

## Royal Contract 271

### Chapter 271 - Short But Sweet

"Wow!" Alex expressed in awe when Dani presented herself upon opening the door.

He always admired the way Dani styled herself. It did not have to be the most expensive clothing or too flashy, but its simplicity spoke volume.

The way she carried herself with confidence and the lack of pretentious movements was the key to her elegance. She barely wore jewelry, but she drew attention like a diamond in the crowd.

Lance, on the other hand, slightly whistled when he saw Jacky in her gown. "You both look stunning." He complimented them both, but his eyes remained focus only on Jacky.

He knew that Jacky could easily pass up as if she belonged to the nobility. Just put her in a great dress, and nobody would know that she was a commoner.

But it was never the reason he liked her. Those were mere physical appearances that any princess would possess. What made her stood out was her honesty. She never tried to be anything else other than herself.

"You two don't look bad at all," Dani stated as she scrutinized the two as they stood in their living room, returning the nice compliments she and Jacky just received.

Alex and Lance also stood impeccably handsome in their tuxedo suits. Standing outside their door, they seemed like men who just came out of the magazine.

Who would not want to be beside two of the gorgeous man in the city? Well, not just any man, but prince at that. But the funny part was, both Dani and Jacky did not care about that.

"Are you girls ready?" Alex asked as he entered the apartment, followed by Lance.

"I guess we are," Dani answered as she looked at Jacky for confirmation.

Jacky looked down at her shoes and smiled. "All set." She replied, seeing the smile on Lance's face, remembering the last time they were in this situation.

Fortunately, Lance never mentioned anything about it. Jacky, until now, was embarrassed about it. But like Lance, she only smiled at the memory.

Alex and Lance decided to travel in one limousine instead of picking them, one by one in a different vehicle. They thought it would be more fun to ride together. Well, Dani and Jacky could not agree more.

"Why don't we have one glass of champagne to take the edge off?" Lance offered, seeing that Jacky was slightly on edge on her seat beside her.

He could understand the dilemma since this would be her first time to be seen with him. He, Alex, and even Dani were accustomed to this kind of scene.

But from what he understood, this would be her first time to attract the media attention. He knew how intimidating that would be. If he was not born to it, he might feel the same way.

Alex started passing each one of them a glass with a third full of the bubbly drink. He believed that should be enough to take the edge off from the ordeal they would be facing once they disembarked the car.

"Ok. Drink up, and let us look forward to a wonderful and fruitful night." Alex raised his glass to the other three, making them follow his lead.

They all drink up, quickly finishing the drink before arriving at the location of the event. The alcohol should be able to do its job. That was to calm all the nerves as they faced the press.

Even famous people did fear making a scene in front of the cameras. Not everyone was immune to the effects of standing in the flashing lights and unending and repeated questions thrown at them as they walked the red carpet.

"Don't worry. All you need to do is smile. You'll do just fine." Lance whispered to Jacky's ears as she toyed with her hands. He could feel her rapid breathing and her agitated movement as she sat next to him.

"You think so." She asked with full of doubt in her tone.

She had done this several times as she attended one party after another with Dani. But nobody paid attention to her since she was a nobody. She never cared about it since she never needed one.

But now, she was sure that the press would eat her alive. She had seen how social media could be cruel to a person like her. She could already see the bashing that she would get once the word got out that she was dating a prince.

"Just squeezed my hand if you feel like it is getting too much." He offered his hand, and she took it.

"Thanks." Jacky felt calmer, knowing that he would be there to support her through this. He was such a good friend.

But the funny thing was, they were not officially dating. Nothing about the setup was romantic. Lance only ended up with her because it was convenient.

Maybe she should stop worrying about things that might not even materialize. She was so concerned about what other people would think when there was no relationship to talk about in this case.

Finally, the car slowed down in front of a famous building, one of the largest in the city. It was not the tallest, but its structure was imposing, showing off its magnificent architecture.

"Ready." The men asked as they gazed at their respective partners.

They could already hear the noise of the crowd outside as their limousine made its way to the entrance.

"Do we have a choice?" Jacky jokingly said, but if she had. She would probably have back out from coming out of the car, seeing the press and the many people littering the street.

"Fair question, but unfortunately, no," Alex answered her, knowing what was going through her mind.

"Don't worry. I got your back." Lance held her hands more firmly in his. "Remember, just squeezed my hand. I won't mind." He reminded her.

Jacky could only nod at him, finding it hard to voice out her thoughts. A few more seconds, the door would open. Luckily, Lance and she would be the first to go out of the car.

It was a small consolation prize for her since once Alex and Dani came out, the attention would immediately go to them. She already told Dani not to take too long from following her.

Eventually, the car went to a final full stop. Outside was the red carpet leading to the main door. It was time, and they all had to brace themselves with what would happen next.

As the door opened, Lance went out first. Jacky could already see the flashes of light. Anywhere she looked, someone was taking a picture.

"Come one." Lance offered his hand to her. Once outside, she shut her eyes for a second, wanting to get used to the idea. Then, she held tight to Lance's hand, zoning out the world around her.

She could do this. She kept repeating to herself. She walked steadily with Lance's assistance, not faltering her steps. Until finally, they had reached the doors that sheltered them away from the prying eyes of the press.

"You were great." Lance suddenly held her tighter and pulled her until they were face to face.

She was surprised by the gesture, not expecting him to do that. But when she felt his lips on hers, she was utterly shocked. If her heart was beating a hundred miles a minute earlier, it just went faster by tenfold.

It was not the kind of kiss that was mind-blowing, but it was indeed short but sweet.

## **Chapter 272 - Life Or Death Condition**

"We're next. Are you ready?" Alex asked as he positioned himself next to the door.

He could not wait to show the world how proud he was to be escorting the most beautiful woman in the world. He could not ask for anyone better to be his partner tonight and hopefully the rest of his life.

His excitement for tonight had put him on edge for several days. Add the other things that happened to him. But tonight, he planned not to let those things ruined his plans to make Dani the happiest woman on the face of the planet.

"Definitely. Shall we get this show over with?" She playfully smiled at him, knowing that once they were out there, all eyes would be on them.

They might not be a celebrity, but they were famous for some other reason. In the eyes of the media and the world, they were the current talk of the town.. The prince and the princess of the multimillion business they owned.

She also remembered that she promised to help her friend, Jacky. She had to attract the crowd, indicating the media. To get their attention away from the other couple, meaning her.

"Let's go." He was the first out, smiling at the people who greeted him.

Then, he assisted her as the cameras turned their focus on them. Flashes after the other almost blinded them as photographers continued to take their pictures together.

People shouting several questions about their personal lives, jobs, and especially their plans for marriage echoed in their ears. But they only maintained a smile on their faces, refusing to answer any of it.

That certainly distracted the reporters and paparazzi away from the first two who walked before them. But, Alex and Dani were both used to this, no harm done. All they had to do next was smile and model for the camera.

