

Royal Contract 381

Chapter 381 - Forbidden Affair

"Honestly, based on my experience. I think that is the best offer we will get from a man like him." Gerald admitted to her.

Although chances were high that they might win this in court since they did have a case against him and his company. But the downside, he could guarantee it would take years before they could see any future in this.

Usually, fighting in a courtroom required bottomless resources, especially when the two of them were going up against a giant. Chances were, Mr. Bradshaw and his team of lawyers would bury them in paperwork until their client gave up due to lack of funding or patience.

"Are you saying that we should give up and take his offer?" She questioned him with a disapproving expression.

It was what was wrong in the justice system. Even if the complainant already had a solid case against the defendant, the former still had a high possibility to lose in the end.

This corporate goliath used this bullshit practice to take advantage of the situation, driving their smaller opponents into a difficult position.

"Well, not exactly. We can still work on increasing the offer, but it would not be as high as what was in the deal." He explained to her the situation.

As much as he hated this kind of outcome, he could not do anything about it since it was the best that he could do under the circumstances.

The reality was, their client would not be able to fight them in the arena. Not when the case could drag on for years, which he believed would be the tactic of the defendants.

"But we could still win this if we take this to court." She insisted, not wanting to admit defeat. Because in her opinion, once they opted to accept what they were offering, it was the same as losing.

She did not want to believe that this was the best they could do for the aggrieved party. She preferred to exhaust all other options before informing their client about the offer.

She was afraid that once the clients knew about the present circumstances, eventually, they would lose hope in the case and take the mediocre offer.

"Let us be realistic about this. As much as I want to win this case and make these corporate monsters pay for their crimes, we also must think of what will be best for our clients." Gerald focused his attention on her, knowing what she was going through.

Dani was still young and idealistic. She believed that the system had a chance to change. She still had much to learn about the reality of their job.

He was once just like her. He could see himself in her when he was a new lawyer, struggling to make a change in the world. Ultimately, he woke up to the sad truth that justice was not blind. It was not fair.

"I am just frustrated with the situation. I almost thought that we have the case by the bag." She said defeatedly. Her earlier enthusiasm had vaporized into thin air.

She was aware of the possibility. It was something that she wanted to avoid from happening. But, it would seem that she had no control of the situation.

"I know how you feel." Gerald moved a bit closer to her, seeing the disappointment in her eyes.

He placed his hands on her to comfort her. He understood that losing unfairly in a case could be annoying, at the same time, could demoralize her motivation.

"How do you handle this kind of injustice? How could we keep letting them get away by using the same law to escape punishment?" She looked at him as she waited for an answer to her questions.

"Do you want me to answer that?" He knew that she already knew the answer to all her questions. She was not that naive, but only in denial of the truth that justice would never be equal for everyone.

"No," Dani finally confirmed to him that she was only ranting. She could not accept that after all the effort, still, the other team would be getting the upper hand in this case.

"Then, let us work on renegotiating the offer into something bigger. It is the least we can do before we take this to our clients. Then, we have no choice but to let them decide." Gerald suggested to her.

He still held on to her hands as she began to see reason. He could see that she was slowly admitting to herself that it was for the best. He wished he could do more for her, but as her mentor, he had to show her the fact of the case and not some false hope.

He did not want to crumple her idealism, but it would only hamper her growth. To succeed in this harsh world, she had to face reality. She had to learn to be the shark, or she would be eaten alive.

"I guess that would be best." She finally admitted that there was nothing else she could do but accept his recommendation.

She admonished herself for ignoring the facts and aiming too high. She only had herself to blame for not considering every possibility. Now, she felt responsible for letting their clients down.

"Well, don't take this personally. It is not the end of the world. We did try our best, and our clients would still get a reasonable settlement offer." Gerald shook her by the shoulder to cheer her up.

In an instant, he had her enveloped in his embrace. He could not stop himself as his body moved in its own accord. He did not plan it, but his subconsciousness must have wanted it so much.

He abruptly released her, realizing what he had done. As his mind reminded him, he did not want to scare her away. But he could not help but memorize how she felt in his arms.

"I hope you feel much better now." He immediately told her, hoping that the incident would not create awkwardness in their working relationship.

He did not want his careless action to cause him another chance to get close to her. He was almost making a breakthrough in their relationship. She was starting to trust him and even consider him a friend.

"Thanks." She said after getting over the shock of what just happened. She was not expecting that he would do that. She quickly pulled away while he also returned to his previous position.

She was deeply affected by the result of their case. However, she was not distraught to need a hug. But she did not want to put any more thought into it, dismissing the warning bells that resounded in her mind.

A few minutes of stillness enveloped the scene as they were both lost for words. But another guttural sound, as if the man was clearing his throat, promptly broke the silence, making both of them look at the intruder.

"It looks like I am interrupting a cozy scene. Is Alexander aware of your extracurricular activities?" He had been watching them since Dani arrived at the restaurant. He was pleasantly surprised to see her.

He was curious about her dinner date with the famous lawyer. Then, a bit disappointed when a client joined them. He thought that it would be just another boring meeting.

