

Wrath 191

Chapter 191:

Upon hearing the host's question, Carman acted as if he were lost in thought. He lowered his eyes, then looked up at the sky with a sigh.

"Honestly, I've faced many challenges recently because of my new song. You've all heard about the Blue Heart scandal. Initially, I relied on a friend to secure the Blue Heart for me, only to be duped with a counterfeit."

Carman then stood up, bowed gracefully toward the camera, and addressed his audience earnestly. "Although I was deceived, it caused harm and wasted public resources. I sincerely apologize to all my fans and supporters watching. We must respect authenticity and honor every creator's hard work." His heartfelt words struck a chord with viewers, leading to an outpouring of support.

"Carman is so genuine. He's the victim, yet he still apologizes. I'm truly touched."

"How could anyone deceive someone as nice as Carman? If I find out who did it, they'll regret it."

"Carman, you're amazing! We'll always be here for you."

As Carman heard the cheers, he settled back into his seat, taking a moment before sharing more. "Facing all this pressure actually sparked something new in me, and that's how 'Life' came to be. I believe life is a journey of highs and lows. But if we keep pushing forward, we can overcome any challenge. I believe rainbows will appear after storms."

The live stream audience erupted with excitement, filling the chat with "I believe rainbows will appear after storms."

"I'm so mad!" Sierra's frustration grew as she wished she could confront Carman over the phone. "I can't believe he's acting all high and mighty! Preaching about supporting originals, but he plagiarized 'Reborn,' the piece you gave me!"

“Stay calm, Sierra,” Janice remained composed, soothing Sierra with a gentle pat. “Don’t let a plagiarist like him get to you. He’s not worth it, is he?”

Perhaps Janice’s calm words had an effect, as Sierra’s anger lessened. “What should we do, Janice? We can’t just watch him take credit for your work.”

“Don’t worry. Let’s wait for the right opportunity,” Janice said, watching as Carman unveiled plans for a fan event on the live stream.

With a warm smile, Carman looked into the camera. “As a thank you for your unwavering support, I’m organizing a fan event as a token of appreciation. Details will be posted on my Twitter, including the time and place.”

Fans erupted with excitement once again.

Once the live stream ended, Carman relaxed in the lounge, his smile fading. “Yvonne, for the next interview, can we get a more prominent host? We only hit two hundred thousand viewers today.”

Yvonne sat down beside Carman, gently massaging his shoulders. “Two hundred thousand isn’t bad at all, especially considering how quickly we had to organize everything. With so many top hosts already booked, we were lucky to secure anyone at this short notice.”

Carman closed his eyes, savoring the massage. The rushed timing was unavoidable, mostly because of his new song. Delays had nearly pushed him to the brink of criticism for lacking innovation, and he felt the pressure intensely. More than that, he was determined to make Vernon regret.

“Just so you know, Vernon called the company earlier today,” Yvonne mentioned casually.

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“What did he say?” Carman asked, opening his eyes.

“He promised to back your fan event completely. He’ll handle everything—funding, location, and all the details—to the finest degree.”

“Ugh, he just couldn’t help himself, could he?” Carman scoffed, clearly annoyed. “I thought he’d have the decency to wait until after the fan event, when everyone was watching me.”

Yvonne turned, sitting on Carman’s lap, her hands framing his face. “So, are you going to take his offer?”

With a cunning smile, Carman lifted her chin slightly. “Absolutely. He’s asked for it, so I’ll make sure he doesn’t get away without a public apology at the event.”

Stella received the design drafts. Now, she just needed to polish them and plan what came next.

Janice’s morning was anything but peaceful. Sierra’s anger at Carman had her venting nonstop. She carried her fury to Carman’s social media, flooding the comments with angry rants.

To be fair, Sierra’s words were sharp and strong. Even when Carman’s passionate fans confronted her, she stood firm. But the sheer number of fan replies overwhelmed her. The constant flood of responses forced Sierra to give up and stop engaging.

“Janice, how much longer are we going to sit here?” Sierra snapped, pacing in frustration. “I’m about to explode with anger. You don’t know how arrogant Carman is. He’s just a copycat, but he acts like he’s some creative genius. It really annoys me.”

“Take a deep breath and sip some coffee,” Janice said calmly, handing her the cup. “But be careful—”

“Ow! It’s too hot!” Sierra yelped, interrupting Janice as she hastily took a sip and scorched her tongue.