"Please, step over here." A man who guided them to the official photo booth instructed.

They posed for the photographer as he took several pictures of them in several different styles. For their last one, Alex pulled Dani closer to him, and in one swift move, he had her in his arms, locked in a passionate kiss.

That certainly made the crowd wild as flashes lit the night sky. The reporters could not stop the questions from flowing out of their lips. But it soon stopped as the couple stood upright, smiled, and thanked everyone.

"What was that?" She asked Alex, pinching him in the arm, once they were out of the earshot of everyone and out of sight.

She was astonished that he would steal a kiss like that in front of the press. She was not used to showing her emotions outside the confine of her privacy.

She certainly had not done anything like that before. She usually avoided too much display of affection in crowded places, not to attract unwanted publicity.

"You said to create a distraction." Alex defended himself as he reasoned his way of trouble from her.

But he could sense that it was not such a big deal. Alex and Dani were only bantering to see who would win in their latest argument. Something that they had been doing recently.

He enjoyed tinkering with her mind, finding what made her tick. At the same time, the things that could easily make her smile. It would seem that she was also doing the same thing as they both learned their tiny tell-tale signs.

"Well, it was supposed to be for Jacky, but they were long gone. If you did not notice." She reminded and told him.

She could remember that by the time they stood in the booth. Lance and Jacky were already inside the building. So, technically they never did need the distraction.

"Oh, I did notice. But I wanted to do it anyway." He tickled her back on her waistline.

But he did notice that the other couple was gone. He just really liked to show the world that Dani was all his. It felt so great to be standing right next to her, kissing her for all the world to see.

"You did." She looked at him with a widened eye and a slightly agape mouth, disbelieving what she just heard from him. "Are you sure you are ok?" She jested as she touched his forehead.

What happened to his very conservative man, who always did things by the book? He was indeed acting a bit strange lately. But she always blamed it on the stress of these last couple of weeks.

Even she felt that ever since they announced their engagement, things had been chaotic. It never relented as time went by. In truth, she believed it worsened as they declared their feelings for each other. Or maybe it was just a coincidence.

"Yes. This gown should be illegal because you are making me do things I don't usually do." He whispered in her ears.

The sensation of his voice, followed by the breathy air that tickled her ears, was enough to send another electric shock in her body. If she was not turned on earlier by that kiss, she was craving for him now more than ever.

"But I love this dress." She protested, not wanting him to blame the dress for their kiss.

She might not expect it and might have been a bit shock by it. But she was not discounting the fact that she loved the feeling of those lips against hers and the way he devoured her mouth.

In truth, she wanted more, and she intended to get more later. At the moment, she had to control herself and concentrate on the present matter.

"I know." He retorted back with a satisfied smile, winking at her. "And there is nothing more I would like to do..." Alex stopped as he lowered his head again, next to her ears.

"...than to tear it out of your body after this party is through." He continued and moved his fingers seductively on her waist again to make his point.

Even if they need not act as a distraction for Jacky, he believed that he would still have done the same thing as what he did. He would still kiss her because that was what he yearned to do since she opened her door at her apartment.

If this event were only not insignificant for both of their causes, he would have ditched it and just stayed in her apartment with her. He would like to lie on the bed with her rather than be left contented at staring at her.

"I'm looking forward to it." She finally whispered back before focusing her eyes on the couple, waiting for them.

All they shared earlier was a short peck on the lips because they were in a hurry. Plus, they did not want to make it more awkward for Lance and Jacky.

Until now, she was clueless about what was happening to Lance and Jacky. She felt they were a good match. But she was not an authority to be an expert on such matter.

She tried to ask Alex about it, but he said he also had no idea how Lance felt about her. Since they never talked much about it. Besides, he never did interfere with someone else life unless it was a life or death condition.

## **Chapter 273 - Future Of The Next Generation**

"Hey, Jacky. Are you ok?" Dani asked, finding her friend looking like she was still in shock while Lance held her.

She was late to witness what happened earlier. Unaware that Jacky's current state was not due to the press outside, but something else she was not expecting to happen.

Jacky finally snapped out of it. Even Lance seemed surprised by the sudden turn of events. "Yeah, I think I am," Jacky answered her friend, releasing herself from Lance's grip on her arms.

She quickly turned to her friend and faced her, avoiding looking at Lance, afraid that he might read something in her eyes. She had to get her bearings in order. After that short kiss, it felt like she was drowning.

What happened with the press seemed so insignificant compared to the awkwardness and confusion she currently felt.. She did not know what to think of that gesture. But she knew she could not ask Lance why he did that.

"I think you also did a great job. You certainly impressed the press." Dani jokingly said, encouraging her that she had nothing to worry about with her debut on the red carpet.

Still, not having any idea that the real problem had nothing to do with what she thought. She hugged her friend, seeing the smile on her face. Happy that she was finally taking it lightly.

"Yeah, I did," Jacky answered back, forcing a smile on her lips, not wanting to alarm Dani with her present predicament.

Should she even give much thought to that single kiss? For all she knew, it did not mean anything to Lance. But a simple reassurance that she did well, just liked what Dani did.

"So, shall we proceed inside?" Alex interrupted their conversation as he and Lance waited for the two of them to finish.

Alex took Dani by the waist and proceeded towards the entrance of the ballroom. Lance also did the same thing with Jacky.

Lance was also surprised by his action. He was caught in the moment and unexpectedly found her lips irresistible. It was too late to realize what he was doing until he felt her lips on his.

It took all his willpower to stop himself from going further, remembering where they were. But he certainly enjoyed the few seconds that he felt their connection.

"It seemed that your first time to host such an event would be a huge hit." His mom approached them with a big smile on her face, accompanied by his father.

They arrived only last night but decided to visit their friends, Dani's parents, earlier that morning instead of meeting with Alex and Dani.

So, it would be the first time they would see them.

Alex's parents felt sad that Ethan had a health issue but was glad to know that he planned to remedy the matter soon. They certainly did not want anything worse to happen to any of them.

"The night has barely begun, Mom. We will know tonight if all of these people came here to participate in the event or just going for the ride." Alex extended a kiss to his mother and a nod to his father.

Her mom shifted her attention to Dani and Jacky, complimenting them with the beautiful gowns they were wearing. Alex excused himself to get them some drinks, leaving them temporarily behind.

"How are you doing, Lance? We hope you are seriously taking your training with Alex into mind." The duke turned his attention to Lance, who was not far from Dani's side.

His uncle looked at him, studying him. Then, his eyes also spotted the girl that was standing at his other side. She had seen her before. She was a friend of Dani, if not mistaken.

He was suddenly curious if her presence here was because of Dani or was it because of Lance. But he would look into it later if something was happening here that needed the Council's attention.

