

Wrath 241

Chapter 241:

As the waiter disappeared, Aiden turned to look at Tess's wrist. "Dr. Newman, I noticed you aren't wearing that bracelet today."

Tess's fingers instinctively brushed her bare wrist, and she forced a smile. "I was in a rush this morning. I must have left it behind."

"Is that so?" Aiden's tone held a subtle edge of suspicion. Realizing the tension, Tess quickly shifted gears. "Mr. Green, if my company makes you uneasy, you don't have to stay. I only suggested this meal because I didn't want you to feel obligated. Like I told you before—I saved your life because it was my duty. Nothing more."

Her words rang steady, righteous even, and seemingly genuine. If Aiden hadn't been so suspicious, a hint of guilt might have crossed his mind.

But the absence of that bracelet on Tess's wrist, along with the flicker of hesitation, only fueled his doubt. Tess thought she had the playbook for dealing with wealthy, powerful men down pat—swiping pages from countless romance novels featuring domineering CEOs. But novels were just stories, and Aiden? He wasn't a character she could predict. To him, she was already under scrutiny.

"My apologies if I seemed rude." Aiden poured her a glass of water with a smooth, detached grace. "Let's enjoy the meal. Since you've been eager to try this restaurant for quite some time, let's not spoil the moment."

Tess's shoulders eased just a little. "Mr. Green, I know someone like you could have anything you want, but I'm happy with my simple life. I don't need anything from you. I just hope we can be friends."

Friends? Aiden's eyes narrowed, and a flicker of cold amusement danced across his face. So, this was her game.

Gaining the friendship of someone like him wasn't something done lightly, and Tess knew it. Her carefully crafted sincerity wasn't fooling anyone—especially Aiden. He could see right through her carefully orchestrated act.

Just then, the waiter returned, setting down one perfectly plated dish after another.

Tess could hardly contain her excitement at the sight of the mouthwatering dishes, her eyes lighting up. But she knew she had to maintain her composure in front of someone as distinguished as Aiden.

“Dr. Newman, the food here is simply exceptional. You should give it a try,” Aiden said, flashing a smile.

“Absolutely!” Tess replied, her voice upbeat but still poised.

With Aiden's approval, Tess elegantly reached for her fork, determined to keep her poise. But the moment the rich flavors hit her tongue, all pretenses vanished. A spark of delight lit up her face before she could reel it back in.

Aiden, however, took only a few bites before setting down his fork and knife with practiced ease. He dabbed the corners of his mouth with a napkin, his movements as smooth as ever.

Tess paused mid-bite, glancing at his plate. “Mr. Green, you're hardly eating. You really must take care of yourself. As a doctor, it's hard for me to watch someone neglect their health.” Her brow furrowed in disapproval.

It was a scene straight out of a romance novel—the well-meaning heroine trying to thaw the heart of the stoic, powerful man. Tess was sure she had nailed the performance. This had to be the moment when Aiden finally saw her in a different light—maybe even became intrigued.

Chapter 242:

Aiden's expression stayed calm, his tone steady. “I appreciate your concern, but I know my body well enough to decide what and how much I should eat.”

Tess hesitated, momentarily stunned by his cool dismissal. Her attempt to engage him had fallen flat, leaving her feeling awkward and unnoticed.

“Maybe I was overstepping,” she said with a strained smile. Why wasn’t he taking the bait? She had acted convincingly—he shouldn’t have suspected anything.

Aiden’s gaze narrowed slightly. “Dr. Newman, how did you feel when you saved me back then? What was my condition?”

The question struck Tess like a lightning bolt, sending her into quiet panic. Why was he bringing up the past all of a sudden? Something about his tone made her uneasy, and her instincts warned her that saying too much could expose her.

Back then, the man she saved had been just an ordinary stranger. A simple car, a routine traffic accident—if Aiden probed for specifics, Tess feared her carefully crafted story might unravel.

“It’s been so long that I barely remember,” Tess said with a forced smile. “I was rushing to work, and it all happened so fast. Everything’s a blur.”