Overwhelmed by the pain and her simmering anger, Sierra’s emotions erupted. “I can’t take it! That song was a heartfelt gift from you, Janice, and now that jerk has stolen it and turned it into his big hit!”

“There, there, don’t cry,” Janice said with a sigh, gently patting Sierra’s head. “He won’t stay arrogant for long. Just wait for the fan event; everyone will be laughing at him.”

“Really?” Sierra’s tear-filled eyes sparkled with hope as she looked at Janice.

Her innocent, pitiful expression tugged at Janice’s heart. Unlike Delilah, who often faked such innocence, Sierra’s emotions were heartfelt.

When Delilah played up her innocence, Janice could barely resist rolling her eyes, but with Sierra, she felt a genuine urge to help. “You’re my friend, so I’ll help you vent your anger.”

“Janice, you’re the best.” Sierra embraced her tightly, her spirits lifted by her friend’s support.

Delilah watched the interaction, her expression darkening. Janice had her way of winning people over—first Aiden, and now even Sierra.

But what exactly was troubling Sierra so much?

Leaning in towards Cheryl, Delilah murmured, “What’s gotten into Sierra?”

“She’s all worked up because she thinks your brother stole her piano piece for his new song,” Cheryl replied, her tone dismissive. “It’s ridiculous. Carman’s creative enough on his own; he doesn’t need to steal.”

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Delilah chuckled. “Exactly. With my brother’s talent, plagiarism isn’t necessary.”

Still, she felt a bit uneasy. Sierra didn’t seem like the type to make accusations without reason. There had to be something she didn’t know.

After thinking it over for a moment, Delilah decided to inform Carman about the accusation, sending him a brief message to explain the situation.

She didn’t fully control the Edwards family yet, and any drama stirred up by Carman could complicate her plans.

Around midday, as was often her routine, Janice approached Stella to request some time away from work.

Given Janice's proven talent and the ongoing design project, Stella saw no reason to deny her and promptly agreed. As Janice left Delgado Jewelry, her eyes caught sight of a familiar black sedan parked by the roadside.

"Aiden?" Janice was taken aback. What was he doing here? Despite her confusion, she walked over.

As Janice neared, Braylen stepped out of the car and opened the door respectfully. "Ma'am, please get in."

Janice nodded and climbed into the car.

Once inside, she noticed Aiden's deep-set eyes. He appeared distant, yet carried an air of melancholy. Any naive girl might find herself enchanted by him.

Fortunately, Janice was no naive girl.

"Aiden, you didn't come all this way just to give me a ride from work, did you?"

Aiden signaled for Braylen to start driving, then answered, "You've been leaving work early in the afternoons. I thought today might be the same, so I came."

Janice narrowed her eyes, studying him with teasing curiosity.

"Oh, really?"

Aiden nodded but looked away.

The truth was, he had felt bored at home and just wanted to take a ride. But he ended up here.

So, he decided to wait for Janice until she finished work.

“Braylen, let’s go to Auburn Hospital,” Janice suddenly said.

At this, Aiden’s pupils shrank, and he looked at her, startled. “You’re heading to Auburn Hospital?”

“Yes,” Janice answered. “Someone very important to me just had surgery and woke up today. I want to visit.”

Aiden’s feelings became mixed. “May I ask who this important person is?”

Janice looked at him. “Aiden, I thought you were aware. You did investigate my background, after all.”

Aiden sat composed, his legs crossed neatly. He explained, “That was just standard procedure. Those checks don’t really uncover everything about a person.”

He turned his gaze to Janice.

She met his eyes in return. For a brief moment, their eyes met and held.

Janice’s eyes sparkled, while Aiden’s gaze was intense. Yet, neither could truly decipher what was on the other’s mind.

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They resembled two strategists at a chessboard, each trying to outwit the other, yet neither gaining any real advantage.

“He’s like a father to me,” Janice said, turning to look out the window. “He’s been with me as long as I can remember. He taught me how to learn, imparted wisdom, and shaped who I am today.”

Upon hearing this, Aiden felt a heavy weight in his heart as a rush of thoughts started to come together. “Is he Glenn Haynes, the director of Generous Lives Orphanage?”

Janice raised an eyebrow. “You’re quite informed, Aiden.”

Aiden’s lips pressed together. The realization that Janice intended to visit Glenn stirred complex feelings within him. He had instructed Braylen to gather information on the key figure at Auburn Hospital, who was Glenn.

