

## Royal Contract 191

### Chapter 191 - An Insignificant Person

"I hope that I did not bore you with my stories," Katherine told Dani as they were going through their desserts.

Katherine did enjoy sharing with Dani about their life in the palace, hoping to encourage her that it was not as grim as what her son might have told her.

She had an idea that Alex would rather stay in this place than go home and take his place. But if she could convince Dani that they could also have a future back home, then maybe her son might reconsider his view.

"Not at all. I find it very interesting." She replied with enthusiasm. In truth, hearing Alex's mother talked about his childhood was fascinating.

There were some similarities in the way they grew up, but a few differences too. But not as bad as she always thought the life of royalty would be. It would seem that it was no different from hers at all.

"What about when Alex lost his tooth?" Katherine reminded her husband, appearing to be thrilled to tell the story.

"Oh, please tell me more." Dani encouraged Katherine to continue. Then, she turned to Alex's side and whispered. "This should be entertaining."

Alex could only roll his eyes at the two, knowing that he could not stop his mother from telling every tiny detail of his young life. His mother always found it adorable to share his little adventures with whoever cared to listen.

"He could not wait for the tooth fairy to reward him. Even demanding that the guards not to patrol near his bedroom, afraid that the tooth fairy might be scared away." Katherine could not stop telling her with pride how delightful he found Alex was when he was a young boy.

"That is so cute." She teased Alex, touching his cheeks with both of her fingers, which his mom told her was a bit chubby when he was young.

"We are talking about a very young impressionable boy that was told many lies growing up by his mother." Alex defended himself from the two ladies beside him.

His father could only smile at how the two ladies were making fun of his son. It did look funny when he was not the one at the receiving end of his wife's mischief.

"Oh, don't be such a cry baby. You did look so mature as you commanded the troops." She pointed out what she could remember of that event.

His mom continued with the onslaught of her stories. He did not see any problem with that back then. But. "What about when he was first heartbroken? Do you remember that, Fred?"

"Oh! I would like to hear what happened." Dani could not keep the enthusiasm from showing on her face upon hearing something about Alex's past love life.

"Oh no, we are not talking about that." Alex finally had enough, and he was putting his foot down to end this storytelling at his expense.

"Ok. Fine, we'll talk about this tomorrow when Alex is not around." Katherine whispered to Dani, but Dani was sure that Alex and his father heard all about it.

"Mom, I heard that," Alex said, but what could he do?

Besides talking about Alex's childhood memories, his parents seemed genuinely interested to get to know her as they questioned her about her work and the other things she did with her time.

In summation, it was mostly her work and her pro bono cases since she did not have many other extracurricular activities to boast about in her free time.

Except for Alex, who was taking up most of her spare time, but she believed it was not the topic his father was looking for in a dinner conversation.

"What about you, Alex? Maybe you will like to join us so we can discuss the necessary arrangement for your wedding." Katherine asked, but she seriously doubted that her son would oblige her offer.

"I think I will leave all the planning to the experts' hands. I trust that Dani would know what to do with it." As soon as the words came out of his mouth, he knew that Dani would not like it.

It felt like he had just thrown her to the wolves to fend for herself. But seriously, he had no idea at the moment how to handle the situation. All he could think about was to let the matter played out for now. It was just until he found out more about what he could do with his problem.

Of course, this earned him a slight jabbed on his side when Dani had the chance. It did make him wince a little, but Dani wished she could have hit him harder.

"I guess it would be just us ladies, unless the duke, I meant Dad, would like to join us," Dani said a bit sarcastically, directing her statement to the man at her side.

"Oh, you have to forgive me, my princess, but I could not even pick my tie to match with my clothes," Fred told her with a laugh, also trying to dodge being involved in girly matters.

He would willingly go to a corporate war rather than find himself in a salon or a shop full of clothes. It bored him to death to hear them talked about colors, hairs, fabrics, and the likes.

"Trust me, Daniella. You can never depend on men in situations like this." Katherine placed her hand on hers to assure her that they would manage without them. "I'm sure we can accomplish more with you and Laura."

The dessert was over, and all was left was to say their goodbyes. "I am so glad that we had this dinner. I enjoyed every minute of it." Dani told Katherine and Frederick.

"Yes, it was." His parents finally made their farewells as they prepared to leave.

But something surprised Dani before they could stand from their seats. A man went close to their table and greeted Alex and her.

"Oh, what a pleasant surprise to see the lovely couple? I believe I still owe you a congratulatory greeting." The man said as he greeted Dani.

But when she only gave him a tight smile but never received his hand, he turned to her fiancé and extended his hands to Alex.

"Thanks," But Alex also did not extend his hands to him, which he retracted immediately with a smile.

He was not bothered at all with the cold greetings. He was expecting it from the moment he saw them. But that did not mean that his fun was over. On the other hand, it was just beginning.

Then, he turned to Alex's parents and introduced himself to them. "I am an old friend of the bride, Nickolas Travis." He extended his hand to the couple, which Fred accepted with politeness but curious about his identity. He did notice how Alex had acted around him.

"It was nice to meet you, Nickolas." Katherine extended her hand without hesitation. But she also found the sudden change in Dani's expression a bit strange at this man's presence.

But of course, it was not in their nature to make a scene, especially when they were not in their territory. They did not fear for their lives because they had security all around them.

But they did not want a scandal to attach to the name of their son. An unnecessary scandal caused by an insignificant person was just not worth it, as far as they were concerned.

## **Chapter 192 - A Million Bucks**

"You have to excuse us, Nick, but we are about to leave," Dani said as politely as she could muster, hoping that Nick would take the hint.

She wanted to avoid an unnecessary confrontation with him in front of Alex's parents. But if she had her way, she would have told him to go back to the hell hole he came from because he did not belong with the living.

"It had been nice to see and meet you all." Nick gave her a satisfied smile and finally said his farewell and moved away.

He could see that he already accomplished what he had come to do, so there was no more point in pushing his luck at the moment. There was still a lot of time to proceed with his plans.