“No problem. If you’ve forgotten, I can help you remember,” Aiden replied, a charming smile tugging at his lips.

But to Tess, that smile was anything but comforting. It was unnerving. She fought to keep her composure, avoiding his piercing gaze, terrified he might see through her.

“Dr. Newman, that was the first time we met. Don’t you think revisiting such moments is meaningful?” Aiden’s tone was calm, almost hypnotic, but it tugged at Tess’s fragile composure.

Internally, Tess was on the brink of panic. As a surgeon, she prided herself on her mental toughness, but Aiden’s probing questions were shaking her resolve. For a moment, she thought about fabricating a story, but a voice of caution warned her to stay quiet.

Reaching for a glass of red wine, she took a large sip, using the moment to mask her unease. Then, with a faint, disappointed smile, she said, “It seems you’ve got it wrong. Did you think I invited you to dinner to get closer to you?”

Aiden’s fingers tapped lightly on the table, the sound sharp and deliberate, cutting through her words. Tess’s eyes were drawn to his well-defined fingers. The simple, casual motion struck an odd chord within her, but the commanding presence of the man before her quickly erased any stray thoughts.

“Dr. Newman, have you truly forgotten? Or was the person you saved back then not actually me?”

Tess abruptly stood, her eyes fixed on Aiden in disbelief. “So, all this time, you’ve doubted that I was the one who saved you, haven’t you?”

Aiden held her gaze in silence, his expression unreadable.

“Fine, I’m leaving,” Tess said curtly, turning on her heel. Her voice turned icy. “Let’s just assume the person who saved you wasn’t me.”

This move—taking a step back to draw someone in—was a classic tactic straight out of romance novels.

But something about Aiden felt different. He wasn’t like the typical domineering CEOs Tess had read about. His composure was unnerving, and his gaze, steady from start to finish, held no trace of warmth. It was not the way he was looking at someone who had saved his life.

Chapter 243:

Aiden sighed, softening his intense gaze. “I apologize for my earlier rudeness.”

“I don’t accept it!” Tess snapped, striding forward without looking back.

But inside, she was counting. Ten seconds, and Aiden would surely catch up and stop her. It was straight out of a romance novel, playing hard to get.

The sound of a chair being dragged back echoed sharply through the restaurant.

Tess raised an eyebrow but kept her stride steady, her heart buzzing with exhilaration.

As expected, Aiden had taken the bait. He was probably chasing after her right now, desperate to stop her, apologize, and finally open his heart. She could already envision it—the dramatic confession where he'd spill his feelings and beg her to stay.

But just as Tess was about to savor her triumph, Aiden brushed past her without a second glance, heading straight for the door.

Tess stopped dead in her tracks, utterly stunned as she watched his figure disappear into the distance.

What just happened? Wasn't Aiden supposed to stop her? Instead, he walked away and ignored her completely.

A burning mix of humiliation and anger surged through Tess, her fists clenched tightly at her sides.

Just then, a cold, smooth voice cut through her thoughts. "Dr. Newman, did you really think you could trap Aiden that easily?"

Tess spun around, her breath catching. Her gaze locked onto a man leaning casually against the wall, hands tucked into his pockets.

His eyes were sharp, mocking—an expression that seemed to relish her discomfort.

"Who are you?" Tess demanded, her voice sharp.

The man flashed a smirk. "Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Bart Green—Aiden's half-brother."

Tess's eyes widened in disbelief. "You're Aiden's brother?"

“Exactly.” Bart took a step closer, his voice dropping to a confidential tone as he locked eyes with her. “Dr. Newman, let’s strike a deal.”

“A deal?” Tess stiffened, her guard snapping into place.

“What kind of deal are we talking about?”

“I’ll help you win my brother’s heart, and in exchange…”

Bart leaned in, his face just a breath away from hers. Though he didn’t possess Aiden’s refined charm, his confidence and striking features still held a certain appeal, enough to make Tess’s cheeks warm against her will.

“What do you want from me? I’m not about to sell myself,” Tess retorted, instinctively crossing her arms and taking a step back, her posture going on guard.