"I am, Uncle. I am learning a lot from Alex." Lance assured him, knowing that the Empire always wanted to expand its business outside the country.

Now that Alex penetrated the international market, they would like someone to represent them in the expansion plans. It was the only reason he was sent here in the first place.

He did not mind since he always wanted to try to expand their business outside. But unlike Alex, he wanted to stay in their country and helped it grow back to its former glory.

"Well, your father is very proud of you for doing this. You are bringing so much honor to your family." Fred said to Lance, watching every reaction his nephew had to his words.

There were many reasons why the Council was dead set on having Lance trained under Alex. If worse came to worse, and they still find Edward unsuitable to be king.

Alex would have no choice but to step up to the throne. If that ever happened, unrest would surely come to the kingdom. He would need Lance's alliance to stabilize their Empire against those who would try to take it down.

"Well, I am here to serve the Empire and our King," Lance said, knowing quite well his mission.

But what he did not expect to find was the woman next to him. She was the only problem that he was having difficulty finding a solution to this entire equation.

"Then, that is good to hear. I will surely inform your father of your progress. I think you are doing a good job." Fred stated with a bit edge on his tone as he glanced again at the girl beside Lance.

"Thank you, Sir." Lance acknowledged his compliment, but the double meaning of his words was loud and clear.

He noticed the way his uncle was looking at Jacky. He knew that he was already suspecting something was happening. He wondered what his uncle would think of it if ever he decided to pursue a relationship with Jacky.

How would his father react to his situation? If he found out that Jacky did not come from noble birth or money. What would be the action of the Council and the King if that ever happened?

"I'm sorry it took me longer to get back." Alex walked back to Dani's side, carrying nothing in his hand. "I've been stopped several times that I was not able to make it to the drinks."

Who knew that having a party this size would be hard? Well, he knew now. Next time, he would leave this to the expert, like his mom. He suddenly wondered if Dani would be good at this.

But from what he had seen so far, she was no better than him.

"I think we better move on and leave these kids to enjoy the party," Katherine stated, putting her hand on Fred's arms.

She was happy that she had seen her son and Dani. Now, it was time to meet the rest of the guests. It was a rare occasion nowadays to meet new people since they hardly conducted events lately.

He finally returned his attention to his wife and moved away from the young kids that would be the future of the next generation.

### **Chapter 274 - Desperate Need Of Justice**

"Have you seen my dad and mom?" Dani asked Alex in her low voice as they moved around the crowd, greeting guests that attended the charity event.

The official ceremony had not yet begun since the other guests were still arriving, but she could already see that the place was starting to get crowded.

She was not surprised at all. No one would pass up the chance to be included in this occasion. It was an opportunity to be seen and mingled with the people on top of society.

"Not yet. But I gathered that your dad opted to come a bit later when the crowd is more settled." Alex explained to Dani.

In truth, he was the one who suggested it to Ethan so that he would be able to maximize his hour in the scene when everything in the plan was in motion.

Ethan would not want to miss one of the most momentous occasions in the life of his only daughter, so they had to be here at the moment of revelation of his master plan for tonight..

But Dani could not know that yet. It was a surprise that he had worked on since he conceptualized this fundraising for her. He would keep it that way until the final moment.

"I guess that is better than for him to get stress with all these people." Dani surmised as she gazed at the increasing masses.

The ballroom was enormous, but the attendees would seem like ants scattered around the room. Buzzes of everyone's conversation echoed on the massive walls that enclosed the entire space.

She only wished that nothing untoward happened tonight and for the success of Alex's plans. She had seen how he made an effort to make this perfect, and it was all because of her.

"Alex!" Someone at their back tried to call their attention.



Alex was the first to turn and checked the source of the voice among the sea of people. He found his old friends gathering in a group at the other side of the room.

Dani followed his line of sight, trying to figure out who he was looking at, and saw several men and women waving at them. She did not recognize them, so she wondered who they were.

"Come on, let me introduce you to my college buddies." Alex ushered her to the group without waiting for her reply.

It had been a while since he had seen them. All of them had been busy with their respective lives. He was glad that some of them were able to take some time to accept his invitation.

"Oh, sure." She looked at his friends, trying to assess them before they reached the group.

She was never shy, and meeting new people was always welcome, but trusting them was a different story. She was fascinated with the various characters of the people she met.

It was a way for her to enhance her ability to read people, which was very relevant in her line of work, at the same time, to filter the real people who wanted to help from those who only wanted to use her.

"Hey, guys. I'm so glad that all of you were able to come." Alex greeted the group with handshakes and hugs. "By the way, this is my fiancé, Dani." He proudly introduced her, presenting Dani to his friends.

Everyone, of course, had heard of the heiress that would be marrying the prince. It was all over the news. But seeing them now in the flesh, they all agreed that the two would make a perfect pair.

"Where are Marcus and David?" One of the men asked, knowing that the three of them were tight during their college days.

Marcus had always been his best buddy since they shared the same dorm, but David had been a close friend since they also had many things in common.

"They will be here," Alex assured them. They were probably in the vicinity. They just had not seen them with this crowd yet.

"I have never been jealous of you when I learned that you are a prince, but now, I think I am." Another man stepped forward and introduced himself to Dani. "Adam, at your service. If ever you decide to dump his ass, I assure you that mine is better."

"In your dreams, Adam." Another man piped in, discrediting Adam's line. "Alex's ass would always look better than yours." A girl named Dani did not catch earlier intervened, causing a raucous laugh in the group.

"I will make sure to take note of that," Dani answered with a smile, amused with Alex's college friends.

Well, she wondered before if ever she would meet some of his other friends. Now, she finally did, and she had enjoyed her interaction with them so far.

"I heard that someone was looking for me." Marcus walked into the group and started greeting their old friends.

He was alone tonight, deciding for the first time to fly solo. But he had no intention to pick up anyone in the scene. He planned to enjoy the moment of being alone for a change.

"And you were probably also looking for me." David also was not far behind, with a beautiful woman in his arms. "I also want all of you to meet Rosella Sheldon, my girlfriend."

He could see that Alex had a wide grin on his face, while Marcus was a bit stunned by his public admission. But the rest was happy for them as they welcomed Rosella to the group.

"It is good to see you again, Rosella," Alex said out loud. But since she was near his side, he whispered something else to her. "Congratulations for taming my friend's wild side."

But Alex was sure that David and Dani heard what he said, making them both smile with Rosella. The others did not need to learn of their private joke. It was just between them.

"It is nice to put a face to a name. Nice to meet you, Rosella. I am Dani." She pulled her into a slight hug and a friendly smile.

Dani was a bit surprised by David's announcement, but a realization dawned on her, remembering the boat name Lady Rose. She concluded that all along, he named the boat after her.

"I also heard so much about you. But I did not realize that the boys talked about me at all." Rosella answered her.

She knew that her past relationship with David had been on and off. He came into her life, one minute and then gone again the next. She did not expect much, but she loved him, so she took what he could offer.