Was it possible that Janice’s last visit to Auburn Hospital was also to see Glenn? That would explain a lot.

“Did you also go to Auburn Hospital last time?” Aiden asked, a mix of eagerness and curiosity in his voice.

“Yes,” Janice said candidly. “I went because Glenn was seriously ill and required surgery.”

She chose her words carefully, neither confirming her exact role during the hospital visit nor denying it outright.

She understood Aiden's brilliance.

The more she tried to conceal, the more discrepancies would emerge. Honesty was the best policy.

While revealing her identity wasn't a major issue for her—given that her marriage to Aiden was merely contractual—it was prudent to maintain discretion to avoid complications.

Aiden massaged his temples, feeling a wave of disappointment after confirming Janice's visit to Auburn Hospital.

What was he expecting? Was he secretly hoping Janice was the one who had performed surgery on Glenn? Even if Janice really had medical skills, what would that confirm? That she was the same woman who had saved him? The idea sent a shiver down his spine.

Was he, deep down, hoping that Janice was the woman who had once saved his life? How could that even be possible? It felt like his thoughts were spiraling out of control.

Aiden pushed aside his swirling thoughts and changed the topic. "Have you checked out Carman's latest song?"

Janice looked intrigued. "Aiden, do you actually follow showbiz?"

"I don't believe he wrote that song himself."

Janice's curiosity heightened. "What makes you think that?"

"Just a feeling!" Aiden replied, avoiding Janice's gaze. He wasn't about to reveal that he recognized the tune from a different piano composition.

After their recent conversation, he had someone monitor her, and a video of Janice playing the piano confirmed his suspicion that he knew very little about her. This assured, poised, and beautiful woman was not just a designer but also an accomplished pianist.

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He couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to Janice than met the eye. It seemed as though she purposefully hid her talents, perhaps because such confidence and dignity couldn't just be an act.

"Aiden, it's surprising that someone as logical as you would rely on gut feelings. You're right about your intuition, though. Carman did plagiarize the piano piece I gave to Sierra," Janice said with curiosity.

Aiden's brow creased slightly. "Do you need my assistance?"

Janice waved him off. "No need. Carman will be the butt of the joke online soon enough."

From her response, Aiden sensed she had everything under control.

At that moment, Aiden's phone buzzed. He checked the caller ID, cast a quick glance at Janice, and then declined the call. Janice observed his cautious expression and asked, "Why didn't you take that call? Is it something I shouldn't hear?"

"Just a spam call," Aiden answered casually. "Let's head to Auburn Hospital first."

Janice shrugged, seemingly indifferent, and they both lapsed back into silence.

They soon reached Auburn Hospital. Janice stepped out of the car, said goodbye to Aiden, and walked to the VIP ward. Aiden watched her go, his gaze thoughtful, then picked up his phone to return the missed call.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“Aiden, Dr. Newman is on duty as usual.”

“On duty?” Aiden’s eyes narrowed, a sly smile playing inside. “So, she’s been avoiding me intentionally?”

“It seems likely.”

“I understand.” Ending the call, Aiden fingered the bracelet on his wrist thoughtfully. “Braylen, join me. We need to meet Dr. Newman.”

Previously, he hadn’t been able to confirm Tess’ identity, leading to a planned second encounter which she had dodged. Fed up with the uncertainty surrounding Tess’ intentions, Aiden was eager to clear up whether she was indeed the woman from his past. This unresolved question was haunting him, disrupting his sleep.

Pushing the door open, Janice was greeted by three familiar faces.

“Janice,” they all greeted.

Leah, Costello, and Prescott were inside, waiting for her. Leah and Prescott offered her warm smiles as she entered.

“Janice, we’re really lucky to have you. I doubt Glenn would have woken up if it weren’t for you.” Leah was dressed in a white dress that softened her usual appearance, giving her a gentler look.

Prescott's hair was still messy, with black-rimmed glasses resting on his nose, and the dark circles under his eyes looked even deeper.

Costello maintained his usual composed and distant demeanor, but around Glenn, his expression softened, showing a hint of innocence.

Janice smiled and then turned to Glenn, who was lying in the hospital bed. His eyes brightened with affection as they met hers, and despite the circumstances, he appeared to be in good spirits.

"Glenn, how are you feeling?" Janice asked, settling into the chair beside his bed. "If anything feels off, please let us know right away."