"Well, it was nice to have a wonderful dinner with both of you. But don't let us keep you. I know you are still probably both tired from your long flight." Dani stood up from her seat, wanting the dinner to end and for everyone to leave. She did not need Alex's parents to start asking questions about Nick.

She did not like the sudden appearance of Nick. She could sense trouble that she did not want Alex's parents to witness. Besides, she could feel that Alex was already fuming with his presence alone.

What more if he started talking about his nonsense? She had no idea what would happen. Although, she knew that Alex could control his anger, just like the time with Troy.

Still, she was apprehensive when it was Nick at the other end of his ire. Alex still had no idea of what Nick was capable of, and she did not want Alex involved in the mess that she got herself involved with during her past.

"Shall we go?" Alex said, but his eyes still followed the man that had caused Dani so much misery.

He still had no idea of the kind of relationship Dani had with Nick, but from the way he saw it, Dani was traumatized by it. He believed it was not just the cancellation of the wedding, but there is something more.

He could not ask Dani outright. He believed that he should wait until Dani was ready to tell him what truly happened between Nick and her.

"Sure," Dani said with a breathy sigh.

Fortunately, to Dani's relief, Alex's parents did not ask anything about Nick. Alex and Dani, together with their parents, walked out of the restaurant with a smile. It was as if the incident with Nick did not happen.

They eventually separated outside when their parents rode their vehicle, and they too went on theirs. As they sat on the backseat of the car, she felt Alex moved a little closer to her and cradled her head between his shoulder blades and chest.

"Are you alright?" He asked as they started moving towards the street.

He could feel that the encounter with Nick still affected Dani. She might show a strong front, but underneath all that shield that she built around her. She was just a too kind and trusting girl who could easily get hurt by abusive and cunning people that surround her.

He should know since he had the first-hand experience. Dani quickly trusted him and agreed to his arrangement without knowing him that well.

Fortunately for her, he was not as bad as some of them, who took advantage of people's weaknesses. His offer was legit. He made sure that she understood what she had signed when she entered their contract.

"Yes, I am. Don't worry. I can protect myself from the likes of Nick." She assured him as she slightly moved until she could look into his face. "I am just afraid that your parents might get caught in his games."

She tried to read his face for any reaction, but it remained blank. She still needed to learn his tiny telltale signs if she would read his thoughts. At the moment, it was hard for her since he seemed well-trained to keep his feelings to himself.

"Don't worry about them. My parents knew how to handle someone like him." He assured her. "Promise me that if he ever bothered you again, tell me." He took her hand in a protective gesture, gave it a soft kiss, and kept it rested near his heart.

He was not sure what Nick was planning. But whatever it was, he would be there to stop him. He was not going to allow him to get near Dani ever again.

He found himself wanting to protect her more from these kinds of people, like Nick. Then, he questioned his feeling. How deep was he into this relationship? He wondered as he asked himself if he was ready to settle down.

"What about you? Are you ok?" She could not help but be thrilled that he was ready to be her knight, but who was going to protect him from the likes of Nick.

She would never forgive herself if anything untoward happened to him because of her. She also had to keep an eye on him and Nick's activities. She did not trust Nick not to try his dirty tricks on Alex to get back at her.

"I am capable of taking care of myself. You need not worry about me." He assured her as he finally enveloped her in his embrace.

Half of him wanted so much to keep her by his side. But the other half was telling him to let her go while he still could. Because presently, he was not sure where Dani would be safer, with him or without him.

Back inside the restaurant, when Nick moved away from the couple's table, he could not help the wide grin that spread across his face. He made sure not to look back because he guaranteed that Alex was watching him.

Nick knew he had accomplished what he came to do when he walked to Dani's table. Contented with himself, he continued to his reserved table, where several of his new investors were waiting for him.

"I hope I did not make you wait too long. I could not resist greeting some old friends on the other table." Nick boastfully informed them.

Seeing the faces of his guests, with satisfied smiles, indicated that they witnessed the show he just presented them. Attaching his name with the royal couple would give his name and company a boost in the eyes of these people.

"I did not know that you have finally settled your difference with your ex-fiancé." One of his younger clients, who probably heard of his past, expressed his opinion on what he had witnessed.

"Fortunately, we set aside our differences and remained friends. Now, the royal family also could not wait to schedule a meeting with me." He continued to say, letting the lies influenced their decisions.

It was like hitting two birds with one stone. Nick was able to gain the new clients' trust and, at the same time, get close to Dani even for a brief minute.

If this deal pushed through, he was about to make a large amount of money. It seemed to be his lucky night. He suddenly felt like a million bucks.

### **Chapter 193 - Marrying Without Love**

"Are you tired, or are you up for some movie?" Dani asked as soon as they entered his apartment.

She did not feel like sleeping yet, not after the day she had with her mother, with his parents, and with Nick. Then, the question that Alex dropped on her like a bomb still lingered in her mind.

She wondered if she would have an answer about that anytime soon or when the time came. Because her mind still had not changed. She was not ready to get married to anyone, not even Alex.

"A movie sounds nice." Alex removed his jacket and started loosening the first two top buttons of his shirt, trying to make himself a little bit more comfortable. "What about some drinks?" He asked as he moved to his mini bar and grabbed two glasses.

He thought that a glass or two should relax their frail nerves. He knew that he still had to deal with the news that his father told him earlier at breakfast, the wedding that his mother kept on insisting on, and most importantly, he had to deal with Nick.

"Yes, I will only have one glass." She told him. She already had one during dinner, and one more would be too much. She placed the first movie she found on the selection without giving much thought.

Surprisingly, it was a romantic movie about getting married. It was ironic that it was the one thing Dani wished not to think about at the moment. But she guessed the topic was something she could never avoid.

She was about to change the movie, but Alex stopped her. "I like to watch this." He was not a fan of romantic shows, but he was willing to see if it would give him an insight on how to handle their situation.