But he was glad that he stayed on to watch as a new scene unfolded.. From his vantage point and malicious mind, it did look like they were having a forbidden affair.

Chapter 382 - Jaded By The Current System

As if the recent incident was not awkward enough, discovering that someone had noticed the scene only made the situation worse. In another's eyes perspective, it did seem that they were in a passionate embrace.

But she would not allow this man's opinion to affect her. She did nothing wrong as far as she was concerned. It was an innocent hug by a person who was only showing support. She would not allow him to color it with his vile thoughts.

"I don't know what you mean by that, but what you witnessed was not what you think." It was Gerald who first responded to the man's nasty suggestion.

He could not allow this man to disgrace her image. After all, it was his fault for causing the scene, not hers. He knew it was a mistake to allow his emotion to control him. Now, he had placed them in a compromising position.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Edward. But I am not cheating or having an affair if that is what you are implying." She could not help but be irritated with his presence.

She believed there was no use explaining to him the real story because he would still turn it into something twisted. It was in his gene to be mean, rude, and vicious.

Alex did not need to warn her to stay clear of him. She believed that nothing good would come out of being associated with him. Besides,? he only did something good if it would benefit him.

"First of all, I am only stating my observation. Secondly, I am just concerned for my dear cousin's reputation." Edward smiled sarcastically at Dani, enjoying her slight discomfort.

It seemed that luck was on his side today as he just made a successful transaction a few minutes ago. Now, he found another pawn in his game.

"I think you have no real business to be here. If you will excuse us, but we still have a meeting to conclude." Gerald was rarely hostile to other people, not even to his enemies.

He usually took his fight inside the court. He always found it more fulfilling and enjoyable. But if he had to exchange unpleasant words with this man, he would if it meant that he could send him away.

He only knew the man because of his affiliation with Alex. But based on what he gathered so far, he was not a man he wished to be friends with and had to be careful as an enemy. It was clear that Dani also did not like his company.

"I only intend to say hi for now. But maybe someday, I might need both of your expertise. I heard that you make quite a team." He was satisfied with the way he had ruined her night, as evident in the slight scowl on her face.

He already realized that he would never have a chance to win her over to his side. Dani was different from Tyra. But if he could not have her, maybe his cousin should not have her either.

"I don't think our services will fit your best interest. It will be better for you to look for someone else." Dani retorted with a slight edge on her voice. She was not enjoying their conversation at all.

"It was nice to see you, Prince Edward," Gerald said in finality, indicating that he already had enough of his presence and the fake smile plastered on their faces for the benefit of the onlookers.

"It has been my pleasure," Edward mockingly stated, enjoying the annoyance in his voice, slowly walking away as he bade farewell.

He felt he had accomplished what he had come to do, quite satisfied with himself. He could not wait for what would happen next after what he had done.

"I'm sorry. I did not mean to cause any problem." Gerald turned to her as soon as Edward was far enough to hear their conversation. It was never his intention to make a scene and to put her in a difficult situation.

"I know you were only trying to help. I am not blaming you for any of this." She said to her boss. She did not want to make a big deal of this situation.

She did not want to emphasize what happened because it was nothing. It was a spur-of-the-moment action that did not mean anything but a friendly gesture.

"For what it is worth, you are a good lawyer who only wants what is best for your client. I truly admire you for that." Gerald tried to change the subject, returning to the real reason for the meeting.

"Well, I do wish I could have done more." She still felt a slight pang of disappointment with the outcome, but she had already accepted the fact that it was the best they could do under the circumstances.

They only stayed for a few more minutes after Edward had left and decided to call it a night. They discussed their next course of action before bringing the news to their client.

She temporarily forgot her encounter with Edward as her mind began formulating new strategies. She did not want to waste her time with a man like him. He was not worth it, just like Nick.

"Me, too, Dani." Gerald gazed at her, liking the feeling when he was with her.

She reminded him of what it was like to be young and idealistic. He was still not that old, but he had already lost sight of what was right and wrong.

His career had focused on his success and winning. He had forgotten the other reason, why he had chosen this profession in the first place.

"This will not stop me from trying to change what was wrong with our justice system. I might have lost for now, but I will find justice however well it hides from me." She swore to him as he assisted her into her car.

"I think I should be the one learning from you," Gerald replied to her statement. It would seem that he was the one who needed a refresher course.

He commended her more due to her passion for the law. He wished that he could have the same dedication to correcting the injustice in their corrupted system.

He did see many new lawyers with the same idealism as she had. He used to be one of them.. He only hoped that she could find a way to do what she had set out to do and not end up like them, jaded by the current system.

Chapter 383 - Suck The Life Out Of

She texted Alex that she was on her way home before she started the engine. It was not quite late yet, so she was unsure if Alex was already home or still back at the office.

He might have decided to work overtime when she canceled their dinner. Now, she wondered if he had already eaten. Maybe she could prepare an easy meal for him since she barely had anything to eat during the meeting.

"Beep!" She heard her phone ping, alerting her of an incoming message.