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"Janice, I trust your medical skills," Glenn said, his voice filled with warmth as he smiled at her. "I'm feeling a lot better now. I might even be able to leave the hospital in a few days." A wistful look crossed his face as he continued, "I've been here so long. I can't help but wonder about the orphanage. Are the kids okay? Are they warm and well-fed?"

With a comforting smile, Leah responded, "Don't worry, Glenn. Despite my busy schedule, I always make sure to keep an eye on the orphanage. It's our home, after all."

At Leah's mention of "home," a wave of nostalgia washed over everyone's face. They had all been orphans, but the love and care they received at the orphanage had made it a true home, thanks to Glenn, who truly cared for them. To them, Glenn was more than just a director of the orphanage; he was family.

"Janice..." Glenn's face darkened with concern as he placed his hand over hers. "I know everything. The Edwards family has crossed the line. How could they be so heartless to you?"

"Glenn, don't get upset," Janice soothed, patting his hand to offer comfort. "It's not worth your energy to dwell on people who can't see or feel."

"When they first found you, I was worried about how they would treat you after taking you back." Glenn let out a heavy sigh, his voice tinged with regret. "I've lived long enough to read people. When they

came for you, there was no joy in their eyes—just a sense of obligation. But you were so hopeful about having a family then.”

He had kept his reservations to himself, not wanting to dampen her spirits.

Janice shook her head, a smile breaking across her face as she looked at him with relief. “Back then, having a family seemed like a dream I couldn’t let go of. If I hadn’t taken that chance, how could I ever move on? Now, I’ve lived that dream, and I can leave it behind without any regrets. From now on, you all are my real family.”

Janice looked at Leah, Prescott, Costello, and then Glenn. “I don’t need anyone else but you.”

“Janice, you’re our family too,” Leah said, stepping forward with a determined expression. “I held back before because they were your family. But now that you’ve severed ties with them, I won’t hold back anymore.”

“Exactly! I won’t hold back either.” Prescott was quick to add his support, pushing up his glasses with enthusiasm. “I’ve been waiting to teach the Edwards family a lesson for a long time.”

Costello remained quiet, yet his actions conveyed his stance clearly. By stepping forward, he silently affirmed his alignment with Leah and Prescott. His presence alone was a strong statement of solidarity—he, too, could no longer tolerate the Edwards family’s cruelty.

Janice was deeply touched by their encouragement. She mused on the bitter irony that her own family had only ever shown her indifference, humiliation, and mistreatment, whereas Leah and her friends, unrelated by blood, showed her profound kindness.

“Leah, I’m aware of the disdain you hold for the Edwards family,” Janice said. “But I plan to reclaim what they took from me slowly. It’s far too simple to just crush them immediately.”

Destroying the Edwards family swiftly was well within her power, yet she knew that wouldn’t soothe the ache of the past year. Her goal was for the Edwards family to gradually spiral into despair, to witness firsthand Delilah’s deceit and hypocrisy, and to watch their pride crumble. Such a gradual torment was the only way for Janice to heal her deep-seated wounds.

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"I have to say, I disagree with your approach, Janice," Leah retorted with a pout. "But I respect your strategy. Still, when Carman stole your piano composition and gained fame, I couldn't just stand by."

Realizing Leah's implication, Janice asked, "Did you intervene somehow?"

With her arms crossed, Leah said, "Vernon stepped in at my request. I held back from going further because I knew your strategy. Otherwise, Carman would be in prison already."

Janice shook her head, amused yet frustrated by Leah's impulsive nature. "Are you sure that there's no turning back for you and your family?" Glenn interjected, his voice laced with concern. He considered that Janice, still sharing blood ties with the Edwards family, might regret a harsh fallout. He wasn't worried about the Edwards family's well-being but about the emotional strain such a harsh vendetta might have on Janice.

"Relax, Glenn, I'm well aware of what I'm doing," Janice said as she gently tapped his hand. She presented a box, from which she extracted a bracelet.

The bracelet stirred a mix of emotions in everyone who saw it. Crafted with a heart-shaped pendant, this bracelet was both unique and elegant. Having designed it herself, Janice had originally planned to give it to her mother, yet plans had changed.

"This bracelet is for you, Glenn." Janice slipped it onto Glenn's wrist. "This was meant for my family. Since I've lost touch with them, and you've become my family, it's only fitting you have it."