So, just like David's close friends, she was astonished that he finally had the guts to admit that he also loved her. Presently, they both agreed to enjoy the night as an official couple for the first time.

"I think Alex mentioned you a couple of times. But I doubt David will talk about you since he is my boss." Dani pointed out, not that she was defending David. It was simply the truth.

Most of her conversation with David had been professional. He was her boss, so they never actually discussed much personal life. They never even talked about Alex as far as she remembered.

"So, Dani, tell us all about these pro bono projects. I am very interested in discussing some cold cases with you." Adam, the big burly man in the group, snapped her attention back to the group.

"What about it?" She asked, suddenly curious that another lawyer was interested in what she had been doing.

She just learned that he worked for a small firm that his family managed. But their resources were not enough to fund cases that had no funding.

"Well, I can use some help on them," Adam proposed, learning about the reason for the fundraising.

"Of course, set up an appointment, and I will be glad to look into it," Dani answered him.

Adam seemed willing to join her crusade, to give justice to those who needed it. Her doors are always open to those who had a wish to help. That included Alex's friends.

She was more than happy to share what she would get from this fundraising. After all, the money collected in this event was not for her but for those in desperate need of justice.

## **Chapter 275 - Golden Chip**

Tyra was going to the charity ball together with her father. Despite her protest, he insisted that she should escort him to this occasion. It was an important event that they should not miss.

"Dad, I think it will be better if you attend on your own." Tyra pleaded with her father to reconsider as they sat in the car on their way to their destination.

After her last encounter with Alex, she had avoided being in the same place as him or Dani. She had decided to let go and move on despite its difficulty.

But no matter what she did and how far she went away. Her heart remained with the man she made the mistake of letting go of, all because of what. She was childish and stupid.

"No. Alex invited us to be here, so the least we can do is to show up and give our support. Remember that our company needs his business. We can't afford to offend him." John said to his daughter, stopping any further discussion of the matter.

He believed that maybe Alex had a change of heart. He would not have sent a special invitation for them to come if he did not think of his daughter. He could always hope that Alex still loved Tyra.

"Dad, I think you are misinterpreting his kind gesture for something else. Remember that he is doing this party for his fiancé. He is still getting married to Dani," Tyra said, reasoning out to her father.

However, voicing it out loud was like having a knife stabbed in her heart. She was sure that seeing the happy couple together would be pushing the knife deeper and twisting it all at once.

She believed that her father was still under the notion that Alex would realize that he still loved her, and he would ask her to marry him instead of marrying Dani. But she knew better than to hope for such.

She had accepted her fate and only wished to move on, hopefully, somewhere far away from all of this. She had given up her chance with Alex. She only wished she could start over again.

"I understand the situation perfectly fine. We are not here to make trouble." John assured her daughter. "We are here to pay our respect. Alex had been kind to you, and I do wish that you will remain friends."

If Alex would not take his daughter back, and then he would find someone else more suitable for her. She was beautiful and intelligent. Someone was bound to notice her.

But one thing, he needed help with his company. He had been in financial restraint for a couple of years now. If he did not find fresh capital, he would surely lose everything.

"I also heard that Edward is here. It would be nice to say hi to him." John told his daughter.

Well, he was involved once with her daughter. Maybe they could rekindle the old flame. He could also look into that possibility. After all, Edward was still a prince and soon to be king.

"Dad, Edward, and I are over. I will never dream of getting back with him ever again." She could not reiterate that to her father hard enough. It was a mistake that she would not find herself trapped again.

She loved her father very much, but sometimes she wondered if he loved her just as much. She had stayed in constant communication with him because he had no one else.

She promised that this night was the last time she would indulge her father. But now, she was starting to regret ever agreeing to come with him to this event. She should have stayed away.

"Don't close your heart to the possibility of love. I know you were hurt partially because of me. And I will forever blame myself for it." John hugged her daughter, knowing that he had to get her sympathy and cooperation.

But in his mind, he did blame himself not because Tyra was hurt. But because he played the game wrong, and it caused him the future of his company.

Now, he had to rectify the matter. He had to find a solution. It might not be Alex or Edward, but someone else in that building would be the answer to his problems.

"Please, Dad. As I said before, I never blame you for what happened to me. And I am not closing my heart to love. I only need some time to heal." She suddenly felt guilty again for putting her father in the middle of her problems.

She knew that her father was a good man who only looked after her interest and her future. But sometimes, she did not agree with the way he wanted things done.

"But I am sure someone out there is a man right for you. Just saying." He patted his daughter's shoulder, assuring her that everything would be alright.

It should better be for his sake. He thought as the car finally stopped at the front of the building. It was showtime, and her daughter must do her part for all his plans to work.

"I know, Dad. But I am not in a hurry to find him anymore. I know the right one would come at the right time." She stated with confidence in her voice.

For now, she was devoting herself to her career. She had a promising career when Alex came into her life. But when her life spiraled down because of her mistakes, her career also temporarily went down with it.

But she was now on her way back to the top. She would not allow anything else to distract her again from achieving it. She believed it was the only way she would be able to forget Alex.

"Good." He agreed with her, but in his mind, he needed the right time to be tonight. "Come on. It is time." He helped her daughter out of the car and proceeded to walk on the red carpet, showing off his daughter to the world.

He was glad that the cameras indeed loved her as the reporters bombarded them with questions about her booming career in the fashion world.

"Why don't we just enjoy this night?" He encouraged her daughter as they both smiled at the crowd.

"Tyra, can you do some poses for us?" One photographer requested, which the others seconded.

"Sure." Tyra smiled in front of the lenses and started moving her body. Flashes lighted the red carpet as the cameras enjoyed watching Tyra struck her poses.

She did enjoy her time in front of the cameras. She loved seeing her pictures scattered all over the world. She had one thing she was good at, and she loved doing it.

"Thanks." The photographer said when Tyra excused herself.

"You did great." John encouraged his daughter, showing her that he was proud of her career.

He could certainly use that as bait to her next prospective husband. He still believed that Tyra was a good daughter. She would listen to him to what was best for her.

Now, what was best for them was for him to find her a husband. He would gamble tonight and risk it all. But with his daughter as his golden chip, he would surely win.

### **Chapter 276 - The Last Man Standing**

"What do you think of my friends?" Alex asked, ushering Dani to another group of people who tried to catch their attention for a while now.

"You have an interesting set of friends," Dani admitted, enjoying their company.

She would surely enjoy talking to them all night, but duty called them to mingle around. It was, after all, Alex's party, and as host, he needed to make sure that everyone would have fun.

Whoever said that hosting a party was easy should recheck her vocabulary because that was not how they would describe it. The party had barely begun, and Dani was already feeling the stress of it all.

"I want you to meet Mr. Dean Morgan and his lovely wife, Evelyn." Alex began his introductions of several more names.

