

## **Royal Contract 341**

### **Chapter 341 - Good Luck Charm**

"How did your day with Jacky go?" Alex asked as he drove them to her parent's home.

Her father had been requesting her presence since they arrived, but her busy schedule prevented her from keeping up with her promise. She had to postpone her visit until tonight.

"It had been fun." Remembering the entire fun day spent with her friend. "You know Jacky." She could not help but smile at the thought of the things Jacky did for her.

"Then, I guess I should stop asking questions," Alex was satisfied to know that when Jacky was around, it was sure that Dani had a great time.

When it came to her best friend, it was best not to pry with their activities. He was sure that it probably involved shopping, salons, and other girly things.

"Funny." She smirked at him. "But honestly, I did have a lot of fun." She looked outside the window and saw the darkness spreading around them.

She was glad that she did get out with Jacky earlier. Although she loved spending the day with Alex, she knew her time with Jacky would be limited once she was married.

She still had no idea what would happen once she took her vow. She realized they hardly talked about their plans once the ceremonies were over, like where they would live.

"I am glad. You deserved to have fun." He only glanced at her for a second before returning his eyes to the road.

"What about you? I notice that you hardly see your friends." She had observed this since they ended up together.

He had been swamped with work and with her. He never had time to bond with his friends, even Marcus. She sometimes felt guilty that she and her family consumed most of his free time. He did not get enough for himself.

"That is ok. My friends are also busy with their lives." Alex made his excuses, but he decided to concentrate on his work.

Since she became a part of his life, he had made her his number one priority. He did not regret it one bit but found satisfaction, knowing that he was protecting her.

A few more minutes, and they were parking in front of her family home. She still could not call it a house due to its massive size. Until now, she still considered it too big for the two people living inside.

"Ok. But I do hope you can take some time to loosen up with your friends." She knew the pressure of their jobs could be demanding.

A few times of going out and having fun might be what he needed.

Once inside the mansion, she walked into the hallway. She recognized all too well the history of every corner of the place.

Her parents were already waiting for them at the library where his father still kept his price possessions, his collections of old books, manuscripts, and some masterpieces.

"My princess," Ethan greeted his daughter when he saw her step inside the door. "Alex, welcome back to our humble home," Ethan added when he followed close behind her.

Laura also greeted them, offering them a seat on the long sofa and drinks. Her daughter and her fiance were a bit early, so dinner was still not yet set.

"It is always a pleasure to be with your company," Alex responded with a charming smile.

He always enjoyed chatting with Laura since she kept reminding him of his mother. While Ethan had always been fascinating, his conversations with him had always been interesting.

Dinner had always been impeccable as always. Laura always did a great job in running the households. She could run an army if she wanted with her skills in the delegation.

"Your mother would like to hear more about your day with Jacky today." Ethan directed his words to her daughter. "Alex, would you like to join me in the library? I am sure that you are not excited to hear about shopping and the likes."

"Yes, I am sure Mom would like to hear how beautiful my gown is." Dani stood from her chair and gave her father a soft kiss on his forehead. "Mom, would you like to accompany me to my room?"

It had been a long time since she had been in her old room. It would seem that her mom had kept it just the way she liked it before. She could still see her old things exactly where she had left them when she left.

"You kept my things." she voiced out her surprise as she moved around the room. She picked up some old books she loved to read. A few of her old pieces of jewelry were still in her box.

"Of course. It was the only thing that reminded me of you while you were gone." Her mom answered her as she sat on the edge of the bed, watching her walk around the room.

Her daughter leaving their care had been one of the difficult times she had to endure in her life. It took her a while before she stopped blaming Ethan for breaking their family.

She was glad that it did not take long. She and her husband were able to patch up their differences. She eventually stopped being mad at him, accepting that Dani had to leave because of a misunderstanding.

Her daughter was too young to learn the truth, so her husband had to keep her in the dark. As much as they wanted to include her in their secret, it was too dangerous. It was better if Dani remained clueless about the situation.

"What are you looking for anyway?" Laura asked as Dani kept moving around and picking on her things.

"Nothing in particular. I am just enjoying recalling the memories this place held in my heart." Dani picked up a picture of her with her parents on one of their ski trips.

She remembered she broke her ankle that time when she accidentally tripped on a rock. But that was another time, Dani could say that she had improved through the years.

"I do remember when your father first gave you this." Laura stood beside her on her table and pulled out a basketball.

It was the only boy toy that she could find in her room. It reminded her of the time when she insisted on having one. It was the moment her daughter pointed out to her father that she could also do what boys could.

Dani did not play the game, but she kept the ball. It had been a symbol that gender was only a letter. She could do anything she wished to do as long as she was determined to do it.

"Are you ready to get married?" Laura changed the topic, asking the question that was plaguing her mind.

She just wanted to be assured that Dani had thought about this wedding thoroughly. She did not want her to make a mistake and ended up divorced and miserable in the end.

"I have never been sure in my life." She answered her mom with a starry-eyed and dreamy smile.

Dani finally found what she was not looking for in the first place. It was a blue hairpin that her grandma gave her when she was young. It was one of her favorite.. She constantly kept it around because she believed it had been her good luck charm.

## **Chapter 342 - Leaking The Secrets**

"How are you feeling?" Alex asked as they sat down inside his parlor.

He observed the man, who would soon become his father-in-law, checking his state of health. Based on his physician, he was recovering according to their timeframe.

It was a good sign, indicating his fast and complete recovery. As much as he wanted control of the company, he did not mind having Ethan as a partner. He would not mind having Ethan around to show him the ropes.

"Don't worry about me. I am as strong as an ox. I am not dying that easily." Ethan said, seeing the questioning look in his eyes. He rested his back on his favorite chair as he drank his freshly prepared fruit juice.

"Why don't you help yourself with a drink?" He said bitterly, putting down the glass with distaste.

Laura and his doctors had warned him against drinking caffeinated or alcoholic drinks. Even his meals were regulated and calculated. For him, it was no way to live.

Then, he felt like a prisoner in his home, with Laura monitoring his movements. He knew that his wife only thought of what was best for him, but he could not help but feel so incompetent, unable to do what he wanted.

"I am glad to hear that," Alex replied, happy that Ethan was fighting his condition. He declined the drink, not wanting to be rude to his host.

If Ethan could not drink any alcohol, so would he. He accepted the offered juice by the server, placing another glass in front of him. As the saying went, one for all, all for one.

"So, tell me what is happening with my company." "I want to know everything." "Don't even try to lie to me." He warned him.