There was no question that he was very attracted to Dani. Just looking at her, touching her, kissing her was more than enough to drive him crazy about her. But was he ready to marry her after knowing her for just more than a month?

Granted that they had met a year ago, but that was just one night of passion, nothing more. Sleeping with her only confirmed that they were very compatible in bed. Marriage, in his opinion, was more than that.

"Do you believe in love?" She suddenly uttered halfway through the movie, unable to control her curiosity.

They had been silent since they started to watch. Occasionally, both would smile or laugh at particular scenes and then said some remarks about the characters. But most of the time, they kept to themselves.

Out of a sudden, she was not able to keep the question to herself. She wanted to know how Alex viewed the concept of love. It was not as if she was asking him if he loved her.

"I did." He answered her automatically, still keeping his eyes on the screen as the movie kept playing.

He remembered the several times he thought that he was in love but only ended up broken. Well, mostly was just young love that did not mean much.

Except for the time with Tyra, he knew that he did love her. He was serious about marrying her eventually when he had established himself in his business. But she could not wait for him.

"You don't anymore." She felt suddenly disappointed, but she quickly lowered her face to hide her expression from him. She did not want him to read something and made a wrong conclusion out of it.

Then he also quickly amended his answer. "I think I still do. But." He finally looked at her and stared into her eyes. "I always thought that it was easy to fall in love. Seeing the way my parents expressed their love for each other. It was so effortless."

Then, he was again lost for words, unable to explain to her what he thought of love. Maybe he was scarred by it, or he was just confused on how to interpret it. But for now, he was not sure how to love.

"But, somehow, you found yourself failing with your expectations." She continued for him. It was the same thing with her.

She thought by loving someone with your whole heart, and then love will automatically fall into place. The other person would soon feel the same. But she thought wrong.

"Maybe something like that. I know that love exists, and I am capable of love. But to know if it is love that I am feeling or just something else. That is my question." He told her honestly.

He already stopped believing in love at first sight. Look at where that brought him. But he believed in respect and mutual understanding that might lead to love eventually, but there was no assurance. Everything was still a risk.

"I like you so much. I want to get to know you more, and I want to be with you all the time." He took her hand in his and placed a single kiss on each knuckle.

"Maybe in time, I might fall head over heels, in love with you. But until then, I can't say it because I don't want to lie to you." He knew that opening up to her was the only way to make this relationship work.

"I think we feel the same way." Somehow, instead of getting disappointed, she felt relieved. Knowing that he was not lying to her or using her was more than enough commitment she needed from him.

Promising her the moon and the stars would be a lie that she could not accept. But telling her upfront what he truly felt was better, even if it was not what she liked to hear.

Wait. Did Dani expect him to say that he loved her? Was she ready for that? Dani suddenly tried to shake the thought away. She was not even sure of how she felt about him.

"What do you think about marrying without love?" He had no idea why he was asking her about it, but it was a thought that nagged on his mind.

Once again, she was surprised by the unexpected question. "I don't agree with it, but I knew a few people who had done it because of one reason or another." She felt anxious that he had brought up this topic in their conversation. "What is this all about?"

Was it a prelude to another question that he might ask her? Was she ready to answer that question that she thought might be where he was heading with this?

"Truthfully, I don't know why I am even asking you that question. But I think it had something to do with what my dad told me earlier." He finally admitted to her what exactly was bothering him.

He related to her what his dad discussed with him during breakfast that led him to think of the different possible alternatives. One of them was getting married for real.

"Then, take the other deal that your father is giving you. Maybe if it worked, then you don't have to resort to marriage." She told her, thinking that it was a better choice than forcing the marriage as an option.

But then again, just out the forefront of her consciousness, her mind pestered her about something. Would it be so bad if she ended up marrying Alex?

Do they have to wait for love to come into the picture before getting married? Or maybe they could let it developed through time while they were already married? Was she seriously considering this?

Marrying without love, was it a death sentence or a chance to start a future with him?

#### **Chapter 194 - Reasonable Explanation**

"Have you not heard? He never wanted you? He was only using you because he wanted to get close to your father." A woman said to her as she wrapped her arms around a man at her side on the bed.

"I don't understand what you are saying." She tried to move closer, but she remained rooted on the spot. She could only gaze at the two figures right in front of her.

"He wants me back because I am far better than you will ever be." She continued with her hurtful words.

"What are you talking about?" She was confused as she looked at her closely, but somehow, she could not see her face.

She also tried to recognize the man facing his back on her, but her view was a bit hazy. She still had no idea who he was. They must be someone she knew because she was talking to her.

Her voice was a bit familiar, but she could not place where she had heard her before. But she was sure that she knew her from somewhere. She was great with her memory, but right now, it was failing her.

Maybe if the man talked, she would also recognize his voice, and then she could finally tell who they were. But the man remained silent as the woman kept her possessive hands on him. He remained turned away from her.

"Do you know what your problem is? You think that you are a f\*cking princess that everybody should bow down. But you are nothing but a spoiled brat who thinks you could always get what you want by showing off your money." The woman told her with so much hatred.

"You don't know me. You have no right to judge me." She shouted back as she started to fight back. She had no right to say those words to her because she had long abandoned that kind of life. She had changed.

"He doesn't want you, so you can't have him." The girl once again reiterated as she started kissing him, pulling him closer to her. "This time, your money will never be enough to buy love. Nobody loves you. All everybody wants from you is your money."

"If he did not want me, then he is all yours." She answered her, getting confused even more. She still could not put a name on the people that were in front of her. Why would she want him?



Then, the man started kissing her back. Then, he pulled her closer to him until the woman had her legs around his waist as he supported her with his arms around her body. The woman ended up straddling against him, facing her.

"You can't make any man want you. You would not know how to do it because you will always be incompetent in bed. You will never know how to pleasure a man." The girl continued with her insult.

On the other hand, the man continued to tease her with his lips and pleasure her. She also did the same thing with him.

"I..." She was about to defend herself when the cloudy haze suddenly cleared. But her eyes became watery as she slowly recognized the people in front of her.