Some of them were familiar since she had seen and met them in the other parties she had attended before.. As she mentioned earlier, these parties usually had the same guests, except for some occasional unexpected attendees.

They discussed a few topics about the business and the purpose of the fundraising event. Dani had to explain to them why it was relevant to help the poor in achieving justice.

"It is a noble act, what you are trying to do, dear." An elderly, gorgeous woman standing right next to her pulled her hand and patted it gently.

"Thank you, but I am just trying to get back something to our community." She answered her with a genuine smile. She could feel the woman's passion for helping, and she hoped that she would be one of the contributors tonight.

They quickly moved to the next group to welcome them into the occasion, hoping that they would pledge to their cause. So far, things would seem to be doing great.

Until a slight commotion caught her eye, the crowd parted, and the devil himself showed his face. Luckily, Jacky already warned her of his presence, so it had not been a shock anymore.

"You have a very nice turnout at your party. I guess congratulations are in order." Nick dispensed with the introductions and pleasantries, knowing that it would not be welcome.

"No need for that. The night is still young, and so far, we still only collected a few pledges yet. Maybe you would like to give one." Alex knew that the game had begun.

He had prepared for any tricks he had on his sleeves. But he was still watching out for the unexpected bombs that he might throw at him. Edward as his ally would be tricky. He did not know how to play fair.

"Dani, you look as lovely as ever." Nick turned his attention to her.

He started to regret making so many mistakes during the time that they were together. He could have acted more like a doting fiancé then, just like the act that this prince was doing.

Then, his biggest fumble was to be caught with his pants down, doing Cassie. Until now, he was still looking for the person who dared sent those photos to Ethan.

"I can't say the same thing with you." Dani was not playing nice with a despicable man like him. "I think your bimbo is looking for you." She pointed to Cassie, who wore the most provocative dress of the night.

"Don't be jealous. I still think you are far better." Nick stated, not caring if Alex was throwing daggers at him.

He wished that he would dare to touch him. He could not wait for him to strike first and make a scene at his party. That would make this party less boring and probably earned a spot on the headline.

"Don't flatter yourself. I hate to burst your bubbles, but my fiancé is far better than you." Dani felt Alex's hands went tighter around her waist as if he was expressing his support.

But she could handle her fight with Nick. He did not need to worry about her when it came to the dickhead in front of her. But his silence made her believe that he did trust her with this one.

He showed he had so much respect for her by allowing her to fight her battle. He knew that he did not need to be the knight who would save her from the villain.

"Ok. Mr. Perfect Prince--- ton," Nick uttered with an insulting tone. "I know you had been buying to my stocks. If you think I would never find out, then you are wrong. I already put a stop to your plans."

He was a man that was not afraid to fight his battle. He would not allow anyone to make a fool of him and robbed him under his nose. He was not frightened of Alex and his small army of wannabes.

Alex only smiled after his statement. He was not expecting that he would confront him about it in front of many spectators. There were probably more than one who was now curious about their interaction.

"Unlike you, I wanted you to find out that I am buying your stocks. I was surprised that it took you several days to figure out that it was me. Imagine buying ten percent shares of your company." Alex said without breaking a sweat.

He knew that if he was steaming earlier, Nick was now boiling inside. He wondered how long before hot steam came out of his nose and ears. From the reaction on his face and the daggers in his eyes, it was not far behind.

Luckily, Cassie finally stood beside him, trying to calm him down. But Alex was looking forward to his meltdown, but he knew it would take much more than that to bring him down. But it was a start.

"While my team learned of your tricks even before you got hold of my stocks," Alex stepped closer and whispered this time, not allowing the small crowd around them to hear what he said.

After his stunt, he pulled Dani away from him, making their way to the other guests. He knew his plans to poke the bear were working. Now, he was fuming and about to explode.

Usually, a mad man was a distracted man. He could easily make mistakes when his head was not on the game. That was precisely Alex's plan all along, to cripple one opponent.

Now, he had to deal with one more. Hopefully, it would work until the end of their game. But if not, he still had several lined up as his game plan.

"What was that?" Dani asked, surprised at what she witnessed.

She was not aware that the two had been having some corporate fight. If she did not hear it with her two ears, she might not believe it. Because as far as she knew, Alex should not be keeping secrets that big from her.

"It is nothing." Alex dismissed the issue, not wanting to involve Dani in the problem.

"It doesn't look like it is nothing." Dani insisted, wanting to get to the bottom of the matter. "But fine, we can talk about it later."

She did not want to drag the issue anymore since it was not the time to talk about it. She would wait until they got back in private, but she would not simply let it pass.

"Don't worry about it. I am handling it." Alex assured her once again.

He believed she already had enough on her plate for her to involve herself in a corporate war. Usually, in this kind of fight, the last man standing always win.

## **Chapter 277 - Damsel In Distress**

"You look like you are bored." Lance walked behind her, slightly startling her in the process.

He went away supposedly for a few minutes to handle a minor situation, leaving Jacky to fend on her own. But a client stopped him on his way back, discussing an important matter.

It took him an additional thirty minutes before he was able to return to where he left Jacky. He was expecting that she would be gone or mingling with the other guests. But she sat on the side alone, watching the other people went on with their business.

"Yeah, I guess I am." Jacky felt lying would not fool him, so she went for the truth. She returned her hands under her chin and her elbows on top of the table, sulking in her gloominess.

Her excitement when she arrived at this party earlier turned into boredom.. What was she supposed to do, pretend that she belonged with these people? Who was she kidding? Certainly not herself.

She tried to mingle with the group next to her. But all they talked about was the millions that they spent on this and that. Then, on the other group, well politics seemed to be the hot topic.

"Come on. Alex's party can't be that lame." Lance sat opposite her and stared at her despair.

He could understand that most of the guests were his kind of people. But he thought that Jacky usually handled them daily. Naturally, he would think that she could easily fit in.

During this kind of party, he suddenly remembered that people tended to be more vocal about their achievements and accolades. It was either they were trying to impress the other or overwhelmed their opponents.

"It is not. I think it is just me." Jacky once again admitted, seeing that everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves.

She believed she was just not in her element since she was not in her crowd of people. She could count in her one hand the number of times she attended a party like this.

One was when she went with Dani to his father's party. That was the first time that she and Marcus clicked together. But she had Dani then to entertain her and then Marcus.

Another time was when she went with Marcus as his date, but they hardly stayed at the party for too long. Then, there was Alex's birthday party, but Lance knew what occurred on that occasion.

"Then, let me be your very own personal jester for the night."

Lance announced as he pulled her hands away from her face and made her look at him.

He believed he understood what she was going through. But this time, he was not leaving her side anymore. Not unless it was a life and death situation.

Jacky only needed a few encouragements from him, and she would bounce back to her jolly self. Sometimes, he wanted to beat Marcus to the pulp for destroying Jacky's confidence when he dumped her.

