out shopping with Sierra.”

“Shopping?” Aiden blinked, caught off guard. “You skipped work to go shopping? And since when are you so close with Sierra?”

“It’s a long story. I’ll explain later. She’s calling me now; I have to go. We’ll talk when I get back.”

Before Aiden could say another word, the line went dead. The dial tone in his ear only deepened his frustration. He raised his head to look at Braylen.

Braylen was briefly startled but quickly understood the unspoken command. “I’ll look into it right away.”

It didn't take long for Braylen to uncover the truth. Sierra had recently joined Delgado Jewelry and, interestingly, had requested to work as Janice's assistant.

Aiden frowned. Sierra's move was unexpected and left him puzzled. He knew her to be straightforward, not someone with hidden agendas. Her attachment to Janice seemed more like a personal preference than a calculated plan.

After a brief silence, Aiden exhaled deeply and leaned back in his chair, shutting his eyes. "Let's head back."

Though the day hadn't been particularly eventful, Aiden felt uncharacteristically drained, as though an avalanche of concerns had suddenly descended on him. His mind churned with unanswered questions, leaving him grappling for clarity. The matter of Tess' identity demanded confirmation, and Janice's possible visit to Auburn Hospital still needed to be clarified.