Bart let out a soft laugh, shaking his head. Was her imagination always this wild? “That’s not what I’m after.”

Tess furrowed her brow, still confused. “Then what exactly do you want?”

“I need someone on the inside,” Bart said, his tone shifting to something more serious. “Be my eyes and ears, and I’ll make sure you get everything you’ve been hoping for.”

Chapter 244:

For a second, Tess considered it. The offer tempted her, but she quickly squashed the thought. Despite her growing feelings for Aiden, she wasn’t blind to the danger. “You’re not planning to use me to hurt Aiden, are you?”

“Quick on the uptake. I’ll give you that,” Bart chuckled, the sound low and almost mocking. He reached out, brushing a lock of hair from Tess’s face—a touch that sent an involuntary shiver down her spine. “Why not? Isn’t it worth it if you get everything you’ve been dreaming of?”

Tess took a step back, her instincts kicking in. “Do you really think I’m that naive? What’s the point of winning Aiden’s heart if you tear him down and steal everything he’s built?”

“You’re clever, but you’re running out of choices.” Bart’s smile faded instantly. His hand shot out, gripping her chin firmly, forcing her to look him in the eye. “I know you’re not the woman who saved Aiden back then.”

Tess’s heart skipped a beat. Panic flickered in her eyes. “You’re bluffing. I saved him—I was there.”

Bart’s smirk deepened as he leaned in, his lips grazing Tess’s ear. “You want to know why I’m so sure? Because I’m the one who caused the accident.”

Tess’s face drained of color, and her legs went weak. She collapsed into the nearest chair, her body shaking uncontrollably.

“Dr. Newman, you’re smart enough to make the right choice. Sure, you could go to Aiden and spill everything—or even turn me in. But if I were scared of that, do you really think I’d be standing here, telling you the truth?”

With that, Bart tossed her a business card and turned to leave.

Tess stared at the card in her hand, her fingers trembling as she gripped it tightly, her mind racing.

Aiden exited the restaurant, climbed into his car, and asked Braylen to drive to Phyllis Restaurant.

Braylen was taken aback by Aiden’s unusual haste and felt compelled to inquire, “Mr. Green, is everything alright?”

Aiden began to respond but paused, hesitating to share that his rush was due to concerns about Janice. He had just received a troubling photo from Nellie. The image showed Janice at dinner with a handsome gentleman.

The urgency to get to Phyllis Restaurant had initially overwhelmed him. Yet, as they traveled, Aiden's anxiety began to dissipate. He massaged his forehead, pondering if his worries about Janice were exaggerated.

"Could this be about Mrs. Green?" Braylen interjected, breaking the silence. "I heard she was supposed to meet someone at Phyllis today."

With a slight frown, Aiden responded, "Yes, she's dining with a man. We're in a delicate phase of our plan, and any misstep on her part could jeopardize everything."

"Understood!" Braylen's expression became resolute as he grasped the urgency. "Mr. Green, brace yourself. I'll make sure we reach Phyllis Restaurant quickly."

Aiden managed a wry smile and nodded in agreement. He told himself his worry for Janice stemmed from the critical nature of their plans. With an unfamiliar man at her side, Aiden felt the stakes were too high to ignore. Nothing could be allowed to derail their objectives.

Meanwhile, at Phyllis Restaurant, Janice was finding herself increasingly uncomfortable. She searched for a plausible reason to excuse herself, but Lancelot was insistent and refused to let her slip away.

Chapter 245:

Moreover, Nolan, the shrewd strategist, had not yet reappeared. Presumably, he had realized his error and was now too apprehensive to face her again.

"RAIN, do you particularly like these?" Lancelot asked as he took out a notebook and began jotting down the names. "I'll note these down. Once I master them, I'd love to cook for you."

Janice felt overwhelmed. Lancelot, with his charm and devotion, seemed capable of enchanting any woman.

However, she cherished her freedom, relished her solitude, and disliked constraints. The strict norms of the royal family were precisely why Lancelot held no appeal for her.

“Lancelot...”