She was already on the road when she finally heard from him. He did text back that he was already at home. She was surprised since it was rare that he was first at the apartment before her.

He usually showed up wherever she was to pick her up, sometimes surprising her in the process. She wondered why he did not bother this time. She did tell him where she was going.

"Thanks, Ben." She started to make a habit of thanking him for risking his life to protect her. Since the other day, she realized she should not negatively take what Alex was doing for her.

He only wanted to assure himself that she was always safe because he cared too much for her safety. She should appreciate it more, instead of fighting him at every turn.

She walked into his apartment excitedly, expecting to see him waiting for her. She did find the room brightly lit, but he was nowhere in sight.

"Alex," Dani called out once inside the living room as she dropped her things on the table and slumped down on the sofa.

Her feet were already killing her since she wore her stilettos for her supposed date. She only wanted to put her feet up and let it rest. But, she still had yet to see Alex around.

He must be in one of the rooms, busy with whatever he was doing, still unaware that she had already arrived. She would have looked for him, but she did not want to move from her position anymore.

"Alex, I am home." She tried again, but still, he had not responded.

She decided to close her eyes while waiting for him to show up. She allowed her body to lean on the soft cushion and adjust the placing of her feet, finding a more comfortable position.

A few more minutes, she found herself dozing off, unable to stop her mind from shutting down. She ended up sleeping on the couch with still no sign of Alex.

On the other side of the apartment, Alex was in the gym, trying to expel all his pent-up energy. He was unaware that Dani had already arrived since he was wearing his headset, listening to his playlist.

"Damn you, Edward." He shouted in frustration as his mind reminded him of his earlier conversation with his cousin.

He decided to work on his backlogs since Dani told him of her previous engagement. He did look forward to their date. It had been a while since they enjoyed a simple dinner out.

However, as soon as he finished his paperwork, he went to check on her. But before he even arrived at the restaurant, his phone rang and on the screen was Edward's name.

"Yes, Edward. What can you possibly need from me." Alex questioned his cousin when he had already cut all his ties with him.

When he decided to join Nick in his company, he had already declared war against him. But he still hoped that Edward knew what he was doing. He still wished that Edward would become a good king that would lead their people.

"I just had a wonderful dinner with a client. Fortunately, I closed another successful deal." Edward bragged on the line as he sat on his luxurious car on his way to his hotel.

"So, what does it have to do with me? As if that will interest me." Alex said disinterestedly, tired of hearing his voice.

He could see the relevance of his call to him. He could close a hundred deals, and he would not bat an eye on him. He was about to end the call, seeing that talking to him was just a waste of his time, but Edward stopped him.

"Wait, Alex. It is just a part of my report to you." Edward stated sarcastically, remembering when the Council had instructed him to report all his activities with Alex.

This time, he was only reporting to himself. The Council would only be waiting for his result, which he was working on full time. He realized that he could not depend solely on Nick's help.

It would seem that Nick was in sort of a dilemma. He believed that Nick was going through some rough patches, but he was too stubborn to admit it to him. But he would soon find out about it.

"What else do you want?" He asked, starting to get frustrated with the suspense. He just had no time for his petty and senseless talks.

He was racing to reach the restaurant where Dani had a meeting, and he did not want to miss her. "I am in a hurry."

"Well, if you are on your way to see Dani, you just missed her. She just left the restaurant." Edward assumed that Alex was on his way to see his fiancée, which made the situation more interesting.

"How would you know that?" Alex asked curiously, wondering if Edward was telling him the truth.

He could not help but doubt any word that came out of his cousin's mouth. He had years of experience, discovering that Edward was a compulsive and pathetic liar.

"Because I just saw her during dinner with that fast-rising lawyer. I would have joined them, but I don't want to intrude. They seemed well..." Edward paused for a second before continuing. "...very cozy together."

He quickly sent some pictures that one of his men took to back it up. That should do the trick. He knew he was planting a seed that he hoped would grow immediately.. Like a weed, it would suck the life out of their relationship.

Chapter 384 - Conveyors Of Emotions

A few more minutes to go. "Ahhh!" He knew he was pushing himself to his limits. It appeared that he was not exercising for health concerns, but he was running away from something.

Alex only stopped moving on the treadmill when he felt his lungs were about to collapse. He had to catch his breath, feeling the air being sucked out of his body every time he inhaled and exhaled.

But he knew he needed a distraction from where his thoughts were going. He had to release his frustration from talking with Edward and the pictures he saw earlier.

"Damn you, Edward!" He finally shouted in annoyance. He walked back to the bench on the side and sat down, grabbing his towel and canister of water to rehydrate.

He always tried to understand his cousin since they were young. He was family, after all. But right now, he had enough of his petty, envious, and selfish manners.

Since they were kids, he knew that Edward always had been more than average in intelligence and other skills. They had trained almost all their lives, together with Lance and the other kids in the palace.

But he noticed that the King and the Council members would not stop comparing Edward to him when he usually outdid everyone else on their challenges. It was rare that Edward beat him to a test and only by a small margin.