He could not wait a minute longer to hear his report. He did not ask Alex in private only to talk about some idle chitchat. He demanded what was happening in his company.

"Are you sure that you can handle the pressure? I don't want to stress you out, or else Laura and Dani will skin me alive." Alex had guaranteed that Ethan was up to the situation.

Any wrong word and his life could be in danger once again. Alex did not want to be the cause of worsening his condition, definitely not his demise.

"Of course, I can handle the pressure." Ethan raised his voice at him, not tolerating how he was treating him as if he was a glass that could easily break. "I will die sooner if I keep sitting here, wondering about my company."

He was bored out of his mind. The only thing keeping him sane was Laura, but even she was getting frustrated with his attitude. He tried to obey her every request. However, it was taking too long for him to get back his life.

He was used to working almost twenty-four-seven since he started building his company. Now, it was the other way around. He was either lying, sitting, or moving around the house with nothing to do but stare at the different corners of this place.

"I understand." Alex could only imagine what Ethan was going through. He believed it might be hard to transition from being the tycoon to retirement.

"Do you?" He raised one of his brows, doubting his words. "Anyway, what is the latest news?" He placed his glass back on the table, entwining his fingers in front of him and crossing his legs as he waited for him to tell his story.

"So far, the board members had responded positively to my take over. But I know they are still waiting for me to fail." Alex narrated his first board meeting.

He also told him the new projects he introduced and the latest problems the company was facing. He spared no details in updating Ethan with what was happening to his company.

Although, he still withheld some of the questions in his mind. He was still debating if he should discuss the secret that Alex discovered through Cassie.

He wondered if Ethan was well enough to handle if he brought up the past and examined its implication in the present and towards the future. For him, no secrets remained hidden forever.

"It would not be easy to eliminate their doubt. After all, it took me my entire life to build my reputation and to earn their trust." Ethan gave him a reassuring smile.

Building a character could take months, years, and even a lifetime. It required developing many facets of an individual. Some were born with it, while others did not have it at all.

He was confident that Alex was just like him, a born leader. The reason why he had easily chosen him to take his place. He had seen himself in him, the ambition and the drive to succeed to the top.

"Don't worry, Sir. I am doing my best to convince them that you did not make the wrong choice." He looked up and stared directly into Ethan's eyes. "I will never fail you and Dani."

He was not doing this solely for his gain, although he had wanted this for a long time. His main reason remained the same. He needed to protect Ethan's legacy for Dani's sake.

"I heard that Cassie was at your office. What did she want?" Ethan still had a few eyes inside who still secretly whispered in his ears. However, those were not enough to satisfy his curiosity.

He needed the comprehensive information and not just bits and pieces of crap. As far as he knew, Cassie visited him. What transpired inside the office was still a mystery to him.

"How did you know that?" He did not wait for the answer. Someone loyal to him could have passed up the message to him. "Yes, Cassie had come by the office." He affirmed his statement. "She wanted to discuss something."

He did not elaborate more, assessing first the situation. He wondered what else his informant had told him about the meeting, but he could tell that it was not much.

Whoever was providing Ethan with the information was not included in most of the private meetings. Since Ethan hardly knew of what was happening in the company.

"What did she tell you?" Ethan could only guess the information that Cassie shared with him.

"She said she needed to get away from Nick. If I helped her, she would give me the evidence she had against you." Alex finally disclosed to him what was nagging at him.

He waited for Ethan to respond to his statement. He could not read what Ethan was thinking through his expression, but Alex could tell that he was in deep thought.

"And, did she give you the file?" Ethan waited for his answer as his mind swirled around what he had learned.

Ethan always suspected that when Cassie left his company. She might have taken some private files from his office. His men could not find proof of his claims. Cassie got away without anyone catching her.

Then, when he learned that Cassie joined forces with Nick, he thought that she would give those files to Nick, but it would seem she did not.

Because if she did, Nick would not have a second thought to use that information against him. He would have ammunition against him. Fortunately, for whatever reason, Cassie did have some form of change of heart.

He finally confirmed his initial suspicion that Cassie had something to do with leaking the secrets he had kept from Dani that had caused the rift between them.

### **Chapter 343 - Dodging The Bullet**

Instead of being alarmed, Alex was relieved after hearing Ethan ask about the file. It was a perfect opportunity for him to question Ethan about the evidence he had obtained.

"I have it in my possession and safekeeping." Alex divulged to him. "I also had gone through it." He admitted as he watched Ethan's reaction to what he said.

He had kept the file in a secure place, making sure it was safe from spies and prying eyes. It would be a scandalous problem if words got about the contents of those documents.

"So, you have seen it." Ethan shook his head as if it was not such a big deal. He smiled at Alex without any signs of distress. "So, what do you think?"

Ethan leaned back and rested both of his arms on the side of the armchair. He sat comfortably on his chair, observing his apprentice. He wondered what he would do with this kind of situation.

He debated if he should meddle with this situation or let Alex decide what to do with this new development. Before that ever happened, he believed that Alex should know the story behind those files.

"It is incriminating. It can ruin your name and cause damage to the company if not dealt with properly." He honestly expressed his opinion on the subject matter.

He would keep those secrets behind sealed doors if he could, but if Cassie were able to obtain that information, someone else might dig it up if they only knew where to look.

Then what? It could become one explosive expose and drag Ethan's name to the mud. It could destroy the credibility of the company, bringing it down to the ground.

"So, do you believe what it says about me?" Ethan remained calm and collected as if this news did not affect him at all.

He had hidden this secret for so long that he had prepared for the time it would blow up into his face. He expected it would be Cassie or Nick who would nail him to the cross.

However, it would seem that he had to wait a little longer. Cassie seemed to change her mind, and Nick still had nothing to fight against him. His other enemies still could not take him down.

"I am not here to judge whether you were innocent or guilty." Alex leaned forward in his chair and focused his attention on the man sitting from across from him.

He could never be positive if anything on those files could be true. Only Ethan could enlighten him of the accuracy of those data. He would not jump to any conclusion until he heard Ethan's side of the story.

"But, I would like to hear the story." He interrupted Ethan before he could make any remark. "It is the only way I could deal with this if it happens to come up with the press or in the hands of our enemies."

"I guess I owe you an explanation." Ethan knew that he could not keep hiding from his past.

Now that the cat was out of the bag, he had no choice but to deal with it while he could still control the situation. Preparing Alex for the eventuality would be the most sensible thing to do.

"I think that is a good idea." Alex could not wait to hear his part in this entire situation. He believed that for them to get this sorted out, he had to know the truth.