"You don't know how to satisfy a man like Alex, and you will never will. You will never be able to keep him for long because he will always come back to me." She suddenly showed her face. It was Tyra.

"No, that is not true," Dani shouted, but no words seemed to come out of her mouth. It sounded like her voice was trapped in her throat that no matter how she tried to say something, she could not hear anything.

Then, she abruptly opened her eyes only to realize that she was only dreaming. The lights were off, and she could barely see anything except for the few shadows that played around her.

She felt the pillow under her head and the blanket on her body. She knew she was still lying on the bed. "It was just a dream." She mumbled to herself, trying to calm herself down.

When she turned around, she could see his face in the small light coming from the window. He was still sound asleep. She felt a sudden comfort, breathing a sigh of relief. Nothing about her dream was true. Alex was not leaving her, she finally concluded.

She shifted her face away from him, careful not to make any sudden movement. She did not want to wake him as she tried to go back to sleep.

But minutes had gone, her eyes were still wide awake as her mind played the dream she just had. She was left wondering why she had that dream. Maybe it was because of stress or probably seeing Nick again. The latter seemed to be the better reason for it.

She wanted to erase the memory of it. However, this one kept lingering on her head as if it was a broken record that repeatedly played, whether she liked it or not.

She ended up staring at the dark ceiling as her mind strayed back in the past. An event in her life that she would like so much to forget. But as she said earlier, her brain had this ability to keep remembering things, even if she did not mean it or want it.

She suddenly found herself dreaming again, seeing pictures and events. Then, it was so clear, as if she was watching her life revealed to herself.

She was back at their house, hiding behind a cabinet as she listened to her father and mother argued in the other room.

She did not want to believe what she heard. She did not want to listen to any more lies coming out of her father's lips. As of now, all she wanted to do was see him. "It can't be true." She said, shaking her head to deny all her father's claims.

She had to see him. She loved him, and she was sure that he loved her just as much or maybe more. She had convinced herself that all of what his father was saying had a reasonable explanation.

## **Chapter 195 - Vanilla**

Then she was outside the door of his apartment, holding tight on to the key that he gave her. It was still early. She was sure that he was still in the office, probably working overtime.

They agreed that for this week, she was to stay with her parents. Her mom requested to spend some time with her before she finally got married.

She walked to the kitchen and grabbed her phone. She quickly ordered dinner for two and chilled a bottle of wine. She would prove to her father that he was mistaken.

He was surely going to be surprised when he finally came home. "Thanks." She said to the man on the other line and continued to prepare the dinner preparation.

Then, she decided that she should bathe and changed into something beautiful. She did not want to look so ordinary in the clothes she was wearing. She had to look extra special.

He usually liked it when she was fashionable and in a sexy dress. She could not wait for him to see the new dress she bought for him.

"Ouch!" She suddenly slipped on an object that was lying on the floor of the living room.

Luckily, she landed on her bum, and it did not hurt that much. She checked herself, and thankfully she was ok. She moved and found a shirt underneath her that caused her fall.

"What is this doing here?" She recognized the clothing but wondered why it was on the floor.

But as she walked further into the room, she could see the different clothes scattered around the area. There was even a shoe on the landing of the stairs.

Her mind started to reel as she recognized the scene and saw that some of the clothes did not belong to him. She already had a vague idea of what else she was about to discover if she continued on her path.

Despite the pain she already felt, her feet pushed through as she continued to climb the stairs. It wandered through the hallway towards the room they shared during the entire time that they were together.

Finally, she found herself standing outside his bedroom, just staring at the closed door, unable to move any further. She was expecting the house to be empty, but now she discovered that he was home and not alone.

She stood in the hallway for what seemed like forever. But at another one's viewpoint, it might only have been a few minutes. She tried to enter, but her hands froze on the doorknob, and her head slumped down on the door.

Dani heard her moans, enough to know what was going on behind that closed door. The woman inside kept making those noises that only indicated how much she loved what was happening to her.

Then, she also heard him. It was an unfamiliar roar that she had never heard before, not when they were in bed together and doing the deed. She suddenly wondered if it was even him.

Maybe someone else was inside, and it was not him. It was a farfetched idea but something Dani wanted to hold on to because it gave her hope. A hope that he was not cheating on her.

"That was amazing." Dani heard the woman said, but the voice was very familiar. She knew that voice. Why was she here in their bedroom?

"You are amazing, Cassie." He complimented back, hearing his voice shattered every possibility that she might be mistaken. There was no more point in denying it.

Now, she had confirmed that it was her fiancé upon recognition of his voice. And the woman with him was her friend. Well, one of her close friends.

"Are you sure that you are ready to let me go?" Cassie said as they probably laid down on the bed after the despicable thing they just did.

"Who said about letting you go?" He teased her as she started giggling loudly behind the door.

All she could do was stood there and listened to them. She wanted to go and ran away. But she also wanted to enter and what. She had no idea what she would do if she confronted them.

"But you are about to marry, Dani. Do you expect me to believe that you will still want me? She is going to be your wife. You will have everything you want." She pointed out to him.

"You know why I am marrying her. I only need her money. Besides, she had no idea what she was doing in bed. She is no match against you." She heard him told her as if he was very disgusted with her.

"But, don't you see how hot she is. Men are drooling over her." Cassie said with envy in her voice.

"Men only wanted what they could not have. She was a prize that any man would like to possess, but she was unattainable. So the chase to have her only became more appealing." He spoke again.

"Is that the reason that you came after her? Because she was a challenge, you have to conquer." She asked as curiosity laced on her words.

"Yes, and winning her certainly would give me a large reward." He told her with pride.

"Are you sure that is all it is? You don't love her. You are not attracted to her. Because if you do, I will leave you right here and right now." Cassie uttered with accusation in her voice.

"I don't love her, and I am absolutely and irrevocably sure that I am not attracted to her even one bit." He tried to convince her.