He pitied Edward for always being compared to him by everyone. He was the prince in line to the throne, so expectations were high that he should excel in all his endeavors. A big responsibility, Edward had to carry on his shoulder at a very young age.

"Dani," Noticing a figure sitting on the sofa with her feet up on the center table when he came. He immediately recognized her and moved next to her.

When she failed to respond to him, he knew that she must have dozed off. She must be exhausted to drop on the sofa just like that. She had been working hard on her cases and then, remembering the case of Jeremy as well.

She still looked so beautiful, even in her sleep. Alex observed as he stood in front of her sleeping form. But, he found her position awkward as her neck dropped down on her shoulders in a cramped posture.

"I'm just going to move you to our room." He told her, but she remained immobile, still unaware of his presence.

He decided to pick her up carefully, cradling her body and legs in his arms. She did stir a little, but not enough to wake her up. She only made incoherent words before she returned to sleep.

As soon as they reached the bed, he laid her down again. This time, he made sure that she was in a comfortable condition. He slowly removed her dress which he admired as soon as he saw it.

"Is this the dress you prepared for me?" He asked her as he slowly peeled the dress off her body. But the only response he got was a slight smile.

She did open her eyes a bit and tried to focus on him, but he quickly lulled her back to dreamland. "Hey, babe. Go, close your eyes. I'll take care of you." He softly whispered in her ears, not wanting to ruin her sleep.

Then, he covered her body and sat on the edge of the bed, just watching her for a few more minutes. He believed he would never be tired of staring at her face or when he woke up each morning.

"What is going on with you and Gerald?" He questioned, barely audible near her face as he leaned down to fix the blanket around her shoulders.

His mind returned to the image of her in the arms of a man. He recognized him as her boss in the project she had worked on these past weeks.

He had noticed the unusual manners that Gerald was exhibiting in the rare times he saw him and Dani together. He did not want to put a label on it since he promised not to let his jealousy get the best of him.

"But, what did I see earlier?" He mumbled on, still confused about what the picture depicted. "Stop it!" He stopped his thoughts from wandering into things that might go out of his control.

He walked into the bathroom to shower and change. He had to clear his mind before going to bed. He did not want to cloud his judgment and unjustly accused Dani of wrongdoing.

He believed that by morning, Dani would clarify the matter. She would have a good explanation for everything. He did not want to jump to conclusions. Pictures could always be subjective and might have meant nothing to her.

"Good night!" He laid beside her, pulling her into his arms. He allowed her to subconsciously squirm into his body until half of her body was on top of his.

She always felt perfect in his arms. Her body fitted like a glove in his as her arms and legs entwined around him. She had become his other half. Without her, he felt he would never function the same way again.

He knew that sleeping without her would never be the same. He needed her like he required air to breathe. He never knew that he would ever feel this desire to be with someone, but he could not stop it.

"I love you, Dani." He whispered, kissing her on the top of her head and then closing his eyes with her tightly secured around his arms.

He could feel her steady heartbeat lulling him into a deeper sleep. Her scent was like an intoxicating substance that he could not get enough of as he breathed her in.

He knew that whatever explanation she would tell him by tomorrow or the morning, judging from the time, he would believe her. He would not let anything jeopardize their relationship and their upcoming wedding.

He also fell into a deep and peaceful sleep, even if his mind was in turmoil. He believed that Dani was the sole reason his mind and body calmed down even in the most stressful times.

She might not say it back to him verbally, but he felt it in the way she was holding him in her arms.. He believed that actions were better conveyors of emotions than words since it rarely lies.

Chapter 385 - Flesh And Blood

Knock... Knock... Knock...

Buzz... Buzz... Buzz...

Whoever was behind the door was getting more impatient every minute. The unknown visitor kept knocking and buzzing at the door, restless, waiting for the door to open.

"Wait!" He shouted, irritated that someone could be that rude. He hardly slept

He looked at the wall clock and saw it was barely past midnight. He looked at the other close door, wondering if the raucous had awoken the sleeping occupant inside.

He quickly strode to the door, looking at the peephole and checking the identity of the unwanted guests. He was surprised to see who was standing outside, banging on his door.

"Open the door, Jacob!" The man shouted on the other side, hearing him behind the door. He was slightly slurring, obviously mildly intoxicated.

He rammed on the door again when he failed to respond quickly. He did not want to stand outside his door in this rat-infested joint. He wondered what his brother was thinking about choosing this place to be his home.

He remembered offering his brother to live with him or take one of his apartments in the city. But he declined his offer, saying that he had already made arrangements.

"What are you doing here, Nick?" Jacob asked his brother as he opened the door, uninterested in the sudden appearance of his brother in his apartment.

The last thing he needed right now was a drunk brother who would only nag him about the way he was wasting his life in his chosen profession. He would rather sleep, which his body and mind badly needed.

"Well, aren't you going to invite me in first before we discuss life in general, dear brother?" Nick tapped his feet on the floor, irritated that he was still standing outside, in the hallway.

He did not care much about his bastard brother. Jacob could rot in this hell hole for all he cared. But he needed him. Jacob still held the key to the rest of the wealth that was rightfully his in the first place.