"Then, buckle up because it will be a long story." Ethan looked around, checking if anybody was around.

Once he guaranteed that they were alone, he took a deep breath and looked at the window outside. He thought of where he should start, but he guessed it should be from the very beginning.

He suddenly longed for a strong drink, if he could only drink one. He could also use good tobacco, a nice puff, and smoke could help with the long silence.

"Ok. Tell me." Alex had prepared himself for this. He had already conditioned his mind that whatever he was about to hear, he would not judge him or make a harsh conclusion.

"Cassie worked for me. As the daughter of a former late partner and friend, I took her in under my care." Ethan began telling him the start of his story.

He felt he owed it to his dead friend to help his daughter, who was now alone. Cassie was also Dani's friend. Therefore treating her like their own was never hard. She had become part of their family.

Until now, he could only speculate the reason for her betrayal. He still wondered why Cassie hated his family, him, and especially Dani. He could only think of one possible explanation. Cassie misunderstood the facts.

A commotion on the door made them both look up from their sitting position. When Alex's attention turned to the intruder, he was surprised to see who was standing by the door.

"Princess, how long have you been standing there?" This time, Ethan asked the question, finding his daughter with an inquisitive expression.

He did not mind if she heard the story he told Alex. He believed that it was time that she finally learned the truth. It was time to bury the misunderstanding between them and let the facts speak for themselves.

He was old, weak, and might be dying. He was tired of keeping this secret from his family. If he could keep it hidden forever, he would, but he gathered that it was fast catching up.

"Long enough to wonder what you two are talking about a minute ago. What is going on in here? Care to enlighten me." Dani walked further inside the room, looking from one man to the other.

Both men she cared about, but both kept secrets from her. She was tired of being in the dark, always being the last to know what was happening.

For once, she wanted her father, even her fiancé, to treat her with respect. She wanted them to trust her by including her in the picture.

"I am telling Alex about a past that I wish I never kept from you." Ethan looked directly into his daughter's eyes, guilty for lying to her. She deserved the truth. It should come from him and not hear it from someone else.

He knew he only kept everything from her to protect her. He did not want to taint her innocence with the cruelty of the world. As a father, he believed it was his obligation to take care of her.

He now realized that she was old enough to listen to the truth. She had grown to be an intelligent woman who could easily distinguish what was right and wrong.

"Sit down, Dani. Let us hear what your father had to say." Alex stood up and held her hand. He guided her back to the couch and sat next to her.

He also believed that whatever Ethan had to say, he should also share it with his daughter. His secrets had burdened them long enough.

The only way to resolve the issues that had almost ruined this family was to unleash the truth and face the problems head-on.. They could not keep on dodging the bullet and hope that nobody got hurt.

### **Chapter 344 - Take Down The King And The Apprentice**

"Get dressed." He commanded as he strode into the room.

He went straight to the cabinet to pick a dress for her. He wanted her to look extra beautiful tonight. He had to impress their company.

"Why?" She stretched in the bed. It was past dinner, so a date was out of the question.

She wondered what he was planning for tonight. From the way, he was acting. She could guess that he was entertaining some guests, a client or investors perhaps. He needed eye candy.

"We are meeting an important client." He grabbed a dress, inspected it, returning it as he chose another one. "Can I expect you to act in your best behavior?"

He still had some doubts about her loyalty, finding it hard to trust her again.

"Of course, I will, Nick," Cassie assured him.

It was her chance to get out again in the confine of his house. Since he discovered that she planned to run away, he had kept her in captivity.

He insisted that she was not a prisoner, but he was only punishing her for disobeying his orders.

He finally picked one new dress he particularly liked for her to wear. "Wear this. Hurry up. I'll wait for you outside." He dropped it on the bed before he left her to prepare herself.

"Ok. I'll see you outside in a bit." Cassie grabbed the dress and turned to the mirror.

She knew that she had to cooperate with him until she could plan for her escape. Now that she could get out again, it would be easier to slip away from him without him knowing. All she needed was the proper timing.

He could not catch her lying because if he did, it could mean losing her life. Nick would not hesitate to proceed with his threat.

After an hour, they were seated in a private booth in a club, waiting for Nick's guests.



"So, who are we meeting today?" She asked as she looked around the dimly lit place.

She had been used to this kind of scene. She could handle situations like this even with her eyes closed.

"You'll see. But in the meantime, I want to know if you are still part of this team." Nick asked suspiciously.

"I know I made a mistake when I thought that it would be best for us if we will part ways. But now, I realized that you are right." Cassie tried to convince him.

"I am glad that you finally came to your senses. I will hate to lose you. We are perfect for each other." He traced his hand on her cheeks, allowing his fingers to slide down on her arms.

It was both a way to charm her, at the same time, a warning to heed his words, meaning double-crossing him would not end well for him.

Before she could answer him again, Cassie saw a familiar face as he walked towards their table. Like the first time she saw him, he walked with so much arrogance. The crowd could not ignore his presence.

"Well, it is nice to see you again, Cassie. I thought that you bolt out based on the rumors." The newcomer stated as he sat next to them with a wide grin on his face.

He could not help but poke on Nick's affairs. On a personal level, he did not care if he broke up with Cassie. But business-wise, he had learned that Cassie had a significant role in their plans.

If something happened with Cassie, like disappeared, it would affect their plans against Ethan. Although he had no direct issue with Ethan, his connection with Alex was what he counted on, especially now that Alex was doing his bidding.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Edward. But I am still here." She replied to the prince.

She never did like the man. He might exude elegance and sophistication on the outside. But his attitude and his looks had always given her the creeps.

If she found Nick abhorring, she could swear that Edward was twice more, even though she had barely known him. She could tell that he was capable of more wickedness than Nick. She would never dare to get involved with him.

"On the contrary, I am happy to see you." Edward touched her hand, reached for her drink, took it, and placed it on his lips. But Cassie quickly pulled her hand away as if his kiss scorched her skin.

He believed Nick knew how to pick his woman. First, Dani and then this beautiful, alluring woman that sat beside him. He wondered what she had to offer to make a man like Nick go nuts over her.

Edward believed the rumors that Cassie was able to play Nick in the palm of her hands. He could sense it in the several times he had the experience of their company.

"So, what do you want now?" Nick asked irritably. He did not like the way Edward was staring at her girl. He did not appreciate how his hand and lips lingered more than necessary on her hand.

But he also did not enjoy being summoned as if Edward owned him, and he planned to tell him that. If there was anyone in control of this partnership, it was him.