"You don't have to do that. I am sure I can find something else to entertain myself. I am sure that you have things that you need to do. People to talk to." Jacky rambled on, trying to convince Lance to find something else to do.

She did not want him to feel obligated to stick at her side. Although technically, they were on a date, she still believed that he could do more if he had taken someone else.

In social gatherings like this, she believed that a partner should be able to help the other. But what could she bring on the plate when she had nothing? She barely finished high school.

"I would rather stay here and talk to you. Besides, you are right. This party is lame, and all those people are not worth my while." Lance grabbed two glasses of champagne when a waiter passed their table.

He handed one to her and raised his glass to her. "Shall we toss for the greatest night of our life together?" He asked, pointing his glass to hers, waiting for her to clink her glass to his.



"Are you sure about this?" She looked at him with a mix of doubt and exhilaration. But she also raised her glass to him, and after toasting for the night, they drank the wine, bottoms up.

It was just her third glass, so she was not yet tipsy. But she knew that a few more, and she would get drunk. Better be watchful of her drinks because she was not in a club.

"Quite sure," Lance responded, placing their glasses on the table and pulled her on her feet. "Now, we dance."

They passed by several people who tried to vie for his attention, especially the eligible girls that littered the ballroom. But he ignored them all as he led her to the dance floor.

A quartet, located in front of the floor, produced the lovely melodies that played on the acoustic speakers that surrounded the ballroom. A beautiful, elegantly dressed woman stood beside the grand piano, singing along with the soft music.

He placed one of his hands on her waist and keeping the other hand in his. Then, he started moving, keeping track of the rhythm of the slow beat. He was graceful in his movement, in a manly manner.

"You are a good dancer." Jacky complimented as she tried to keep up with him.

Unlike him, she only knew how to dance in a dark club. Keeping up with the fast beat was way easier than this. Besides, nobody would notice if she was out of tune since it was dark and most of the crowd was tipsy and drunk.

"Well, I think you also have potential." Lance smiled at her with a glint in his eyes.

Before she knew what he was planning, he twirled her around, and in one swift movement, she bent her backward and caught her before she fell on the floor.

She was speechless when he pulled her back on her feet and returned to their dance position. Slowly he guided her back to the rhythm as if nothing happened.

She felt like her heart suddenly dropped to the floor. Her breathing ceased to exist, and her colors went down the drain. Goosebumps covered her body after the stunt he just made.

But the worse part of it all was that she enjoyed every minute of it. She loved being in Lance's arms, the nearness of his body to hers, and the closeness of his face that she could almost breathe the same air.

"You see, you are a natural." Lance gave her a juvenile smile, knowing that what he did was a bit naughty.

But he would do it again to feel her body next to his. He did not expect to do that, but he was entranced with the music and captivated by her beauty. It felt like it was the natural thing to do.

"A little heads up would have been nice." She finally found her voice again, and her heartbeat was starting to go back to normal.

She tried to even her breathing, hoping to be able to act as normally around him. But every minute that she was in his arms, normal seemed to vanish into thin air.

In its place was a desire to be closer to him and to feel the kiss that they shared earlier, once again. Jacky found herself fantasizing about him, just like the way it played out during her dreams.

She would act as the damsel in distress while he was the prince who would save the day.

## **Chapter 278 - Just An Illusion**

"Alex, I had been looking for you. Some investors wish to talk to you." Marcus reached their location and invited Alex to join them.

He entertained some of their guests, and after explaining their new projects, they seemed to be showing some interest. Now, they wished to meet the head of their company and host of the evening.

"You seem to be alone. Where is your date?" Alex asked, noticing that his friend had been flying solo since he arrived.

He wondered if his date decided not to show up or had an emergency. He was not used to seeing him with no woman in his arms. Maybe she dumped him even before they reached the party.

"Nah, I decided to come alone this time.." Marcus expected the disbelieving reaction from his friend after that statement.

Who would think that the great Marcus would have no date on one of the grandest events of their company? Well, he could not believe it himself. But so far, he found the experience different.

"Wait, are you sure that you are Marcus and not an impostor?" Dani intruded with the conversation with a naughty grin on her face.

The Marcus she came to know through personal experience, and Jacky's stories did not match the man in front of her. What had changed? She wondered as she watched his response.

"Yeah, funny. The two of you can joke around and laugh, but I decided to work for tonight and not have any distractions." Marcus explained what he was doing.

Well, that was what he had been telling himself and whoever dared to ask about his date. But he also wondered if that was the truth. Anyway, he was here to help Alex with his plans.

"Ok. I won't laugh if you are serious about this new Marcus." Dani said, controlling the smirk on her lips.

In truth, she was happy to see that Marcus had finally had his realization. Well, if that was what was happening to him. It was just sad that he did not have it during the time that he still had Jacky.

"Will you like to join us? I can certainly use some of your opinions." Alex asked Dani as Marcus reiterated that the guests were waiting for them.

One thing he loved about Dani was her quick wit. She could easily catch up with the conversations even if she had no previous knowledge of the details.

"If it is ok. I will skip this one. I wish to go to the powder room. I'll look for you after." Dani excused herself, not wanting to have another debate on corporate issues and the likes.

She certainly needed a break from the non-stop chatters. Although it was necessary to mingle and please all their guests, she still deserved a few minutes of alone time to breathe and recharge.

She admired the energy of all these people who organize events like this. She was proud of Alex for putting up with this just because of her. She could not love him more for supporting her passion.

"Ok. Call me if you need me." Alex pulled her closer and gave her a quick kiss before moving away with Marcus.

She, on the other hand, looked for Jacky. She had not seen her since they separated at the start of the party. She wondered how she was doing in the company of Lance.

But when she turned to the dance floor, she could see that Lance was taking care of her. She had nothing to worry about her. She also noticed that Jacky and Lance looked so good together.

Then, she saw Edward on the other side of the dance floor, talking to some people but looking at her. He was the last person she wanted to see or talk to, so she turned away from him and walked in the opposite direction.

"Dani." A voice broke into her thought as she was making her escape. From the noise of the crowd, she initially thought that she might have only imagined it.

But when someone called again and gently touched her shoulder, she stopped in her tracks and quickly turned around to look at the unknown person.

"Dani. I hope I did not startle you." The man said as he presented himself in front of her.

He arrived more than half an hour ago. He was already mingling with some people that he recognized. But when he saw Dani closed by, he decided to approach her.

"Of course not, Troy," Dani answered him. She was slightly surprised but not shocked to see him. After all, she invited him to the event. "I'm glad that you came."

The last time she saw him at the apartment, she felt so guilty that she had no time to talk to him. So, instead, she sent him an invitation to this event.

"Well, it is an important event, so I thought I might as well check it out." He explained as he stood in front of her, looking around the place.