Jacob had no choice but to open the door wider, knowing that he was not leaving until he had said his point. "Come in, Nick." He walked back into his small living room and waited for him to follow.

Until now, he still could not fathom why Nick did bother to look for him and support him in his studies. He was not the kind of brother who showed that he cared.

He had always known who his father was. His mother did not keep that secret from him. But he never thought of bothering him for support. He had long decided that he would make it on his own.

"Well, I can't say that you have a nice place here." It was the kind of insult that Jacob usually heard from his older brother when he disapproved of his choices.

Nick looked around the small crappy room and questioned his brother's decision to live in this dump. He could see the small room, a small crampy kitchen on the side, and two more doors on the far corner.

He assumed that one would be the bathroom and the other his bedroom. Although, he did notice the pillow and the blanket spread shabbily on the couch.

"Get on with your business. If you have not noticed the time, it is very late." Well, he was also getting irritated. He still had an early duty in the hospital.

He did not want to check on his patients, or worse, operate with a massive headache due to lack of sleep. He still needed to recuperate from the other days he had to work overtime.

"Is this how you welcome your brother in your home?" He walked further into the living room, curious about what was inside his room. "Why are you sleeping on the couch? What is wrong with your room?"

As soon as he asked, he walked in the direction of the first door and opened it. But it was just the bathroom. He closed it and was about to walk to the other room when Jacob stopped him.

"Of course, how can I be so rude? Come on, Nick. Let us share a beer and tell me the reason why you are here." He blocked his brother from proceeding to the other door, guiding him towards the kitchen instead.

He suddenly remembered that he still had another visitor. A person that his brother should never find, unknown to him, was staying with him at his apartment.

He had to distract his brother from the other door, find out what he wanted and then get rid of him before his guest decided to walk out of that room.

"I only came to see my little brother. I need to check if you are doing fine in your new accommodations." Nick grabbed the cheap bottle of beer that his brother handed to him.

It was not anything close to what he usually drunk, but he did not have any other option. He showed his disdain in the foul and bitter taste of the alcoholic drink before putting the bottle down.

"Well, I think you have seen it and judge it. What else is there to discuss? Not that I don't enjoy your company," Jacob said sarcastically. "But, I still have an early duty at the hospital in the morning." He continued.

"Ok, fine. I will cut to the chase." Nick still glanced at the closed door but continued with his reason for visiting him. "I am looking for the girl that you were talking to the other night in the club."

He looked at Jacob after sipping again on the foul-tasting beer. Looking for a clue if he would know something of what happened that night.

"What girl?" He kept a blank face, hoping that would fool his brother as he pretended not to recall a girl. Then, "Oh yes, I do remember. The girl who left during the fight. What about her?"

He had no idea why his brother would be asking him about her. He began to think if Nick had any idea that he was keeping the girl away from him. But he had to convince him that he did not know her whereabouts.

"Well, nobody seems to get a hold of her after that night. I am a bit concerned for her safety. Since you are one of the last people she talked to, I want to ask if she mentioned anything to you." Nick asked him.

Although, he doubted that Cassie might tell him anything. He was, after all, new in the city. Cassie would never trust a man that easily of her secrets.

"Why would she tell me anything?" Jacob reasoned with his brother. "I just introduced myself to her, seeing that she was alone. But she seemed not interested."

"Well, I was hoping that she might have said something that might give me some clues of where she might be staying now." Nick tried to sound worried to make his claim more credible.

Although his brother knew what he did behind the scene, he still did not want to share too much information about his life and plans with his brother, who still did not want to be a part of it.

"I wish I could tell you more. Unfortunately, we barely shared information." Jacob drank the remaining drop of his beer and dropped the bottle in the waste bin.

He hoped that he sounded believable.. Lying and making up stories were not his strong suit, but he had to do his best to protect the girl from his flesh and blood, at least half of the blood they shared in his veins.

Chapter 386 - Secretly Gay

Her sleep was interrupted by some noises coming from outside the bedroom door. She wished to ignore whoever was talking at this time of the night, slightly irritated that she had to let go of her dream.

She could tell that it was a nice dream since she could not take the smile out of her face. But she could not remember most of it, just partial and fragments of the enchanting scene.

"It was just a dream." She mumbled to herself, a bit disappointed that it was not real. She would rather live in it than continue with her current situation where she had to keep hiding, afraid to be caught by the people hunting her.

But the continuous commotion outside spiked up her curiosity, wondering who would be visiting her host in the middle of the night. Although it was none of her business, she could not help but spy on him.

"What are you doing?" She admonished herself for giving in to her nosiness as she strode to the door. She tried to listen to the conversation but hardly heard anything coherent.

She moved closer to the wooden barrier that separated her room from the other side of the apartment. She even put her ears on the surface, straining to listen more clearly to what was going on outside.

"No!" She exclaimed in shock. Fear eventually gripped her heart when she recognized his voice.

She was not expecting that he would come to his apartment. But that was so naive of her. Of course, he was his brother. He would eventually drop by to visit him.