"You are not just saying that. Because if I found out that you are also fooling me, I will make sure that I will cut your balls." Cassie warned and threatened him.

"If men only knew how incompetent she is in bed, then they would not want her." He said as he laughed at his words.

Dani felt her heart torn from inside her chest hearing those words coming out of his mouth. She never had an idea that it was how he felt. She had been a fool all this time, thinking that his world revolved around her.

"Don't you know that I have to force myself to kiss her and make love with her because that is all she wanted? F\*cking vanilla." He said with full of distaste in his voice.

## **Chapter 196 - Made Passionate Love**

She had no idea how she managed to keep standing as she continued to stand there, immobilized outside the room. She almost fell on the floor upon hearing all of those things about her. But she held on to the door.

She never thought that Nick felt that way. She always believed that he loved her. She never had a clue that he was a good actor, and he was only using her to get what he wanted.

And then whatever happened inside that bedroom, she always thought he also enjoyed every minute of it. But hearing him despised her and laughed at her sexual experience was very humiliating.

She suddenly started questioning herself, her worth as a person. Did he even love her for a little bit? Did she even have true friends? Friends who were there for her because of who she was and not because of what she could give?

Was she the one at fault? Was that the reason he had cheated on her? Then, she remembered his earlier words. He only wanted her money. Was she that unlovable that people only wished to be with her because of what she had?

A sob escaped from her lips, but she quickly covered it with her hands. She did not want them to hear that she was outside and listening to their conversation. She did not want them to see her current state and embarrassed herself furthermore.

"What about you? Aren't you afraid that she would find out that you are sleeping with me?" Cassie asked him, but unknown to him, she realized that someone was at the door, listening to them.

Cassie had heard a slight movement outside. She already had an idea, who was sobbing behind the door. But she was not about to ruin the moment by acknowledging her presence.

On the other hand, Nick was too focused on himself to hear her. Cassie knew that she could use this to her advantage if she played this situation right.

"She would never find out." He stated confidently. "She lived in her huge castle and the fairy tales that her father had painted for her. She would believe everything I tell her as long as I don't burst those bubbles." He told her as if he was so sure of his plans.

"What about her father? How sure are you that he will leave everything to you?" Cassie seductively uttered as she started kissing him again, making her cries and moans louder so that Dani would hear everything very clearly.

"I have her father at the palm of my hands." He started kissing her back as she started moaning again under his ministrations. "He would not know what hit him once I got my hands on his companies."

"Are you sure about that?" Cassie asked again as if she doubted what he was saying. "I know all his illegal activities. I can easily make him fall on his knees with the information I have on him."

She knew that once he heard what she said, he would stop and look at her. As expected, he moved away from her and stared into her eyes. He was reading her if she was telling him the truth.

"What are you saying?" He asked, still gazing at her disbelievingly. If she knew something, then that would mean Ethan was still keeping things from him. "And how would you know things like that?" He was skeptical since he was closer to Ethan's operation than her.

"Don't you remember that I work for him during my internship? I discovered several pieces of information about his company that I believe would be valuable someday." She taunted him with information that she believed would spike up his interest even more.

She also made sure that with every word she uttered, Dani would hear outside that door. She wanted her to know what her darling father was doing behind his goody-good shoe act.

"Are you positive that you have evidence to support your claim about this?" He asked, quite excited about this discovery.

If she told him the truth, then he would have Ethan by the neck. He would have everything he ever wanted, money and power. He would be the new King of this city.

"I am very positive." She told him as he once again covered her body with his, excited by this new information.

She started screaming with delight at what he was doing. Something that excited him more as he continued to pleasure her with his hands and his mouth.

Behind the door, she knew she had heard enough, and she could not take it anymore. She had to move away as soon as she could force herself to walk out of that house for good.

Thankfully, she managed to run out of there without them, discovering her. That was what she thought, anyway. She walked on the street without any direction as she passed several people, bumping into them and not caring anymore.

"No." She kept mumbling to herself as if that should make her mind stopped from remembering what happened today, first, the incident in his father's house, then the scene in her fiancé's room.

She kept walking on the street, having no idea where she was going. All she knew was that she had to get as far away from them as possible.

"Please stop." She begged as their words played like an echo in her head. Then, a sudden screeched of tires made her stop only to realize that a car was approaching her direction.

Thankfully, it stopped just in time before it hit her. Then, the man behind the wheel went out of the car, but she ran out of fright. The man tried to reach her, but she kept running until she stopped hearing his calls.

She had no idea how she ended up in a park and sitting on a bench. All she knew was that her head was still busy replaying the scene she could only imagine in her head. Their faces as they made passionate love and laughed at her expense.

## **Chapter 197 - Detective Skills**

"No, it was not making love." She whispered to the air.

Nick and Cassie did not know the word. They never learned to love.

It was only pure dirty sex between two despicable people like them. There was nothing lovely about what they did. Those two were evil people who only used other people for their gain.

"Liars!" Dani uttered in total despair. She was a fool to believe both of them. Nick, her fiancé, pretended to love her. But all he ever wanted from her was the money and power he could get from her father.

Cassie, her friend. The one who was there by her side through the many events in her life. She only led her to believe that she also loved her, but she only used her because of her money and connection. Then, she stole her fiancé away from her.

But the worse thing was learning that her father turned out to be someone as evil as them. She had adored and respected him throughout her entire life.

She believed that he was the most magnificent man in the world. The best father a daughter would ever want. Only to find out that it was all a lie.

"Why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong?" She asked herself, but only to find that she had no one else to point a finger to at what happened to her. Just like Nick said, she had lived in her bubble, not caring about what was happening around her.

Her life seemed so perfect that she did not bother to care what was happening around her. She was a selfish princess who only cared about her crown.

Now, she discovered that her father, the King, was not as innocent as she thought. Her life was not as perfect as she believed. What now was to become of her life?

"I am sorry." She finally said to herself. She knew now that she only had herself to blame. She had kept her eyes blindfolded from all the things that surrounded her. The false praises that she heard from the people around her. She did not realize that nothing about all of that was true.