He knew that being seen in this event would be very beneficial for his business. But he was not here to find investors. There was another reason why he was seeking her out.

"Yes, if you like, I can introduce you to some of the people that might be interested in investing in your company." Dani offered when she saw him scanning the room.

She believed that Troy had a good business in his hands. She agreed with Alex that the place had great potential. With more investments, in an instant, it could grow and expand.

"No need. Some of these people are already investing in my expansion plans." Troy explained to her.

Some of his patrons liked his concepts and decided to help him in his business. With Dani's encouragement during their few talks, he made several deals with them that looked promising.

"Good for you. I am happy that things are looking up for you." Dani said, genuinely happy for her friend. "Well, you can always come to me if you need any help." She offered.

"Of course. I am glad that I came tonight." Troy said. "Count my pledge for your cause." He added as they continued their conversation in the middle of the crowd.

"Anyway, do you mind if I leave you for a while?" Dani excused herself, wanting a few minutes for herself. "I'll come to see you again later." She promised.

"Of course. I am hoping that we can talk some more later." Troy uttered, giving her a friendly smile before she left him.

His business was the last thing on his mind when he decided to attend this party. It is not the main reason why he was here. But that could wait until later when he had the chance to talk to her again.

As he watched Dani walked away from him, he decided to move to the bar to grab a drink. "Give me a gin and tonic." As he sat on the stool, his eyes wandered around the place.

After his second glass, he let his eyes roamed the room again as if he was looking for someone. It finally landed on a couple with their arms entwined, talking in a group of people.

He suddenly contemplated if he wanted to fight for her. Should he keep hoping that she would end up with him or give her up now while he still could? Did he truly love her, or was it just an illusion?

## **Chapter 279 - A Silent War**

She decided to go outside of the ballroom to get some fresh air. As expected, her bodyguards were waiting outside for her.

"Ms. Hamilton, is there a problem?" Ben, her security, asked as he came closer to her.

"No, not at all. I am just thinking of getting some fresh air in the garden." She answered him. Then, she decided to try something else. "Do you think it will be possible if you don't follow me outside?"

She could not see any harm happening to her in the garden. She just felt that she could use some alone time without eyes watching her. For a few minutes, she wanted to relax her mind.

"I'm sorry, Miss. But we can't do that." Ben informed her, still standing in attention as the other of his companion remained in their stations.

She already expected that from him, but there was no harm from trying. "Fine. Feel free to follow me, but try to keep some distance." She pleaded in her tiny voice, which finally earned her an itsy-bitsy smile from him.

Sometimes she thought they were robots, like in the movies, designed to look similar to humans. But Ben's smile, at least, proved her wrong. He was still capable of emotions.

"Well, you should smile once in a while. You looked good when you do." She teased him, but this time, his face remained stoic again. Was there a rule that they should not smile and enjoy their jobs?

She continued to walk towards the end of the hallway. It led to the path to the garden. Scattered garden lights illuminated the spacious, beautifully landscaped garden.

But it appeared that she would not be alone in it as a man was already gazing at the stars as he puffed his cigarette. She thought of turning back, but the man turned, probably sensing that he was not alone anymore.

"Dani, is that you?" The man asked, unsure since she was already halfway out of his sight.

He had seen her before, inside the party with some guest, on his way out. But the shadows still obscured his view of her to be sure of her identity.

Upon hearing her name, Dani curiously turned around to see if she knew the man. She did not recognize him earlier since his back was facing her. But his voice did sound familiar.

"Gerald, what are you doing out here?" She finally saw his face as he stepped closer to her. "Should you be inside with the other guests?" She asked, a bit curious to find him out here alone.

"Should I ask you the same question?" He stated as a comeback to her question. Well, it was indeed a pleasant surprise to see her.

Suddenly, seeing her brightened up the night, all he could think of was how beautiful she looked under the stars. How unlucky he was that she did not belong to him.

"Well, I just wanted some air and to be alone." She uttered with a sigh. She just wanted to release the tension in her body.

Maybe the darkness and the fresh air somehow helped her, as she felt more relaxed than when she was inside. The clear sky and a sprinkle of few stars did help visually to clear her mind.

She never did like these events, but she knew it was necessary. It was a necessary evil they could never avoid as long as they lived in the same social circle.

"Well, I can go back inside. I had been here for some time." He offered, giving her the privacy to be alone. He took a long breathe of the cigarette in his lips before finally extinguishing it in the nearby trash.

"No, I don't plan to stay long anyway. Alex will be looking for me if I am gone that long." She explained to him that there was no need for him to leave. "Anyway, it was nice to see you. Hope you enjoy the party."

She turned back away from him and walked in the direction of the ballroom, her security not far behind. "You, too." She heard him say, but she continued to walk away, not looking back.

When she returned inside, she remembered that she still had not heard of her parents. She had no problem if they decided to change their mind about coming. She preferred it.

She was about to look for Alex when a group of guests stopped her. She was chatting about the cases she was handling when someone walked behind her and greeted her.

"Dani, I have been looking for you." He stated as he stood beside her.

He knew that she had been avoiding her all night. He was only waiting for his opportunity to get a chance to be alone with her. But she suddenly vanished from his sight.

"Edward, it is nice to see you." She replied politely. "By the way, let me introduce to you all, Prince Edward. He is Alex's cousin, who is visiting us for a few weeks."

The guests started chatting with him, asking questions about his business and other things relating to the throne. They were genuinely interested in him, and he was slightly indulging them.

She knew it was her opportunity to escape from this situation. She was about to make her quick excused, but it would seem that he had a whiff of her plan.

"If you don't mind. I wish to borrow Ms. Hamilton for a dance." Edward announced to the group, cutting off all their questionings.

He knew that Dani was intelligent, but he was not aware that she was cunning as well. But he was not letting her slipped his fingers that easily. Now, he was more challenge than ever to get her at his side.

"Of course. Go ahead." One of the gentlemen stated as he bowed his head to the prince, which the other followed.

She wanted to tell them that there was no need since they were not his loyal subjects but instead refrained herself from doing so. But she could see that the action did feed his ego as he waved to them.

"Shall we?" Edward offered his hand in front of her, knowing that she had no choice but to accept it. It was his opportunity to be alone with her while Alex was still busy with his clients.

"Sure." She answered back with a tight smile. She could not outright refuse his advances without causing a commotion. Besides, it was just for one dance.

There was no reason for her to be rude since he had not done anything warranting such behavior. She had no choice but to play niceties with him. She could not make a scene without provocation.

He ushered her to the dance floor and guided her to slow dance. "I heard that you are doing great with your job. I planned to make a big donation tonight to your cause." He not so humbly stated. As if that should impress her.

"I am happy to hear that." She replied with a forced smile. "Our clients who could not afford their legal rights to be represented fairly in our justice system would surely benefit from your help."