"I want us to proceed with the plan. My people are starting to get anxious. They want to see results." Edward stated without batting an eyelash as he stared into the face of Cassie.

"But we are not ready," Nick said, not wanting to rush the new idea they had come up to make Ethan and Alex go down.

Besides, he still had to extract from Cassie the files he needed as additional ammunition against their enemies. He suddenly regretted not convincing Cassie to give up the files sooner.

Cassie listened to the two discuss their plans, embedding in her mind their conversation. She could still use the additional information they were feeding her.

But as she continued to listen, the need to escape had become more imminent. She could feel that Nick would soon demand the files that she did not have anymore.

"It is not an excuse anymore. I have given you enough time." Edward said with a tone that meant he was serious.

"Then, let me see what I can do." Nick still felt that the plan was not solid enough, but if he could take the evidence that was in Cassie's possession, then maybe it would work.. They could finally take down the king and the apprentice.

### **Chapter 345 - Lost Not One Thing, But Everything**

If she had any other choice, she would not force this issue now, but the truth was long overdue. She could not wait for another opportunity to discover the past.

"Tell me the truth, Dad. I can take it." She sat calmly on the sofa beside Alex as she faced her father, who still appeared weaker from his recent operation.

She recently realized with the aid of Alex that her father might have kept some things from her because he only wanted to protect her.

It might be his instinct as a father to shield her from anything that he thought might harm her.

However, she was not young and naive anymore. She was capable of handling the hard truths, no matter how grim it might sound. She had to know the reason behind the secrets hidden from her.

"It would seem that Cassie stumbled on a secret that I had kept from everyone. I always suspected that she was the one who told you about it." Ethan closed his eyes for a few seconds as he recalled the scenes in his mind.

He did not see the point of confronting Dani about it at the time. He could see that she was already in deep sorrow after learning of Nick's betrayal. He did not want to add up to what she was going through.

"Yes. It was Cassie who told me." She remembered confronting her friend for what she did to her. She was furious that Cassie could betray her trust by sleeping with her fiance.

In retaliation, Cassie informed her of her father's sins. Cassie narrated a part of the past that Dani never thought was possible. It was a story about her father's participation in destroying a company and a man. A dear friend. Cassie's father.

At the time, she was too angry at her father to clarify his participation in the scandal that happened a long time ago. She ended up judging him based on what Cassie said.

"But what she said, is it true?" Dani asked her father about Cassie's allegation.

She automatically believed everything that Cassie told her. She did not even look for evidence to support her friend's claim against her father. She readily judged her father because of what happened with her and Nick.

In a way, she also blamed her father for the failure of her relationship with Nick. Now, she realized how petty she was back then. She did not even give her father a chance to explain himself.

"In a way, it was true." Ethan was still thinking of how to explain the entire situation. The true story was complicated. "But I am hoping that this time, you will open your mind to the possibility that I might be innocent in this."

Although, the business industry and the justice system cleared his name of any wrongdoing. It would seem that Cassie and his daughter still believed that he was a criminal.

He would never have minded if he was convicted and sent to jail as long as his only daughter was on his side. Instead, it went the other way around.

"Ok. I will try to keep an open mind." She owed her father that after all these years that she blamed him for everything.

Her hatred consumed her, making her blind to the truth. She only saw what she wanted to see and passed judgment on her father without giving him a chance to defend himself.

"It began with Cassie's father, Gary. He came up with a proposal for a business venture." He longed more for an alcoholic drink to calm his nerves down. He suddenly found himself anxious, knowing that Dani still might not believe him after his revelation.

He began recalling the time Gary stormed into his office, armed with several files, studies, and different testimonies. He had been his friend for as long as he could remember.

But unlike him, he was no genius in planning and strategies. He was more of a great artist, creating masterpieces. But her wife was not content with the way he was earning his money. So, she convinced him of this idea.

"Is that the business that Cassie was talking about?" Dani asked, unaware of the background of the story Cassie had told her.

After her fight with her father, she never bothered checking up on the story. She already assumed that her father was capable of doing such a terrible deed. She did not need to waste her time clearing up his name.

"Probably. But before I tell you anything, know this. I only did what I did because I love you and your mom. I never intentionally want to hurt you." He uttered in his low voice as if that was the only thing he regretted with this entire situation.

"I guess I always knew that, Dad. I was just too preoccupied with my pain that I failed to see beyond it." She admitted to her father what she had realized since Alex showed her the value of family. "I love you too, Dad."

Right now, she was willing to listen to whatever her father was about to tell her. Let him complete the story that she believed was half cook when served to her.

She wanted to give her father a chance to prove his innocence and to clear his name in her eyes. For once, she wanted all her doubts to disappear and love her father again unconditionally.

"That is all I ask, princess." He shifted in his spot as he stretched his weary body from his sitting position. There was still slight pain in his operated area, so his movements were still limited.

Then, he began telling them a story about a friendship built with trust and respect. Gary had been like a brother to him. Growing up as an only child, Gary had been his only companion and friend.

He and Gary had sworn to help each other no matter what happened. It was a pack that no one or anything could break. It was a promise that had solidified their friendship.

"He came to me with a proposal that I can't refuse. He asked me for help to finance his business because no one else wanted to believe in his abilities." Ethan could only recall his memories with sadness.

He remembered having doubts about accepting his friend's plan, but Gary was so excited about it that he could not turn him away. Besides, when Gary started the business, it only required little capital.

The quick return of investment and the higher rate compared to other companies, together with his support, had lured many investors to the project. His friend's plans and projections were starting to materialize.

"The business was booming." Ethan continued to tell the story. He could see that there was nothing that could stop the business from moving to the top.

He thought that he had made the mistake of not believing his friend from the start. But what he did not expect was the problem that soon came to destroy everything his friend had established.

"Then, what happened?" Dani asked her father.

After Cassie informed her of what happened to the business venture of their fathers, she tried to stay clear of it. She was angry, at the same time, ashamed of her father's involvement in this terrible situation.

At that moment, she wondered if she had done the right thing by believing Cassie over her father. Maybe she did misjudge the situation and sentenced her father without due process.

"One issue after another surfaced, causing difficulties for the company. At first, we were able to manage it just fine. Weeks turned to months, but the problems kept coming until there was no more point of denying that the company was dying." Ethan remembered how much his friend had suffered the consequence.

Ethan also blamed himself for what happened. His friend was not suitable to run a business, but he supported and encouraged him to manage one.

If he had foreseen what would happen back then, he would have put a stop to it. Maybe he should have even discouraged his friend from pursuing his plans.