“Please, call me Lance,” Lancelot insisted, giving her a tender look. “It sounds better when you say it.”

“Your Highness!” Janice chose not to use his preferred name, taking a moment to gather her thoughts. “I must tell you, I am already married.”

Lancelot’s hand froze while he was writing, and he gazed at Janice with an expression of disbelief. “RAIN, what did you say?”

“I am married,” Janice said firmly. “I’m asking you to stop. Your insistence is troubling me.”

“That can’t be true!” Lancelot protested, shaking his head vigorously, his eyes displaying a stubborn resolve. “You must be misleading me! Although you don’t reciprocate my feelings, it doesn’t stop me from adoring you. RAIN, love knows no bounds. I am willing to give up everything for you.”

Feeling cornered by Lancelot’s persistence, Janice massaged her temples, regretting her decision to disclose her marital status.

“RAIN!” Lancelot called out, producing a small box. “In addition to flowers, I’ve brought you another token of my affection. Please, take it.”

He then opened the box, unveiling an emerald necklace that sparkled brilliantly. The necklace’s design was both elegant and enigmatic, potentially matching the famed Blue Heart in allure.

“Is this the Emerald Forest?” Janice’s eyebrows furrowed as she gazed at the necklace, a spark of astonishment lighting her eyes. “Lancelot, how did you come into possession of this?”

The Emerald Forest was the crowning achievement of the globally acclaimed jeweler, Richard Hinchcliffe, a titan of the industry. To Janice, Richard had been a guide and a cherished companion. This necklace, his proudest creation before his demise, had only increased in value and distinction following his death.

Janice had once endeavored to obtain the Emerald Forest to honor her late friend, but it had ended up in the hands of an elusive billionaire who refused to sell. Reluctantly, she had abandoned her quest. Yet, unexpectedly, it lay before her now.

Her heart fluttered slightly. Clearly, Lancelot had undertaken considerable efforts, likely incurring a significant cost to acquire it.

“RAIN, I promised you I would do anything for you.” Lancelot’s voice softened, his eyes filled with tenderness. Capitalizing on her brief surprise, he reached forward, aiming to grasp her hand.

Suddenly, another hand intervened, blocking Lancelot’s attempt.

Lancelot paused and turned to meet a gaze as piercing and cold as ice. It was an intimidating stare, the kind that sent shivers down his spine. Lancelot, a warrior from a young age, had confronted lions, tigers, and the brink of death itself. Yet, he had never faced a glare as daunting as this.

Chapter 246:

It was the kind of chill that could bring about a snowstorm.

“Who are you?” Lancelot snapped back to his senses, his own expression turning cold. He then noticed the man was confined to a wheelchair, which puzzled him briefly.

“Aiden? Why are you here?” Janice’s voice held a hint of shock.

Aiden turned his cold gaze to Janice, his features softening slightly. “If I hadn’t come, I would have been cuckolded.”

Cuckolded? Janice's eyes flicked from Lancelot back to Aiden, her lips quivering. Was this really about jealousy?

But hadn't Aiden been with Tess earlier? How did he even know to find her here?

"Hey! I'm speaking to you." Lancelot's patience vanished. He ignored Aiden's condition and raised his voice. "Who exactly are you?"

Aiden directed his piercing gaze at Lancelot, a sly grin appearing on his face. His tone remained steady, but it carried a commanding presence. "Pay attention, I am her husband."

"Her husband?" Lancelot's complexion drained as he turned to Janice in disbelief. "RAIN, is this true?"

Janice gave a casual shrug. "It's true. We are married, whether you like it or not."

"No! I refuse to believe this!" Lancelot jumped to his feet, desperation evident in his eyes. "RAIN, I can't accept this. With all your talents and beauty, why would you settle for a cripple?"

Before Lancelot could say another word, a powerful punch struck him, sending him flying.

Braylen stood over him, his fist still raised, his gaze cold. "Mind your words."

Surprised, Lancelot stumbled to his feet, his expression shifting. "Not bad," he said, rolling his shoulder. "You've got strength, but it's not enough to take me down." He shrugged off his jacket, revealing a shirt that clung to his muscular build.