As far as she was concerned, the more she talked to him, the more she did not like him. There was nothing wrong with his words, but his expression and his eyes were telling her something else.

She could not wait for the dance to be over so that she could move away from him. She did not like dealing with a person that she knew was dangerous.

"Oh, yes. The poor people who badly needed help. You are right. We should help them." He said in a condescending tone.

He smiled at her, but he never truly believed in charities. He thought that it was a waste of good money. But he was willing to indulge her if that would allow him to be close to her. It worked with Tyra.

He was sure that it would work on her. If not, he was sure to find another way.

"I am glad that you agreed." She felt like she was talking to a devil but maintained a smile on her face, counting the seconds for the song to end.

She understood now why Alex never liked his cousin and why the Council would pick Alex over him as their king. Alex was a hundred times better than him in every way.

She pitied the kingdom that would bow down to him as their king and the woman who would want to be his queen. He was a self-centered jerk who could only think of his interest.

"Anything to help you. I hope that this means we can be friends." He knew he was baiting her. From what he was reading in her eyes, it was not working.

It would seem that she was not as gullible as Tyra, but he would find a way to get her. He was sure that she had a weakness that he could explore. He just needed some time to figure it out.

"You are Alex's cousin. Once we get married, we are also going to be a cousin." She reminded him, not wanting to respond to his statement.

She could see that he was not satisfied with her answer, but he still smiled at her. She could not allow him to know that she was doubtful if Alex would marry him until now.

However, she did sense that Edward would always be up to no good. She had to be more careful around him. She realized now that she was standing in the middle of a silent war between Alex and Edward.

## **Chapter 280 - Battle Of Desire**

It had been a while since he had last seen her. She said that she would look for him, but where was she. He suddenly worried if something was wrong with her or was just busy entertaining some guests.

"You have to excuse me, but I have to attend to other matters. Maybe we can continue this discussion another time." Alex knew if he did not end the conversation, it would continue till the end of the program.

"Of course, we don't want to keep you from your other obligations." The man opposite Alex nodded in understanding. "We are happy that you spare us some of your time."

"Marcus here will assist you with coordinating a convenient time for an appointment so we can further discuss any future programs," Alex said to the group, which they all agreed with him.

The group of new investors looked promising, but they almost took a big chunk of his time. He still had many things to do for all his plans tonight. And he still had to find Dani.

He moved away from the group. He made excuses to those who tried to stop him on his way in his search for his missing fiancé. He already called her detailed security.

They said that she already went back inside after a short trip to the garden. She was bound to be anywhere inside this ballroom. Finally, Alex stopped at one side of the ballroom and saw her on the dance floor.

"What are you up to?" He mumbled not to anyone but only to himself upon seeing who was dancing with her.

He trusted her in every decision she made. If she ended up dancing with him, it was not because she wanted it. She probably had been forced to the matter due to circumstances.

Him, Edward, he would never trust not with his life, especially hers. He might be acting civilized with him. But it was only out of his respect to his father, his uncle, and the people of his kingdom.

"What do you think?" Marcus stood by his side, waiting for his reaction to the new investors, unaware of what was happening.

He had been working all night, finding opportunities to pitch in their projects to new investment possibilities. So far, he was satisfied with the turnout of interested individuals and companies ready to check their proposals.

"I think she is handling herself quite well." He answered him back, thinking that they were talking about the same subject.

He continued to observe the interaction between Dani and Edward. Dani had that constrained smile that showed that she was not enjoying his company.

She was dancing with Edward and discussing something that displeased her. He was basing it on the way he read her body language and expression.

"What are you talking about?" Marcus asked confusedly, finally following his line of vision, finding Dani at the other end, in the arms of Edward. "Aren't you doing something about it, like save Dani from his clutches?"

That was what he would do under the circumstances. If he suddenly found his girl in another man's arms, he would march into them and snatched her back away from him.

"I don't think she needed saving. But I do believe Edward does." Alex jokingly said as the song was finally coming to an end. "I'll talk to you about the investors on Monday. Go enjoy the rest of the night."

Alex tapped his friend on the shoulder, encouraging him to stop working. He already had done enough. It was time to mingle socially and have fun.

He waited until the music was at its last note before stepping in, knowing that she never needed him to fight her battles anyway. But he would still be nearby just in case.

"It was a nice dance, but if you'll excuse me." Alex heard Dani as she said it to Edward when the music stopped. "I still have other matters to attend to." She added, still trying not to be rude.

She pulled her hands away from him and stepped back, which Edward easily let go when he saw Alex standing almost behind her. He knew his time was up. "Until next time then," Edward responded.

Edward only smiled sarcastically at Alex before he started to move away from them. He knew there was nothing much he could do now that Alex was back.

"How long have you been there?" She asked. It was the only time that Dani realized that Alex was already standing right next to her.



She was so focused on getting rid of Edward that she did not notice Alex's presence. But she was glad that he was finally here because she was indeed looking for him.

"Not that long, but enough to enjoy how you get rid of my cousin," Alex admitted with a grin on his lips. He turned to face her and pulled her into his arms. When the music started, it was his turn to move her in his arms.

He was glad that he did not have to worry too much about her. Every time Dani was away from his sight. He was relieved that she was capable of taking care of herself.

After all, he could not protect her twenty-four-seven. And her security was not always an assurance that no harm could happen to her. It was always good that she knew how to handle any situation and protect herself.

"Oh, you witness that. I don't want to be rude, but I honestly don't feel comfortable around your cousin. He gives me the creeps." Dani confessed to him, which made him laugh out loud.

She was surprised by his reaction to what she said, suddenly embarrassed that the other people around them were starting to look at them. "Ssshhh." She shushed him, which he toned down to a chuckle.

"I'm sorry, but that was the first time that a woman called my cousin a creep." He finally suppressed his smile as his face turned serious. "You just never failed to amaze me. You are everything to me."

He ran his fingers through her face, down to her chin, grazing the smoothness of her skin. Then, he made her face tilt up to him, forcing her gently to look up, so he could gaze into her eyes.

His eyes never left hers, not caring about the world around them. At the moment, it was just the two of them while nothing else existed. Dani was the only person that mattered as he kept her in his warmth.

"I am?" She asked with a slight hesitation, keeping her eyes locked with his.

She had heard those words before, but hearing him say it all over again, still felt so surreal. Like she was floating in a dream above the clouds where everything was perfect.

But she knew that she was never perfect. The world might think otherwise because all they saw was the superficial things, but deep inside, she knew that she had several flaws.

"Yes." He softly whispered, refraining himself from saying more before he started spilling the beans and ruined his surprise.

He could not accidentally say something to her and make her suspicious of his plans. But every time he stared at those soulful eyes, it became harder and harder for him to keep things from her.

He lowered his head to hers until their foreheads and noses touched as they closed the gap between them. The next thing, he had his lips secured with hers in a battle of desire.