Maybe his friend was successful now alongside him, doing something he enjoyed and excelled at, but instead, he was now buried six feet under the ground.

"If he was the one who managed the business, then why was Cassie putting the blame all on you. Why is she blaming you for the downfall of his father's company?" Dani was confused about the situation. She looked at her father and then at Alex, who remained silent while she and her father conversed.

Alex felt that it was not his place to meddle in the situation since he was not involved in it in the first place. He stayed so that he could give support to both father and daughter.

He also wanted to get to the bottom of the story. So, if the need arose, he would know how to handle the situation. After all, he was the one running the business now.

"First, I understand why Cassie did what she did. She was hurt by what happened to her family. I do not blame her for hating me. I feel like I deserved it after what happened to her father." Ethan stated with much regret.

He could not help but be teary-eyed after recalling the sad news. It had been hard for him to accept. He could only imagine it might have been worse for Cassie.

"I only lost a friend." He continued before Dani could say anything else. He shook his head, thinking of the young woman, who he took under his protection.. "Cassie had lost not one thing, but everything that she valued dearly to her heart."

## **Chapter 346 - Bad Guys**

There were a few more things that were bothering her. But she wanted to hear her father's explanation first before she asked more questions.

So far, she still could not make sense of her father's reasoning. There were still a lot of details that did not fit the puzzle. Like why Cassie was so adamant about ruining her family.

"What are you saying, Dad?" Hearing her father defend Cassie was not what she expected. She furrowed her brows together, more confused than ever.

She always thought that her father might harbor some ill feelings for her former friend for her association with Nick. It would seem that was not the case as he revealed to her another side of the story.

"Because when I saw what was happening with the company, I tried to take over. I thought that I could still turn it around and save the business from financial ruin." He shook his head as his memories reminded him of the past.

He recalled the look on his friend's face when he told him that there was nothing he could do. "But no matter what I did, it still went to the ground." He was too late to even make a dent in the situation.

His effort was in vain since the damage to the company was too far gone. He could not do anything more. His business was only starting to take off. At that time, he could not use more of his resources for fear that his company might also suffer the same fate.

His friend understood his situation. Gary was grateful for what he had tried to do, but the others took it the wrong way. They thought that he tried to sabotage the company for his gain. Because after his friend's company went down, his business started soaring high.

"Then, why did Cassie accuse you of killing his father? She said that her father took his life because he lost his company because of what you did." She suddenly felt guilty that she believed those allegations against her father.

If she was thinking straight at that time, she might have laughed at Cassie's accusation. She would not believe a word that she said about her father. She could never consider her father as a man capable of doing wrong.

But, she was distraught at that time. Her life just shattered after learning of Nick's infidelity and his plans to use her. Her mind was muddled with hurt and hatred that she believed everything Cassie told her.

"All I know is that I failed to help Gary. In a way, I did feel to blame for his death. I might not have pulled the trigger, but I might have been part of the reason why he did it." The image of his friend when they found him in his room was still fresh in his mind.

"Maybe Cassie heard the rumors. Maybe it had been easier for her to cope if she felt blaming me was better." Ethan had surmised when he learned that Cassie was coming after him for revenge.

His friend came to him for assistance. He should have thoroughly checked the legitimacy of the business before he had encouraged him to push through with it.

But he was also busy with his company that he failed to determine the loopholes in the business plan that Gary presented to him. The company was already in shambles by the time he realized what he had done.

"But you did not kill him. You did not pull the trigger. Why would you blame yourself for his death?" She had no idea that her father was carrying this burden throughout this time.

She thought that he was just a money-making machine that never cared about other people. Well, her anger had made her believe that her father was a selfish man who only thought of his company and his legacy.

But she did remember growing up, idolizing her father. She always thought that he was the best father in the world. But life threw them a hard curveball. She failed to see it and ended up missing the ball.

"Because I should have noticed that he was not in his right mind. If I was not too focused on my work and myself, I could have done more for him. I could have saved him from himself." He admitted with so much despair.

He never liked crying because it was a sign of weakness. A trait that was not good for any business. But losing his best friend deserved some tears.

He realized that it did not mean that he was weak, but the opposite. He had to think of the welfare not only of his family. But also of the people that Gary had left behind.

"You could not have done more for him. You can't keep punishing yourself for something that you never had any control over." Alex finally interrupted him, seeing the grief in Ethan's eyes.

He might not know the feeling of losing a best friend, but he could imagine it. The feeling of helplessness would always be something that would be hard to get over.

"I know that." He said, sporting a forlorn expression. "I thought I did Gary's family a favor when his wife decided to sever all our ties, and I agreed. Now, I realized that I should not have forsaken them."

Although he did help Gary's family get settled with their new life by providing them with some help. He believed he could have done more if he had stayed connected with them.

Learning that Cassie and her mom did not have an easy life, after the incident, he immediately took Cassie under his protection. He tried to make up for his lack. He always felt obligated with what happened to them.

Only to learn in the end that he was already too late. Cassie had already made up her mind that he abandoned them after using his father for selfish reasons.

"I think I understand now. Well, some of it, I guess." Dani was starting to have a clearer view of what happened in the past.

She discovered that her view of the truth was a bit screwed by her prejudice against her father. She failed to see the facts even if it was staring at her in the eyes.

She wondered if that was the end of the story. As far as she remembered, there were a few more things that Cassie revealed to her.

"I think your father had enough for one night." Laura walked into the room, standing beside Ethan's chair. "Maybe you can continue with this topic some other time."

She listened to their conversation as she stood by the doorway but did not want to interrupt her husband. He was too engrossed with his recollection of his memories that he did not notice her presence.

She would like Ethan to finish, but she could already see the tension in his body language. She knew the entire story about what happened between Ethan and Gary, but she could not meddle in their affairs.

"No, I need to finish it now. Alex and Dani should know what they might be facing in the future." He could not wait for another opportunity like this.

He had more secrets to disclose to them, a past that might haunt them soon. If they were caught unaware, then it might cause them some big problems. He would like to tell them now. He could not wait till it was too late.

"Are you sure that you are still up for it?" Laura felt slightly concerned that the past was causing him undue stress.

"We can always continue this another time," Alex stated, hearing the concern in Laura's voice.

He knew the urgency of the situation. However, he did not want to push his luck, not wanting anything worse happening with Ethan's health condition.

"Yes, we can always return anytime that you are feeling better." Dani also expressed her concern with her father's weakened state.

"No, I am good. There is no reason for me to stop." Ethan looked at his wife, reassuring her that he was still feeling ok. Then, his eyes shifted to his daughter and her fiancé.