Janice's expression tightened with worry. The situation was escalating. If no one intervened soon, it could spiral into chaos.

"Prove your love for RAIN by facing me in a one-on-one duel, like a true knight would," Lancelot said to Aiden, his expression serious yet respectful of Aiden's condition. "Your wheelchair doesn't exempt you

from showing the valor required to be by RAIN's side. Without the ability to defend her, you have no place near her."

Braylen erupted in disbelief. "Are you insane? You're asking Mr. Green to fight you?"

"What? Is he scared?" Lancelot looked at Aiden. "Or did he think his disability would prevent him from being her knight?"

"You bastard!" Braylen charged forward, ready to strike Lancelot.

"Braylen, stop!" Aiden called out sharply, his gaze penetrating. "He may be right. Despite my paralysis, I must prove I can safeguard the one I love."

He turned his head to Janice, adding, "If I can't, perhaps I shouldn't be by her side."

Janice, caught off guard, was puzzled why Aiden looked her way at that moment. Knowing she needed to prevent an escalation, she intervened. "Wait a minute, both of you." Stepping in front of Aiden, Janice faced Lancelot with a weary look. "I've told you, I'm married. There's no sense in continuing this. It benefits neither of us."

Chapter 247:

"No, that can't be right." Lancelot refused to accept Janice's marital status, his heart still aching for her despite the reality. "I am deeply in love with you, RAIN, and I'll do whatever it takes for you."

Lancelot jabbed a finger toward Aiden, his voice laced with scorn. "What is he capable of doing for you? He won't even face me in a duel, hiding behind his disability. How can such a man be your destined partner?" Aiden, typically unruffled, found himself unexpectedly seething at Lancelot's taunts.

This outburst was unusual for him; in other circumstances, he might have dismissed it with a chuckle, but not today. Today, the rage was too evident to ignore.

"I chose him," Janice responded simply.

With those words, the storm within Aiden subsided.

“How misguided you are, RAIN,” Lancelot responded, feeling a mix of frustration and resignation. “But I refuse to stop. Until he proves he can defend you like a man should, I will continue my pursuit.”

Janice was at a loss. This prince was as stubborn as a mule, completely immune to any logical persuasion. At that moment, Nolan approached, extending a phone toward Lancelot. “It’s your mother.”

With a slight shift in his demeanor, Lancelot took the phone with hesitation.

A firm voice commanded, “Lancelot, you are to return immediately!”

“I refuse to return!” Lancelot retorted, his gaze fixed on Janice. “Eleanor means nothing to me; it’s RAIN I love.”

“Absurd!” The voice on the other end conveyed both immense frustration and helplessness. “If you’re not here in three days, I will strip you of your title.”

Lancelot’s expression darkened, and before he could reply, the call ended.

Staring at the device in disbelief, Lancelot pondered his mother’s stern warning. It was clear she was gravely enraged.

“Your Highness, you should go back,” Nolan stated with a sigh, his voice heavy with the burden of persuasion. “I understand you cherish RAIN and yearn to chase after your heart’s desire. However, please consider the broader implications.”

Janice cast a knowing look at Nolan, now realizing that he hadn’t fled as she had first thought, but had instead gone to call Lancelot’s mother. The only one who could truly deter Lancelot at this point was his mother.

Lancelot met Janice's gaze, his expression torn, teeth clenched in frustration. "RAIN, just wait for me! I'll persuade my mother to relinquish this notion of marrying me off to Eleanor."

He grabbed his coat with a sense of resolve and strode towards the door. As Lancelot disappeared from view, Janice let out a quiet sigh of relief, only to catch Aiden watching her with a playful glint in his eyes.

"What's with that look?" she demanded, annoyance threading her tone.

"Your list of admirers is quite impressive. One of them even hails from Aerith's royal family!" Aiden noted, his smile tinged with a subtle shade of envy.

Janice waved off his comment nonchalantly, straightening her attire. "Well, it's not my fault I was born this irresistible! But..."