Glenn paused, visibly touched by the gesture, and under Janice's sincere gaze, he gratefully accepted it. "Janice, I truly appreciate this gift."

"I'd love one as well," Leah interjected, grabbing Janice's arm and throwing a mock tantrum. "Unless you don't see me as family?"

With an affectionate smile, Janice replied, "This bracelet is one of a kind. I'll create another unique piece for you when I find the time."

"Yay!" Leah cheered, revealing a rare moment of playfulness. Her demeanor had completely shifted from her usual composed self, and those who knew her well understood that she only showed this side to Janice.

At that moment, Janice noticed Prescott and Costello watching expectantly. "You'll both have something special too," she assured them, meeting their eyes. Prescott responded with a broad grin, and Costello allowed a subtle smile to grace his features.

After a few more moments spent chatting with Glenn, Janice left with Leah and the rest of the group.

Shortly after their departure, a nurse entered with a cart. "I'm here to take your blood sample, Mr. Haynes."

"Please proceed," Glenn responded, extending his arm to reveal the bracelet.

The nurse's eyes brightened as she noticed the bracelet with its distinctive pendant on Glenn's wrist. "What a lovely bracelet, Mr. Haynes. Who gave it to you?"

"It was a gift from my child," Glenn responded, his expression lighting up with pride and joy.

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"You are truly amazing. You've managed the orphanage for so many years and molded so many incredible individuals. Your impact in every way is profound. It must be from someone very special," the nurse said while arranging the medical instruments.

"You're flattering me. But yes, they are truly remarkable, thriving even without what many consider a traditional family."

"This bracelet is beautiful and obviously means a lot to you, but I'll need you to take it off for the blood draw," the nurse said, gesturing with the needle in her hand.

"Of course."

Glenn carefully unclasped the bracelet and placed it into a small box to keep it safe. After setting the box on the bedside table, he willingly extended his arm towards the nurse.

"How's Glenn doing?" Tess asked while passing by on her rounds sometime later.

"I just took his blood. He seems to be recovering well, and I expect he'll be discharged in a few days."

Tess frowned slightly upon hearing the news. This once-thought-impossible surgery had not only been completed successfully but had also led to a recovery so impressive it might soon be the talk of the medical community. Yet, Tess wasn't impressed. She was sure that soon, she could replicate MO's skills to perform such a complicated surgery herself.

"Take the sample to the lab. I'll check on Glenn," Tess instructed.

"Understood," the nurse responded, taking the sample and departing as Tess made her way towards Glenn's ward.

After conducting a few routine checks, Tess pulled out her stethoscope. "Mr. Haynes, could you turn around, please? I need to listen to your heart."

"Of course," Glenn complied, turning his back to her.

As Tess moved to examine Glenn, the sweep of her coat inadvertently knocked a small box off the bedside table. The box fell with a thud, and the bracelet inside spilled out onto the floor.

Tess' eyes lit up as she noticed the bracelet's intricate design, instantly captivated by its beauty. The arrangement of the patterns and the delicate heart pendant exuded a timeless elegance that captivated her instantly.

“What happened?” Glenn’s voice broke the silence.

“It’s nothing. I just knocked something over and was picking it up,” Tess answered, bending down to retrieve the bracelet and the box.

But as she reached to place the bracelet back, Aiden’s question about a bracelet flickered in her mind, making her pause.

Without fully understanding why, she slipped the bracelet into her pocket, returned the box to the table, and resumed Glenn’s examination as though nothing had happened.

“You’re doing very well. You should be ready to leave the hospital soon,” she reassured him.

“Thank you,” Glenn replied, his smile filled with genuine gratitude as he turned to face her again. “I couldn’t have made such a strong recovery without your excellent care. I have no doubt you’ll be an exceptional doctor.”

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“Thank you,” Tess smiled in return, though her heart was racing. What had she done? She had impulsively pocketed Glenn’s bracelet. What should she do next? Return it?

But if she returned it now, Glenn would realize what happened, and her reputation would be ruined. A surgeon caught stealing—if anyone found out, her career at this hospital would be over.

Glenn’s observant eyes caught Tess’ discomfort, prompting him to voice his concern. “Is something wrong? You look a bit off. Are you feeling okay?”

"I'm just a bit tired," Tess replied, mustering a reassuring smile to mask her internal struggle. But when Glenn reached for the box, her heart pounded. She braced herself, her mind racing to confess her actions as regret washed over her.