She automatically stepped away from the door as if it was about to attack her. Her mind tried to think of a way to escape as panic started to overtake her reasoning.

"Stop it!" She hissed at herself, and then she hastily hushed herself too, realizing that she was being too loud. "Calm down, Cassie." She placed her palm on the top of her chest, willing her heart rate to slow down.

She took a deep breath as she sat on the bed, trying to relax her body and clear her mind. She could not think more rationally if she continued to hyperventilate.

When she felt a bit calmer, she stood up and started pacing the floor as she thought of ways to escape her current predicament. She returned to the door to eavesdrop further on their conversation.

"You can do this." She encouraged herself, gathering more courage to get through the night. She just hoped that Jacob did not decide to betray her and surrender her to his brother.

But how much could he trust the man, for all she knew, he was the one who told his brother that she was here at his place? Jacob could have tried to gain her trust to get information about her. Then, he reported it to his evil brother.

But if that was the case, she was sure that Nick would be all over her by now. He would be smirking at her, making her pay for what she had done. She began to doubt her earlier assessment.

She could only hear bits and pieces of their conversation. She realized that the other two must be in the kitchen or something far from the door. But she did make out something about Nick, asking him about her.

At least, that was what she thought she heard in the conversation. But she felt slightly relieved when Jacob said what appeared to be a denial coming from him.

"Thank you." She mouthed silently to the man that had saved her before and continued to help her until now.

She did not know why he kept doing it, but she appreciated it. She was expecting that he would send her away when she finally confessed to him some of what she had done in her past.

Surprisingly, he said he did not like to judge what happened in her past but only helped her with her present situation. She realized now that he was genuinely a nice guy.

But her ordeal was not yet over since she was still in the same apartment as the man she was hiding from, and she still had no way out.

Then, what she feared finally materialized when she heard footsteps and voices coming her way. She was paralyzed in her position as she continued to listen to their more coherent dialogue.

Just outside the door stood Nick and Jacob. "Why are you sleeping on the sofa? What is wrong with your room?" Nick asked the question again.

He could not leave until his curiosity was satisfied. Something about the situation piqued his interest, and his instinct was nagging at him. He knew he could not ignore it.

"I have a female guest from work. She needed a place to stay for a few days while working at the hospital." He finally came up with a story that he hoped his brother would buy.

He knew that telling him that he enjoyed sleeping on his couch would not be believable. His couch did not seem much to look at, and at the same time, it was small and uncomfortable.

"Oh! A female friend. Is she hot?" Nick found the situation more interesting.

If it had been him in his brother's shoes, he would be all over her by now. He had been wondering why until now, he had not heard him get into any serious relationship with a girl.

He did keep insisting that he was busy with his studies and now his career, but he could not help but question if that was the real reason. Or he might be hiding something from him.

"She is, but she is probably sleeping," Jacob told him, not wanting to sound like he was avoiding the question. He did not want Nick to suspect anything else.

"Can I just take a peek?" Nick insisted, holding on to the doorknob, ready to open the door.

He could not help but question who he was protecting behind that door. He had always been curious about his brother's preferences.. He did speculate at some point if his brother was secretly gay.

Chapter 387 - Enemy Number One

He was curious about the person that his brother was hiding from him. He did see some telltale signs that someone was living with him in this apartment. He liked to know why Jacob was keeping that a secret from him.

"We still have an early duty tomorrow. I don't want to disturb my friend. She also needs her sleep." Jacob also placed his hand on top of his, stopping him from twisting the knob.

He just hoped that his brother would not insist on it. Because if he did, he was afraid that Nick might discover what he was hiding from him.

"Just a peek. I won't make a sound." He did not heed his brother's words.

Despite his brother's hand stopping him, he continued to twist the knob open. Jacob had no choice but to let him go. He slowly opened the door to look inside and inspect the room and its occupant.

He noticed that there was nothing much to look at inside the room. It was relatively dark except for the dim light coming from the small window. He could make out some of the things that filled the room.

"Fine, but just a quick peek," Jacob reiterated, giving in to what his brother wanted. He would be more suspicious if he kept fighting him. He just hoped that Cassie covered herself in a blanket from head to toe.

When their eyes landed on the center of the room, his guest was lying, immobile on the bed. She appeared to be in deep slumber. Thankfully, she covered herself with a blanket, but still, a large portion of her legs was left exposed to their gaze.

He could see that Nick was intrigued. He knew that his brother was a womanizer. From the way his brother appreciated the view, Nick was interested. He just hoped that Nick did not recognize her with the shape of her legs.

"Nice," Nick stated with enthusiasm as he continued to stare at the sleeping form. He wished he could see more of her, but Jacob was a spoilsport, ruining his fun.

But he was satisfied that it was a woman sleeping in his bed. He would have been disappointed if he found out that his brother was rooting for the same sex.

"I think it is time for you to leave. I need my sleep." Jacob grabbed the handle and closed the door when his brother stepped out of the way.

He led the way to the door, hoping that Nick would follow. He did notice his brother's contented smile as if he had just come up with a great idea.