She threw a sidelong glance at Aiden, her tone teasingly provocative. "Are you saying this because you've fallen for me?"

Chapter 248:

Aiden's smile wavered for a moment, and he seemed unexpectedly flustered. "You're reading too much into it. I mean..."

"You're just worried I might wander during our marriage, which could mess with your plans for those shares," Janice cut him off, guessing his thoughts.

Aiden shut his mouth, his expression tinged with resignation.

"Look, Aiden, I know where to draw the line. But drawing a crowd of admirers is just part of my charm," Janice remarked with a shrug, offering him a look of mock sympathy.

Aiden's gaze flickered with irritation. Janice's vanity knew no bounds. Nevertheless, a reluctant smile crept across his face, which Braylen noticed with a hint of astonishment. Was Aiden annoyed with his wife, or merely indulging her antics? His grasp on Aiden's feelings began to blur.

“Didn’t you have dinner plans with...?”

“Is that the woman tonight?” Janice inquired suddenly, her curiosity piqued. “What? Did you really ditch her just like that?”

“It was merely a social engagement,” Aiden responded, his tone steady. “How can that possibly measure up to being cuckolded?”

“Tsk, if you hadn’t said that, I might’ve thought you were a bit jealous,” Janice retorted with a dismissive shake of her head, choosing not to probe further. “Nolan, are we still going to have this meal?”

“No, no.” Nolan shook his head emphatically. “I need to return and get ready for the concert.”

After a moment’s hesitation, he spoke, a hint of nervousness in his tone. “Regarding the concert...”

“Don’t worry, I’m not that petty,” Janice assured him, prompting a relieved exhale from Nolan. Calling Lancelot’s mother had been the right move, ensuring Janice didn’t perceive his departure as cowardly.

“Braylen, let’s get moving,” Aiden ordered.

“Aiden, where are you off to?” Janice’s voice carried a hint of surprise as she gazed at Aiden, evidently caught off guard. She had expected, perhaps, an offer to escort her home.

“There are urgent matters I must address,” Aiden explained with composed detachment, casting a quick glance at Braylen before departing with an air of finesse.

Lancelot had just merged onto the road when a sleek black car raced up from behind him. His brow furrowed as he sensed hostility. With a forceful push on the accelerator, he tried to outdistance his pursuer. Yet, the car following him persisted, like a relentless hunter chasing its quarry.

“Interesting,” Lancelot muttered, irritation coloring his tone. His mood, already grim, darkened further under this provocation. “Let’s see what you’ve got.” With a quick twist of the steering wheel, he swerved onto a narrow mountain path leading to White Jade Peak, a well-known landmark in Efrery. The road was renowned for its sharp bends and dangerous hairpin turns, and few dared to cross it, especially under the cloak of night.

Sparse streetlights did little to ward off the encompassing shadows, casting an ominous, deserted atmosphere over the path. However, the roar of engines broke the silence, injecting a raw, almost primal excitement into the night.

Chapter 249:

Lancelot glanced suspiciously at his rearview mirror, his eyebrows drawing together. Despite pushing his vehicle to its limits and navigating turns with reckless abandon, the pursuing car clung to him closely. This chase was no coincidence. The driver behind him was not only skilled but had likely orchestrated this plan. A shiver of apprehension coursed through him as a chilling realization dawned. Could they know his identity? Was this high-speed chase designed to lure him into a trap?

Suddenly, the screeching halt of brakes ripped through the quiet night. Panting, Lancelot faced the dead end before him, a cold sweat beginning to form on his forehead.

“Damn it! Why didn’t I see this coming?” Lancelot hit the steering wheel in frustration and looked into the rearview mirror. The black car had come to a slow stop behind him, effectively cutting off any possibility of escape.

The area was secluded. If something happened to him here, days might pass before his absence was reported. Lancelot quickly regained his composure, reminding himself of his royal status in Aerith. Any harm that came to him in Veland would undoubtedly trigger a major international crisis.

There was no way someone would actually take it that far, surely.

Lancelot exited the car, his tall frame casting a long shadow in the bright glow of the headlights.