She did not even realize that it already started raining, and she was soaked wet. All she could think about was how foolish she was to believe that she was the luckiest person in the world.

"I am so stupid." She kept saying as she let the rain washed out her pain. But, no matter how much the cold water gushed down on her skin, she still felt numb from the anguish that Nick and Cassie had caused her.

Dani had no idea of how long she had sat on that bench. The next thing she knew, she was freezing in the cold with the wet clothes that stick on her skin and the chilled wind that blew around her.

"Please, help me." The last thing she remembered she uttered before blackness took over her body and consciousness.

All of a sudden, she woke up shaking and sweating uncontrollably. She sat at the bed panting, trying to catch her breath. The vivid memories of her dream or was it her memories, still lingered in her mind.

He quickly opened the lamp beside the bed and looked at her. He was concerned to find her in her disordered state when he felt her quickened movement beside him.

"Dani, are you ok." He enveloped her in his embrace and ran his hands across his back as he tried to calm her down.

He wondered what she had dreamt to put her in this kind of condition. A nightmare more likely, he thought. It was usual to have those. He also had it occasionally, but he hoped that it was not something serious.

"Oh!" She finally recognized his voice and discerned she was awake.

She had another dream, followed by another one. But what concerned her was that it was somewhat identical. Only the characters on it were different.

"Are you ok?" He repeated the question when she failed to respond on his first try to talk to her. "Dani."

"Yeah, Alex, I am. I think I just had a dream." She finally acknowledged him, seeing his worry in his expression.

But her mind was still a bit disoriented. Her past, her dream, and her present seemed to collide at the moment. She tried to shake it off, wanting to clear her mind to her current state.

But it was taking time as Alex continued to stare at her, waiting for her to tell him what happened.

"It seemed more like a nightmare to me." He said as he ran his fingers on her forehead and felt the cold sweat on her skin. "You want to tell me about it. I'm sure talking can help."

"It's probably some dream about what we watched earlier. Or a remnant of something I encountered. But I don't think I remembered much at all." She again lied to him.

But sharing this with him seemed so inappropriate and humiliating. How could Dani tell him that her ex-fiancé found her abhorring personally and in terms of sex?

Her inexperience in bed was laughable, and her old personality was far from appealing. It was her past that she wanted to forget. She ran away from it and never wanted to look back.

"Are you sure?" He asked, but when she nodded. He finally conceded. "If you are sure, but remember, you can always talk to me." Once again, he knew that she was still hiding something from her.

This nightmare was the second time he witnessed during their time together. He wondered if Dani had more of this kind when they were not together.

He was not sure of what it meant. But based on the way her body reacted and the way her eyes twitched when he asked her, it meant to her more than she admitted to him.

She was running from something, and he would find it out, one way or another. She could tell him, or he would have to investigate for himself. He believed that he had a keen eye for things and his detective skills were quite superb.

### **Chapter 198 - In A Puff Of Smoke**

"Do I still have any pending meetings scheduled today?" She asked Jacky, wanting to clear all her obligations before she left for her next meeting.

In a way, she was also looking for a reason to delay leaving her office. She was not looking forward to her date with Katherine and her mom, especially when the purpose of it was to talk about her wedding.

Although she and Alex already agreed that they would allow their parents to plan the wedding, she was still uncomfortable about it. She was not used to lying to her mom.

"I think you are all cleared." Jacky checked her calendar and could not find anything else she had to do for the day. "Stop stalling." She said, noticing that her friend was avoiding her next appointment.

"I am not. I had been so busy with other things. I don't want to miss anything because of neglect." She reasoned, but she knew that Jacky never bought any of her words. Jacky knew her too well.

"If you say so. But honestly, you have to work on your poker face. I can easily read you like a book." Jacky jeered at her as she left her office to go back to her work.

It was almost time to leave, and she had no more choice but to go and meet their mothers.

"Jacky, do you think my parents would hate me if ever they found out about my participation in this?" She was thinking of her mother, who was very excited about this wedding, even Katherine.

Knowing that the marriage was a farce made her feel bad about agreeing with Alex. She felt that leading their parents on and letting them continued with the preparations were wrong.

But like before, Alex was able to convince her that it was a necessary evil that both of them have to do unless she changed her mind and wished to proceed with the wedding. But she knew he was only joking about it.

"Hey, what is wrong? Don't tell me that you want to back out from this?" Jacky asked as concern etched on her face. "But if you do, remember that I am always here to support you."

Jacky wondered where this agreement would lead her friend, seeing that Dani was getting deeper into her relationship with Alex. In truth, she wanted the marriage to progress. She believed that Alex would be perfect for her friend.

But she could not force her friend if she was not ready. She could only support her for whatever decision she would make. She only hoped that she made the right choice.

"No, I don't plan to back out. I can't do that to Alex. We have a deal, and I have to honor it." She explained to her friend. "But I can't help but feel guilty that our parents believe that it is all true."

She could only wish that she was not in this situation. But wishing was for fools. She had to face her reality and accept the consequence of her actions, whether it be good or bad.



"I would not know how to answer you. But all I can say is that from the time I met you until now, all you have done is make the right decision by following your heart. So, I guess to continue to do so."

On her drive to the address sent to her by her mother, she realized that someday, she would have to make certain decisions in her life that she might not like for the betterment of the many.

Would she be able to sacrifice everything that she had fought for, for someone else? Or would she pick her wants first and disregard the need of others?

"I'm glad that you are finally here." Her mother greeted her when she entered the bridal shop where they were meeting today.

Katherine also stood from her seat when she heard that she had arrived and gave her a warm welcome.

"So, we already talked to Ms. Laverne, and he is more than willing to do your gown and the rest of the entourage. She wanted to meet with you so he could discuss what you wanted for the design." Her mother told her excitedly.

"Oh, that is great." She expressed in a cheerful expression, but inside, she was dreading every minute of this.