He could see that both were eager to learn more of his secrets but slightly hesitant because of his condition. "Shall I continue?" He asked but without waiting for their response.

He knew that Laura and the two might still object, so he did not give them time to do so.

"You might be thinking of my involvement with the underground business." He stared carefully into their eyes. He could see no surprise in them.

"Yes." It was Alex who replied to his query.

Alex did see the report that Cassie gave him about it. It did show Ethan's involvement with the illegal activities of some of the known criminal syndicates.

"I know both of you heard about it. Now that I am passing the rein to both of you, I think it is time that you both knew the full story." Ethan began to tell them again of another story about his youth.

It was another piece of his life that he had kept from Dani. A past that he could never forget but did not regret because it was what had made him who he was.

Although it was a sin that he would gladly pay for when the time of his judgment came, it was not something he would let ruin his family, especially her relationship with his daughter.

"Are you confirming that it is true?" It was one of the things Cassie also revealed to her. It was one of the reasons she thought worse of her father.

She started to believe that her father was a criminal who preyed on the weak to become more powerful and wealthier. It was the exact reason why she became a lawyer.. She wanted to put away bad guys like him.

### **Chapter 347 - Jump Into Any Ideas**

A few days had passed since he had started packing his things, and he still could not decide when he would finally move. He had already rented a place where he would settle for a while.

At least in the meantime, until he had found a more permanent place to settle into if ever he chose to stay. But that was not the reason why he could not leave this place, not just yet anyway.

"Troy, there are some issues with the permit of the club. The contractor had to stop because of the temporary hiccup in the processing of the papers." The man on the other line spoke to him, reminding him that he was still on the phone.



He had been distracted by the other thought that preoccupied his mind that sometimes he felt like he was floating on air. He had to settle this matter soon because he could not stay like this any longer.

"Try talking to the one in charge. If you can't convince the man to grant you the permit, then call me again." He ordered, not happy with the situation, quickly ending the call.

He knew that he should be there to handle the construction of his new business. His investors expected him to be on top of the situation, but instead, he asked his assistant to do it for him.

He looked outside the window of his apartment and thought of why he was still here in his apartment. He grabbed his phone and dialed a number.

"Tyra, can we talk? I am coming over." He told her without waiting for her to answer. He hung up the phone and walked out the door of his apartment.

He was surprised to receive a call from her a few days ago after their last encounter. He was sure that when they separated, she made it clear that she did not want anything more to do with him.

She had changed her mind about the proposal she made and wished for them to forget all about it. Troy was disappointed because the idea was growing on him. But what could he do? He could only respect her wishes.

"Come in." She immediately opened the door when she heard the bell, followed by several knocks. She already knew that Troy was behind the door. She was already expecting him after his brief call earlier.

She was also aware of the reason for his presence. She did call him the other day, retracting her decision to end it between them. After her father visited her, she knew that she had no choice but to run away.

If she did not, she would end up marrying whoever her father had chosen for her. Simply moving away would not be enough because John would only track her down and still force her to do his bidding.

"You said that you would call me back, but you never did. Is this just a game to you? Because whether you are coming or not, I am leaving tomorrow." He spoke up in a barely controlled anger.

He did not like that she was hot and cold towards him. He could take it if she wanted out from their arrangement, but for her to call him and then give her again a silent treatment was unacceptable.

"I'm sorry. That was not my intention." She looked at him, apologetic. "I am not playing a game. It was not my intention to cause any problem for you." She tried to explain to him.

She avoided looking in his eyes, ashamed of the way she had treated him. She had no idea of how to tell him how confused she was about her situation.

She did genuinely like Troy as a person. He was kind, gentle, and attractive. But it did not mean that she could marry him just like that. But the idea of marrying someone else was not an option either.

"Then, what is it? I am sure that I deserved the truth." He calmly said this time, avoiding raising his voice.

He took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down. After seeing Tyra struggle with her feelings, he suddenly felt guilty for being too hard on her.

There was no reason for him to lose his temper when she was just a victim like him of their circumstances. He reminded himself why the two of them ended up together. They were both hurt by someone else.

"Yes, you do." She sat down on the sofa and indicated for him to follow. "Do you want something to drink?" She offered, trying to be a generous host as usual.

The least she could do was be courteous to her guest after all he had done for her since she met him. In truth, she was embarrassed to face him after all that she had told him in their last meeting.

She knew she had a good time in his company. She felt that he did too. But that was not the problem. She was afraid that their liaison might lead to something else that she could not control. In the end, one of them might end up hurt.

"Sure." He accepted, thinking that it might help him get through this ordeal. He felt like his nerves were already on edge. A few more problems, then he might snap.

It was not only her that had put him on a tight rope. His business was also pressuring him to leave. The earlier incident was only an example of the many things he had to deal with, but not while he was still here.

He had to leave soon, tomorrow at the latest. He could not disappoint his investors just because he was pining on a girl. Then, the thought occurred to him.

"Here." She returned with two glasses of alcoholic drink. One was her favorite, and another one was his. "I am sorry again if I was not able to call you back." She sat down across from him but refrained from looking in his direction.

She was feeling guilty, knowing she had done something wrong against him. She figured it was not enough to apologize to him. She had to explain since it was not just her future at stake but both of theirs.

"Thanks," Troy took the glass, but he did notice her hands shaking. "Why did you not call?" He determined that she might be nervous.. About what? He did not want to jump into any ideas.

### **Chapter 348 - Marriage Certificate**

"I don't know what to say." Tyra finally looked him in the eyes. "I guess I am still confused about what I want to do."

For now, it was the only thing she could tell him. However, she felt she could not continue to string Troy along with her idea of tying him to her benefit. It was not fair to him.

She knew she needed to finally determine whether to go through her plan or end it right now. But if she did, she had to make sure that she was not keeping any secrets from Troy. She had to come clean with everything that could affect his life too.

"Forget all your troubles and forget about what I will think. All I want you to do is focus on what you need. Do you want to come with me? Do you still want to get married?" He needed answers and did not see the point of going around the bush.

He did not see a reason for them to keep circling the issue. He needed answers, and he did not have time to wait for Tyra forever. He almost did that for Cassie, and it did not end well.

He knew he was not in love with her nor liked her romantically. But, he could see that they had so many things in common. They could become good friends. They could help each other.

"I..." She still had no answer for him. For days, she had thought about it.

Although she knew she could trust him with her life, something still kept her at a distance. But now that Troy was demanding her answer. Was she ready to give him one?

She contemplated deep in her mind, trying to come up with a proper response. But she was still hesitant to commit to Troy to be her fake husband.