However, to her surprise, Glenn merely took the box and tucked it under his pillow, not bothering to open it.

Tess let out a quiet sigh of relief, but the problem still loomed. If Glenn opened the box and found the bracelet missing, he would inevitably suspect her. She had to find a way to return it.

"I have to go now, Mr. Haynes."

"Alright," Glenn replied with a gentle nod.

Tess hurried out of the ward, her steps quickening as she made her way to her office. Once safely inside, she closed the door behind her and pulled the bracelet from her pocket. As she held it in her hands, a mix of regret and admiration filled her.

She had never been fond of bracelets, but this one made her rethink. Its unique and elegant design was captivating.

Tess let out a sigh as she slipped the bracelet onto her wrist, admiring its beauty. Regrettably, she knew it wasn't hers to keep. She would need to return it discreetly, either while Glenn was sleeping or momentarily distracted.

Knock! The sound startled her, snapping her back to reality. “Who’s there?”

“Can we talk, Dr. Newman?” a chilling, familiar voice replied from the other side of the door.

Her heart skipped. It was the same striking man who had been searching for her just days earlier.

“I’m busy right now,” Tess responded quickly. Hadn’t she already turned him away before? Why was he back, and without warning? But before she could stop him, the door swung open.

Braylen entered, pushing Aiden in his wheelchair into the office. The moment Aiden’s presence filled the space, Tess felt an overwhelming pressure.

“What are you doing?” Tess demanded, her face setting into a scowl as she regained her poise. “Leave, now.”

Aiden looked at her coolly, his voice steady and firm. “It doesn’t seem like you’re too busy.”

Tess’ face fell into a deeper frown. She was unprepared for this confrontation. After all, she didn’t know what the bracelet looked like. She knew all too well that once Aiden realized she had no idea what the bracelet truly looked like, he’d lose interest and leave her behind.

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“We doctors have more responsibilities than just tending to patients. We also have to conduct post-operative reviews and study cases,” Tess replied, her voice steady as she drew a deep breath. She needed to keep him at bay. “Besides, you’re here to find out if I was the one who saved your life, aren’t you? Let’s just say I wasn’t and leave it at that.”

Aiden’s gaze sharpened, a chill passing through his eyes. “What I need to confirm is about the bracelet you wore back then...” His words trailed off as his eyes locked onto the bracelet now on her wrist.

Tess noticed his intense reaction and glanced at the bracelet herself, her heart skipping a beat. Could it be...?

A sudden idea flashed through her mind. Was this the bracelet he was looking for? If so, her luck might be far better than she imagined.

However, she masked her sudden surge of hope with a cool demeanor. “As I’ve mentioned, I really can’t recall which bracelet I wore that day.”

“Is this bracelet yours?” Aiden asked, his breathing labored as turmoil swept through his mind.

He had convinced himself Tess couldn’t be the woman he sought, but the bracelet adorning her wrist shattered that certainty in an instant. She was, without a doubt, that woman.

This bracelet—he would recognize it anywhere. It had haunted his dreams night after night, the only clear memory he retained of her.

“Yeah,” Tess replied with carefully measured casualness. “I found it at home after you mentioned a bracelet last time. Why? Is this the one you were talking about?”

Though her expression remained neutral, her heart thundered in her chest with anticipation.

Aiden shut his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, struggling to regain his composure.

After his endless search, he'd finally found her, yet instead of joy or elation, he felt only a peculiar irritation.

"Sir, are you okay?" Tess asked with concern. "You don't look well. If you're feeling unwell, let me know. As a doctor, I should be able to help."

Aiden lifted his gaze to meet hers. "Do you have any wishes?"

"Wishes?" Tess paused, momentarily taken aback, before offering a wry smile. "May the world be without any illness; that is my wish."

"I can't help you with that," Aiden replied, his brow furrowed in mild frustration. "Name something within my power to grant—a wish I can actually fulfill for you."

Confusion rippled across Tess' features. Nothing about this moment aligned with her expectations. He'd spent so long searching for his savior, and here she stood before him. Yet where was the elation, the excitement that should have consumed him? Instead, an unsettling calmness had settled over him.

After a thoughtful pause, Tess' lips curved into a gentle smile. "I appreciate your offer, but I'll achieve my wishes through my own efforts. If you truly want to repay me for saving your life, a simple meal would suffice."

"Just that?" Aiden asked, surprise lifting his eyebrows. "I could establish a hospital for you."