She had no idea that by agreeing to be his fiancé. She would have to undergo this process. But in fairness to him, he seemed to have no clue as well.

Both of them believed they would never have to deal with the wedding. Alex would already have a solution to the problem. But now, they realized that they were gravely mistaken.

"Wait until you see her suggestions. Her creations are well-sought after, but since she is a niece of a friend, she agreed to do your gown even in the short notice that we gave her." Laura kept telling her.

"Then, we are indeed fortunate to get her services." She could only agree with her mother. There was nothing else she could do anyway.

Laura and Katherine, one by one, showed her some samples of Ms. Laverne's works. If she was honest, she loved the designs she had done with her other clients.

She might get excited just like their mothers if she was getting married for real. But as she had reiterated in her brain. Nothing about this marriage was authentic.

"Oh, here she is, my daughter," Laura said as a young woman entered the private room where they were waiting. "Daniella, this is Ms. Laverne."

"Just call me, Dani." She offered her hand.

"Well, call me, Abby." Taking her hand before ushering them back to their seats.

She was all business as she started asking her about her wedding. "What was your childhood wedding dream?" Abby asked in front of her mother and Alex's mom.

"I never had one." She outright told her. Well, she did have a dream wedding once, but it was all shattered now.

She could see from her peripheral vision that her mom looked at her sympathetically. She was probably thinking of the same thing.

It was supposed to be her dream wedding. But it was gone just like that, in a puff of smoke.

## **Chapter 199 - Fishing Expedition**

"Can you call, Marcus? Have him report to me when he is available." He informed his secretary as he looked at the files on his table.

He wanted to finish all his meetings today because he planned to ask Dani out. It had been two days since they saw each other because of their busy schedules.

Their moms had been whisking Dani away for the last two days, so she had spent her every available time with them. By the time she went home, all she wanted to do was sleep.

And just like Dani, Alex was also juggling his time between his company, his father, and Ethan. So, these past couple of days had been a struggle for him too. Luckily, his parents were finally on their way home.

"Yes, Sir." His secretary answered him. "Sir, Mr. Hamilton also called. He said that he is on his way here. He was asking if you could spare him some of your time."

He had to scratch the back of his neck, knowing that he could not refuse to make time for him. He was though a little surprised that Ethan decided to visit him.

"Squeeze him in my schedule. If you have to reschedule someone else, do so." Alex instructed his secretary before going back to his work.

Alex was in a meeting when Ethan arrived at his office. He was early from their appointed time, but he was known to value his time.

"Sir, sorry, but I could not stop him." His secretary said as Ethan walked into his office as if he owned the place.

"That is ok." He informed her since there was nothing that he could do about it.

"I'm sorry for barging on you. I know you are a busy man, too, but I only have a few minutes to spare to discuss something with you." Ethan informed him.

His secretary quickly moved out of his office and closed the door, leaving his team inside the room with his new visitor.

"Guys, maybe we could resume our meeting at another time. My secretary would inform you of our new schedule." Dismissing his staff in favor of the new arrival. "Marcus, stay for a while."

He wanted his legal counsel present in this meeting if Ethan was cooking up a new business deal. Although he could handle it himself, he preferred another mind to deal with the tycoon in his midst.

"With your wedding on the way with my daughter, I felt that we should consider mergers between our businesses," Ethan said without waiting for any formalities as he studied Alex's reaction.

Ethan's partnering with Alex in their first business venture convinced him that it could be lucrative and a way to get to know him. But he was still being cautious with his business dealing with Alex. He did not want a repeat of what happened with him in the past.

It was different when it was all about business. Ethan could deal with it without any hassle. But when his daughter's happiness was involved. He found it hard to be objective.

Ethan could not help but put emotion on the equation. But not this time. He had to make sure that Alex was not using his daughter to gain his trust, even if he was starting to like him.

"We don't have to do this right away. We could talk about this when Dani and I are finally married." Alex stated, a bit surprised but not finding the situation odd.

It was a common practice for two families to bind their assets once married. Usually, it was by merging their companies to make it bigger and stronger.

But Alex did not see the point in encouraging him to do this since the marriage was not happening. He could not bind his company with his, knowing that he had no plan to proceed with the wedding.

"We could process the papers and proceed with the merger when you are ready. If you are serious about marrying my daughter, I think that this should not be a problem with you." Ethan challenged him, seeing the hesitation in his eyes.

Ethan was expecting that he would jump at the chance of merging his company with his since it would boost him in the business world. But his outright refusal to do it suddenly surprised him.

Although it said a lot about his character, he was still unconvinced. It could still be a ploy to disguise his real intention when the time came.

"Ethan, I hope you won't think of me as disrespectful, but I had to decline your proposal. Marrying your daughter doesn't mean I am marrying you and your company." He pointed to Ethan.

"Alex, shouldn't we talk about this more before you decline the offer." Marcus finally interrupted the discussion.

It was a big deal that they should not easily pass up. An opportunity of a lifetime they had been waiting for since they started this company. And now that it was almost at their grasp, Alex was letting it go, just like that.

"There is nothing to discuss. I agreed with our little business arrangement because I saw it as a lucrative business and a chance to learn from you. But I am not taking advantage of Dani's position as your daughter to take your company." Alex stated as he stood from his chair and went to get something.

"Would you care for some drinks?" He asked his guest. Suddenly feeling stressed about this entire situation.

He could sense that the merger was a bait designed to lure him in and investigate his motives with his daughter. He already knew that Ethan was only doing this because of his experience with Nick.

He was sure that Ethan was only waiting for a chance to expose him if he saw anything amiss in his intention with his daughter. He knew that he had to be more careful in dealing with him from now on.

"Sure." He accepted his offer of a drink.

"I respect what you are trying to say. But it won't hurt if you think about it first before you shut my proposal down? I think it would be beneficial for you to be associated with my company." Ethan came here with a purpose, and he did not quickly back down.

Ethan knew it was a risk, exposing his company to Alex. But it would also reveal what Alex was hiding behind his books. By seeing his company's profile, he could see further what Alex had been doing with his business.