"I'm sorry." He suddenly felt like an asshole, demanding her to decide on the subject matter. "I did not mean to put pressure on you."

It was clear that this was not an easy task for him. So how could he expect that it would be easier for Tyra? They were both risking their future for the other.

He did not want to do this, but his time was running out. He did have to leave soon to attend to his other obligations. He did not want to go unless he was sure that Tyra had made her final decision.

"It is ok. I understand. It is not you, but me. I know I can trust you to fulfill the end of the bargain, but I am afraid that something might go wrong." She stated as she played with the glass in her hands.

She did not even notice that it was already empty, not until he offered to refill it together with his glass. She accepted another one, hoping that it would remove that uneasiness that she felt.

"Well, I can't blame you for thinking that way. We still hardly knew anything about each other." He answered her silent query. "But if you think of it, how sure are you that the next guy you meet will be better than me?"

He observed how she reacted to his statement, coming up with his conclusion. He still sensed that she was wary about her situation at home, especially with her father.

He was aware of her reason for entering this arrangement in the first place. It had everything to do with her father. Instead of protecting her, he planned to sell her to the highest bidder.

"You do have a point." She felt the seat next to her move and realized that he had decided to sit beside her.

She took the drink he handed her and took a big gulp in it. She wanted the courage that the alcohol provided. She suddenly felt nervous from his nearness and the attention he was giving her.

"I am not saying that marrying me is the only solution to your problem. But if you think it will help, I am willing to go through with it." He felt the need to reassure her that he had no problems coming to her aid.

"But I can't wait for you forever for your decision. If you want to do this, you have to tell me now." He moved closer to her, not in a threatening way. "I just want to be your friend."

He had sworn never to get involved with women with baggage after his experience with Cassie. He almost lost his self-respect when he kept doing what she asked her to do even though it was against his principle.

However, fate seemed to enjoy playing with his life. He could not seem to stay away as he faced another one today. Try as he might, he could not turn his back on Tyra when he knew she needed him.

"What about your future?" She asked, still unconvinced that she should impose on him and let him marry her, just on paper.

She knew that by doing so, he would be tying himself to her and destroying any chance of finding someone who would truly love him.

"Let me handle that. For now, let us focus on your future." He knew that he was not expecting to fall in love anytime soon anyway.

So, what was a couple of years or more of playing house with Tyra? He could certainly use her company to pass the time. Besides, they agreed to get a divorce once things with her father had settled down.

"Fine, I will come with you. Our initial agreement will resume if that is still what you want." She finally concluded their meeting.

She was still unsure of what she was doing. But she still felt that it was better than marrying some random guy that her father chose for her.

She had finally realized that her father had never thought of her best interest. He only needed her for his benefit.

"If there are changes that you wish to implement, you might need to inform me now. So, we can decide on the matter immediately." She continued without letting him respond.

But the situation with her father was getting worse.. The only possible solution to her, she could assume could work, would be to marry and show her father their marriage certificate.

## **Chapter 349 - Hell On Earth**

Ever since her father told her about his involvement in the underground criminal syndicate, her view of what she thought she knew about him had drastically changed. Was it good, or did it get worse?

She could not sit quietly on her chair or go back to her work as she stared outside her office window when her mind kept getting distracted, contemplating how to deal with this new situation.

"Jacky, cancel all my appointments this morning," Dani shouted just outside her room. "I have to deal with something first." Finally giving up on her work to deal with the actual issue in her mind.

She immediately cleared the papers that she barely touched and placed them back on the rack. Then, she grabbed her phone, inserted it inside her bag, and walked out of her office in a hurry to be somewhere.

"Where are you going, Dani?" Jacky stood from her seat, surprised when she saw her friend strode out of her door, carrying her bag.

She could see that Dani was in a rush to leave, but she could not remember any appointment she had scheduled for today. She would know if she had a meeting outside the office. Therefore, it might be something personal.

She wondered if Dani received a private message on her phone since she did not hear her receive any calls. It was not like her friend to keep something from her. But she seemed to be agitated about something.

"I have to go to Alex's office. It is an emergency." She did not wait for Jacky's response, knowing that she had no time to explain what was happening. "I'll be back as soon as I can." Continuing to walk away.

She did not like to keep secrets from Jacky, but the circumstances were different. She had to be careful with the information she just had discovered.

Although she could trust Jacky with the information, she still was not sure of what to make of it until she had the entire story sorted out in her mind.

"What sort of emergency?" Jacky suddenly panicked when she heard the dreadful word, making Dani stop in her tracks as she twisted her face to her friend.

Her face was etched with worry lines, especially when she could see the anxiousness in Dani's expression. Terrible thoughts instantly filled her mind.

"It is not what you think." Dani realized that she must have sounded disturbing, which caused her friend to worry. "It is nothing like that." She quickly retorted, hoping to correct the misunderstanding.

However, she still did not give her any details. She faced her friend with a pleading look, thinking of what she could tell her about what she was going through.

But her mind remained blank, unable to come up with the truth nor a lie. She was just confused with the entire situation that she could not determine what to believe, not just yet anyway.

"Then, what is it?" Jacky walked towards her position, studying her. "I can see that you have something bothering you."

Lately, she might not be spending much time with her friend, but it did not change anything between them. She was still her best friend. She could still read her friend like a book.

From her standpoint, she could see the dilemma in her expression. Dani was not lying to her, but she was going through something weighing heavily on her.

"It is complicated as of now. But I promise." She swore to her friend, even putting her hands to her heart. "I will tell you everything once I know what it is."

She knew her friend would understand her situation. As of now, her friend did not need to get involved in this particular situation. It was a sensitive matter that she had to handle on her own.

"As long as you are not putting yourself at risk, I don't mind. But if you need my help, don't hesitate to come to me." Jacky told her, giving her a reassuring smile before going back to her table reluctantly.

She had learned to trust her friend to tell her whatever it was that was bothering her. But she just had to be patient when Dani was ready to share that with her.

She did not want to add more pressure and stress to what she was already dealing with at the moment. When Dani was ready, she would tell her everything, and she would be there for her.

"Thanks. But I need to go." Dani continued to walk away, determined to discover the truth behind the secrets of her family's past.

She was a lawyer. Facts were relevant in her line of work. She could never judge a situation by hearing only one side of the argument and not seeing the pieces of evidence of the case.

Her father, which she loved so much, might have recounted his involvement in the criminal underworld. But she still had to hear and study what others might have against him.

She gathered that there was more to the story than what her father had told her. She did trust her father. She believed that he was telling her the truth.