However, he was not interested in whatever it was, Nick was thinking. He was sure that it was something he would not like. All he wanted at the moment was for him to leave.

"Ok. I am leaving." Nick sported a smirk on his face, reluctantly trailing after him to the door. "By the way, if you ever remember or hear something about Cassie, please tell as soon as possible." Nick reminded him before stepping out of the door.

Jacob leaned on the door when he finally closed it on his brother, relieved that Nick appeared convinced with his lies. He did not want any harm happening to Cassie. He did not want his brother to have his hands on her.

"That was close." He thought to himself, thankful that he managed to fool his brother this time. He was not sure if Nick stayed a little longer, he might catch him with his deception.

He believed that he was doing the right thing of helping Cassie because she did not deserve the wrath of his brother. Despite what she did in her past, he believed she was seriously trying to change her ways.

On the other side of the room, Cassie still hid under the covers. She strained her ears to hear if someone was still around, but all she heard was the sound of the street outside the window.

"Please, make him leave." She silently prayed as she struggled to keep still, not wanting to move unnecessarily.

She slowly inhaled and exhaled, still afraid that he might be standing on the side of the bed, waiting for her to show her face. But she believed that she heard the creak of the front door as it opened and closed.

She slowly lowered her blanket just below her chin, still searching the dim room for any sign of another life. But nothing moved around her, not even the shadows.

She released the heavy air that she had been holding on her lungs, relieved that she was finally alone. Then, gradually she slid out of bed to check on the door.

"No one is out there." Her subconsciousness was trying to convince her as she continued to listen to the other side of the door.

She finally dared to open the door and peeked through the tiny slit. She let her eyes wander through the small living room just outside her door and found it empty. As she searched the room, her eyes finally landed on Jacob, who stood motionless by the door as if in deep thought.

"Is the coast clear?" A tiny voice echoed in the silence, making him turn to face the other door.

Jacob saw her peeking at the slit at the door, making sure that his brother had already left. He could not help but smile, then laugh at their situation. They barely made it unscathed.

"Yes, he already left." He would check the corridor for any signs of him, but he knew his brother. He would not lurk in a building like this. He would want to be as far away from a dirty, stinking place like this.

"I'm sorry." She wanted to laugh with him, at the same time, cry. She somewhat found the situation a little confusing.

She was glad that Jacob was there to help her. Then, another part of her regretted putting Jacob in a complicated situation. He was, after all, a family of Nick. His loyalty should remain with his brother.

If his brother ever found out that he had been lying to him and harboring the enemy, he might probably disown him and declare him enemy number one.

Chapter 388 - Friendly Hug

"Ah!" She whimpered as she opened her eyes. At first, she was confused but then eventually realized what was happening.

She woke up in the middle of the night, covered in sweat. She just had a bad dream. It had been a while since she last had a disturbing vision. It seemed so realistic that she almost believed it.

She quickly searched the dim room for confirmation that she was only dreaming. When her eyes landed on the figure next to her, sleeping peacefully, she knew that none of what she saw was true.

"Alex." She tried to call his name, but he was in a deep slumber that he did not even stir.

She stared at him with his eyes closed tight. She wondered if he was dreaming at the very moment. She did witness him toss and turn on his sleep, mumbling some incoherent words before.

Unlike her, he did not shout or wake up at all. He just continued to do so until he calmed down eventually after a few minutes and went back to deep slumber.

"Alex?" She tried again when he did not respond on her first try. This time, he moved and turned in her direction, but still, he did not open his eyes. "Are you awake?"

She suddenly felt the need to discuss something with him. Her recent dream kept creeping in the forefront of her mind as if telling her to do something about it.

She only remembered a portion of the dream. It was about the recent misunderstanding that they had. However, in her dream, she was not so lucky.

He did not want to hear her explanation. She believed he was about to leave her because he thought she lied to him. He accused her of fooling him.

"Alex." She said, making her voice louder. "Wake up." More determined this time to get his attention.

He finally mumbled something, but it was too low for her to understand. He finally opened his eyes and focused them on hers. "Dani?" His eyes and tone were full of questions as he searched her face for answers.

"Hi! I'm so sorry for waking you up." She muttered under her breath as her courage swiftly left her. She quickly turned away from him, thinking about what she had to say to him.

She began to doubt her plan to discuss what was on her mind. It suddenly felt that it was a terrible idea. But she knew that she had to get it out of her chest. If not now, she would still have to do it soon, eventually.

"Hey, what is it?" He was suddenly awake, seeing the distress in her facial expression. He wondered what was wrong with her. "Did you have another dream?"

It was the only thing he could think of that might be keeping her still awake. But he usually woke up when she had nightmares before. Maybe he was too tired that he did not notice.

He pulled himself in a sitting position, putting his full attention on her. He observed her sudden silence as if she was in deep thought. Her eyes kept moving, but her lips remained sealed.

"Yes." She responded first, but she quickly retracted her answer, "No." Then, she realized her answer was confusing. "I meant I had a dream, but it had nothing to do with why I woke you up."

She knew what she wanted to tell him was not about her dream but something else entirely. Although, it did have some similarities in a way.