"Fine. I will look into it, but I don't promise anything." He was not afraid to show him who he was. He had nothing to hide in his business dealings, and his intention with his daughter had always been pure.

But what he could not promise him was the marriage part because it was a lie. Although, the possibility of marrying Dani remained an option for him. He was still not sure when that would be.

"That's good enough for me. Let's toast to that." Ethan raised his glass to him and Marcus, who seemed very interested in his plans.

Alex also raised his glass to them and swallowed the alcoholic drink. He thought of Ethan's proposal and knew that he had to be careful with it.

But playing Ethan's game at this point would only complicate things for him and Dani. He did not plan to get caught in his fishing expedition.

## **Chapter 200 - In The Hands Of Fate**

"Are you also going out tonight?" Jacky asked as she finished preparing for her date tonight.

Sebastian had asked her once again for the fourth time to go out with him. It would seem that he was genuinely interested in her. But her question remained. Was she?

She did promise to give him a chance, and if he would still ask her again on the fifth time, then she might reconsider taking this relationship more seriously.

"I am not sure. But probably not." She said resignedly.

Two days of not seeing him became torture for her. She believed that he was beginning to be an addiction to her senses. And an obsession that she could not stop because she longed to be with him all the time.

"Why not?" Jacky asked, knowing that she had been waiting to see him all day.

"My father unexpectedly dropped by his office today and interrupted his meetings. Now, he is still conducting an important meeting as we speak." Dani said sadly and quite disappointed since she was looking forward to tonight.

Alex had promised that he would wrap it up early today so that they could have dinner together. But sometimes, things did not work out the way they wanted them to be. As fate, in the form of her father, had meddled with their plans.

"I am sure Alex will think of something to make it up to you," Jacky consoled her as she sat beside her on the couch.

"Seems like things are getting serious with you and Sebastian." She stated, changing the subject away from her. She turned to face her and watched her reaction. "By the way, you look stunning in that blue dress."

She hoped that Sebastian was the real deal so that her friend could finally find someone who would love and take care of her. But from the way her friend was acting, she believed it was not Sebastian who was the problem, but her.

"I think there is something wrong with me." Jacky finally disclosed as she slumped back on the seat beside her. "I know that he is a good guy. I am lucky that he finds me interesting, but something is missing."

"What do you mean?" She asked, unsure of what her friend was saying.

She was no expert about relationships since she was barely figuring what she was doing with her own. But she wanted to know what was wrong with Jacky. She still might be able to help her.

"I don't feel the connection that I had with Marcus and Lance with Sebastian. Do you think it had something to do with me not having sex with him yet?" She asked, burying her face at the palms of her hands.

She assumed that the lack of intimacy might be the reason behind the absence of her attraction for him. But in a way, she was also unconvinced.

"You mean that you haven't done it with him yet." She yelped unbelievably. It was not like Jacky not to include sex in the equation when it came to dating, especially when they were already on their fourth date.

"I am trying it your way this time. Trying to get to know him first, then the sex part can come later." Jacky admitted, feeling a bit uncomfortable telling her friend about following her lead.

"Where is my friend, and what have you done with her?" Dani asked, shaking Jacky on her shoulders, pretending to pry the information from her. Then, she could not stop her frown from changing into a smile.

"Stop it! I am trying to be serious here." Jacky grabbed a pillow and smacked her with it so she would let go of her.

"Sorry, you just caught me by surprise. But. Really?" She still could not believe that her friend, who always tried to convince her that sex was the answer to all their problems, was now trying it her way.

"Yes. But if that is the case, then I should not have felt anything for Lance too, since we also have not done it yet." Jacky confessed to her friend something that she had kept from her.

She should not be excited to see Lance. She should not be feeling the burning sensation every time that he would look at her. She should not have felt the electricity when their skin touched.

But despite not sleeping with Lance, she still felt the pull of her attraction to him. So, she surmised that the lack of sex with Sebastian should not be the reason for not wanting him.

"First, I will say good for you. For not using sex as a basis for a relationship." She never felt proud of her friend. "But maybe you are still pining on Lance, waiting that something would happen. So, you can't make room for Sebastian in your life."

That was the only explanation she could think of at the moment. She could tell that Lance made an impact on her, especially after what happened with Marcus. So, it was likely that she was still not over whatever attachment she had with Lance.

"But I could not keep hoping that by some miracle, Lance would suddenly appear in front of me. We don't live in a fairy tale, and I am not Cinderella. Unlike you, he is not my prince that would whisk me away to my happy ever after." Jacky mumbled on, unable to stop the words from coming out of her mouth.

"So, you are not over, Lance," Dani finally concluded. "But how sure are you that he did not feel the same way. Did he said it to you that he was not interested to see you again?"

"Come on, Dani. I live in the real world. I don't have the luxury of dreaming of something that would never, ever going to happen. I am better off trying my luck with Sebastian than to wait for a damn prince charming." Jacky kidded around, finally accepting her faith.

She did remember him saying that he would miss her on the last minutes of their last day together. But it did not mean that he would fly across the world to see her. She could not be foolish enough to believe that.

"Fine. I am just saying that sometimes, fate can do some crazy things. Maybe you might cross paths again with Lance." Dani expressed her belief in destiny.

It did happen to her. Who would have thought that she would see Alex again after a year of their one-night stand? Then, they would end up in a relationship.

Besides, she was hesitant if Jacky should continue dating Sebastian if she did not feel the same way with him. But it was not her life and her choice to make, so she did not want to influence her decision.

"Sebastian is a nice guy. He likes me and makes me feel special. He seemed to care for me. So, why should I let him go, in order, to hold on to a dream?" She shook her head as if she was trying to clear her mind.

Because that was what Lance was. A dream that she could only have in when she closed her eyes.

She pulled herself up from the couch and moved towards her bedroom. She still needed to finish up before Sebastian arrived.

She could not put her life in the hands of fate.