“Who are you?” Lancelot called out, his voice echoing through the air. “What do you want from me?”

With a click, another car door swung open. A tall silhouette stepped into view.

Shock rooted Lancelot to the spot, his eyes widening in recognition. "How can this be?"

"Surprised that I'm not disabled?" Aiden's smirk was unmistakable as he walked toward Lancelot, hands buried in his pockets. Every step was calculated and imposing, his presence commanding attention and silencing any surrounding noise.

His usual grace was undiminished by the absence of a wheelchair, but there was something more now—an intensity, a sharpness that commanded both attention and respect.

For the first time, Lancelot, a prince raised among royalty, sensed a real threat to his composure.

"Didn't you once declare your desire to resolve our issues man to man?" Aiden asked, his voice dripping with mockery. "Here I stand. Are you prepared to face my challenge?"

Lancelot regained his composure. "I misjudged you. Feigning disability... You must have profound reasons. It's clear now; you bear burdens far greater than you show."

A glint of something passed through Aiden's eyes, though he remained silent.

"I accept your challenge," Lancelot said, stepping forward, his hands balled into fists. "But I want to know why you challenge me."

Why had he challenged Lancelot? Aiden pondered, a brief vision of Janice flitting through his thoughts.

Lifting his eyes to meet Lancelot's, he declared, "It's for my wife, of course."

Chapter 250:

"Alright!" Lancelot shrugged off his coat, revealing muscles that strained against the fabric of his shirt. "Don't disappoint me."

"I have no intention of doing so," Aiden replied, shrugging off his own coat. Though his shirt was less form-fitting, making him appear lean, there was a subtle definition to his muscles that suggested a well-balanced strength, one that might take an opponent by surprise.

Nearby, Braylen leaned against the car, his eyes alight with a mix of nostalgia and thrill. It had been ages since he had last seen Aiden fight. Memories of their shared ordeals and rigorous training overseas danced in his mind. Few knew, as Braylen did, the depth of power that lay beneath Aiden's unassuming exterior.

Meanwhile, Janice reached out to Costello for a ride. She hardly ever drove herself, and with the late hour, calling a cab felt like too much hassle.

"Janice, where shall I take you?" Costello inquired.

"Aiden's place."

"Alright." Costello ignited the engine, steering their vehicle toward Aiden's house.

In the dimness of the back seat, Janice sought a moment's respite, her eyes closing. However, the buzz of an incoming text message shattered her tranquility. Glancing at her phone, she noted the sender was unknown, yet the message bore a familiar name. "Lancelot?" she murmured, her brow furrowing in confusion. "How did he get my number?"

She speculated that Nolan might have divulged her contact details. Known for his extensive connections within royal circles, Nolan could have easily succumbed to Lancelot's intense coercion.

With a resigned sigh, Janice contemplated blocking the number but instead chose to read the message.

"RAIN, I see how formidable your knight is. I'll stop bothering you now. I hope you find the happiness you deserve."

The words left Janice utterly perplexed. What on earth was happening? Just a while ago, Lancelot had been relentless in his pursuit. Now, he was proclaiming his withdrawal. What was he really planning?

A deep frown etched across Janice's face. What did he mean by saying her knight was formidable?

"Janice, is something wrong?" Costello's voice broke through her contemplation, laced with concern as he caught her troubled expression in the rearview mirror.

Janice threw a quick glance at Costello, her mind spinning. Could Lancelot have been referring to him? This man was undeniably strong. In a raw showdown, if he truly unleashed his fury, she doubted she could hold her own against him.

"Nothing at all," Janice replied, her lips curling into a faint smile as she shook her head, amused by her own musings. Lancelot and Costello had never crossed paths; the notion was far-fetched. Could it be...

Suddenly, the sharp sound of tires halting snapped her back to reality.

She peered ahead to see traffic clogged at the intersection, where a woman was embroiled in a tussle with several bodyguards.

"Let me go!" Sierra's voice rang out, full of defiance. The bodyguards, cautious not to harm her, hesitated, creating a tense standoff. "How many times do I have to say it? I'm not going back with you."