But she also had to see and talk to her former friend. She might find something else that could connect the dots that were still missing. As of now, she still could not see the entire picture.

"Dani, are you on your way out?" Somebody in the lobby shouted at her, making her glance at her back.

"Yes," She replied upon seeing who it was. "I'm sorry, Gerald. Something urgent came up that I need to deal with, but I already finished my draft earlier. Jacky probably had sent it to your office by now."

She knew that it was not enough, but it had to do for now. She promised that she would make it up later when she returned. She would work hard on the case, even if she had to do overtime.

"Ok then, I'll just see you later." Gerald looked at her with curiosity, seeing that she was preoccupied with something else.

He wondered if it was another case she was working on or something personal. But whatever it was, it had her full attention.

She left Gerald in the lobby, making her way to the car already parked outside. This time, she did not drive herself but asked Ben to take her where she was going.

"Please, don't tell Alex about this." She spoke to the man sitting in the driver's seat.

She knew that he sometimes reported to Alex her activities. She explained to him what she had planned. Hopefully, he would see it in her way and cooperate with her.

"Are you sure about this?" Ben asked her, still hesitant about what she was asking him to do.

"Please, just this once." She tried to convince him as he drove her to their destination. Finally, he nodded, making her sigh in relief.

She marched into his office building without anyone stopping her, except when she finally reached outside his private office. She had been in this place several times in the past.

But it was the first time she had returned to set foot in what she thought was hell on earth because she had believed that the devil was the one running this place.

### **Chapter 350 - An Exception To The Rule**

"Are we sure that we could trust Prince Edward?" The Lord from the North asked the other Council Members.

He was concerned with the rumors that he was hearing about the prince. After the stunt that he had pulled in the charity event that Alex had hosted. He wondered if he was suitable to be their new leader.

The Council did agree to give him another chance, courtesy to the request of King Edward. However, he was doubtful that he would like to serve a king with a questionable reputation.

"We all agreed to give him a chance." As usual, the duke, as head of the Council, defended the prince.

He had no love or loyalty for the prince. Nonetheless, his blood bound him to serve the king. By their law, he had to follow their protocol.

But as part of the family, he could not ignore the plea of his brother to help his son to the throne. His brother had reigned over them with a firm but righteous. He still hoped that his son would do the same once enlightened with his responsibility.

Besides, he also had his reason why he wanted Edward on the throne. He would help keep Alex away from the highest position of the land if that was what he truly wanted.

"I still believed that Alex will be better suited to rule over us." Another one of the members spoke up.

He could not see any comparison between the two princes. For him, Alex would always come on top, no matter where he looked at it. Edward would always fail against him.

"Let us give Prince Edward a chance to prove himself. After all, that was what we all have decided on in our last meeting." Fred stated, not wanting his colleagues to push for Alex any further until they had already exhausted all other options.

A knock on the door interrupted the meeting. Fred's secretary stood by the door, informing them that Lance was already waiting outside. They had asked for him to report to the Council to discuss his new assignment.

"Send him in." Duke Frederick instructed as he continued with their other agendas. It was his idea in the first place to involve Lance in the plans. He could foresee that eventually, he would become a great asset in the Kingdom.

He watched the young man stride into the room, appearing to be full of confidence. He confirmed that Lance certainly had many qualities resembling his son, Alexander.

A thought occurred to him as he observed his every movement in these last couple of years. He wondered if Lance could become the next in line to the throne. He was a prince, after all, who carried their blood.

He believed that he could be another good candidate as an alternative with Prince Edward and his son. If only he could find a way around their law, making Lance qualified to take over the Kingdom.

"You ask for me." Lance stood in front of the assembly and presented himself to the members.

Lance took the chair offered to him on the opposite side of the table. He was now situated directly in front of the duke. He observed the unreadable expression of the Council members as he tried to determine the purpose of the meeting.

He could only assume what the Council wanted from him. But he had guessed that it had to do something with Alex and Edward. It was the only possible reason why the Council required his presence.

"We have decided for you to continue with your training with Alexander." Fred had suggested this to the group knowing that the empire would benefit from what he would learn from the experience.

Lance had always been one of the brightest young men in their social circle. He always had been at par with Alexander, whether academically or with their skills as they were growing up.

He could also vouch for his loyalty, honesty, and the other good traits of a good man. Qualities that a true leader should possess. Any parent would be proud to have him as a son. He already had accomplished many things at such a young age.

"If that is what you wish. I am ready to do as you bid." He already figured this as much.

He had foreseen this line of action from the Council after the stunt that Edward pulled. He had prepared himself for whatever the Council would ask him to do next.

He waited for further instructions on how he should proceed with the new plan. He was excited to go back and learn again from Alex. At the same time, he was looking forward to seeing Jacky once again.

"Good." The duke answered him with a nod. "You will leave soon. I will have my assistant arrange everything for you."

The duke looked at him, glad that he had agreed once again with the initial arrangement, but there was something more that he had not yet told him.

He stared at the young face of the prince, seeing the excitement in his eyes. He wondered if that had something to do with the job or it might be something else that was causing it.

"Then, I will start packing and arranging for my trip." The young prince told the Council members.

He waited for them to dismiss his presence, but the Council remained silent as if they were still waiting for something. He directed his attention to his father, the Count, who had been silent throughout the meeting.

"There is one more thing." The duke finally spoke up after a few minutes of silence. He waited for Lance to focus his attention on him, glancing once to the Count. "We also had one stipulation."

The duke stood from his seat and paced the floor until he stood in front of the massive window overlooking the courtyard. He could see the beautiful garden surrounding the place, but his mind was somewhere else.



"What is it? Tell me. I will do my best to comply." He had followed everything that the Council had instructed him so far.

He believed that their laws had always been just, and the Council had been fair at all times. He did not see any problems, putting some conditions in his duties to the people he had sworn to serve.

"The Council members and I had agreed that you should stop seeing a particular woman. I believe she goes by the name of Jacky, a friend of Dani." Duke Frederick spoke up.

He could not see any problem if Lance went out with her as his pastime, but a long-time relationship with a commoner was not acceptable in their society, especially in the palace laws.

It would cause an uproar in their circle and would create chaos in their Kingdom. People would start to question their social status and might even cost them their royalty status.

"But..." He wanted to argue about this matter, but he already knew that it was forbidden. He should have known better.

He had thought of the repercussions of going out with Jacky at the very start. But he had ignored it, thinking that it would not matter since he was not about to be king.. But it would seem that he was not an exception to the rule.