She knew she had to look away because his eyes seemed to be penetrating in her soul. She was suddenly feeling guilty when she had done nothing wrong. It did not make sense to her.

"Then, what is it?" He asked, curious about what was running in her mind. It appeared that it was more severe than he initially thought, judging from her action.

He waited for her to answer him, but she only stared at him for a few more minutes before she turned away again. She would seem to be internally debating if she should tell him her troubling thoughts.

"I don't know why I feel so affected by what happened last night. Maybe it had something to do with my dream or our recent disagreement." She paused for a second and inhaled a large chunk of air.

She could see that Alex already had questions in his eyes, but he still kept waiting patiently with her narration while she tried to revise her statement in her mind.

"Edward saw me last night at the restaurant with Gerald." She began, but she stopped again as she rephrased how she planned to tell him about what Edward witnessed.

She knew that if words would go out about that scene, it should come from her first. Alex should hear it from her and not from someone else like Edward.

"So, what about it?" He wanted to tell her that he already knew and had pictures as proof, as well. But he began to think that he wanted to see if she would confide that incident with him.

For the first time, he wanted proof of her loyalty and love. He would not inform her that he already knew because he wanted to see if she would confess.

"Well, Edward saw Gerald hugging me." She quickly said as if she was ripping off a bandage. "But I swore to you that it did not mean a thing." Then, she continued.

She watched him for a reaction, but all she saw was him, thinking. She wondered if her fiance was able to express his anger through confrontation.

But she did see him beat some men in a pulp. So, she was aware that Alex was more than capable of far more dangerous stunts. But his silence and calm expression were making her more nervous.

"Then, what did it mean?" It was the answer that bothered him since he talked with his cousin.

Not that he wanted to doubt her feelings for him, but he wished to understand the reason behind it. He could not let the idea that she was hugging someone else festered in his mind, not when there was a logical explanation for it.

"He was only giving me some comfort because of the recent development on our case. I think we are about to lose our case." She finally told him why she felt so down earlier.

She repeated to him the event during her dinner with Gerald and Mr. Bradshaw. She told him about the change in the offer and then how the opposing team had manipulated the law in their favor.

"I don't want you to think that I was having an affair with him. Well, I am afraid that Edward might twist what he saw and add his version on it." She explained to him, hoping that he would believe her story.

He moved closer to her, pulling her in his arms. As he promised to himself last night before sleep took over him, he would listen to her explanation and believe her.

"Edward already beat you to it. He already told me about it last night when he called. He even sent me a picture." He took his phone from the nightstand and showed it to her.

"But one thing, I assure you. I wanted to hear what you have to say first before deciding what to do with it. I am glad that you shared it with me." Alex admitted to her, not wanting to add up to the secrets they were still keeping from each other unconsciously.

"I know that my conscience would not stop bothering me until I tell you that incident. Gerard did hug me, but I did not reciprocate his action." She continued to explain.. "Besides, it was just a friendly hug."

Chapter 389 - Time Fly Fast

"Jeremy, how are you doing?" Dani asked as she stood in front of the boy.

He looked different compared to the first time she saw him. His face had a little more flesh, and his skin looked healthier. He also appeared to be happier.

She had built a case against the foster parents assigned to Jeremy. With the support of a foundation that handled cases like? Jeremy. Alex and some of their friends also assisted in the case. Even Gerald helped when he learned of the case.

"I am good." The kid answered her with a smile. "Charles and Martha are very nice. They helped me a lot. They are even teaching me how to read."

He enumerated the things the couple, who was temporarily taking care of him during the case, did for him. Dani could see the enthusiasm in his eyes, but there was also fear mixed in them.

"What seems to be the matter? Why the sudden long face?" She noticed that his smile did not reach his eyes even if he enjoyed his stay with this family.

He seemed to be thinking deeply of something else. Dani could not help but be curious about his state of mind. She believed it was unfair for a child to carry the world on his shoulder.

He was still very young. He should be with people who would take care of him. He should be in school, learning, and making friends. He should be at home, showered with love.

"It is nothing. I am just thankful that I met you and Alex." He looked at the man not far from them, talking to the other couple. "You are the first people who showed me that I matter."

He could not help the tears from dropping in his eyes. He could not help but feel emotional about how things had changed since he met Dani.

"Of course, you do. You are a special boy, and what you do with your life will always matter." Dani pulled him near to her until she had him in her arms.

"Don't ever forget that you are always loved, not only by me but by all these people who cared about you." She added, comforting him as he wiped away his tears, a bit embarrassed with his display of weakness.

"I'm sorry that I cried." He stated as he tried to control his sobs. "I don't know why, but I can't stop it." He continued to make excuses for his action.

He learned since he lost his family that crying did not help. It did not bring them back, nor did it give him a better life. What tears did to him was to cause more misery and pain.

"You have nothing to be sorry about, so don't ever say sorry if you feel like crying. It is not wrong to show weakness because eventually, that is how we learn and become stronger." She pointed it out to him.

Although, she would always prefer to laugh and be happy with life. She knew that crying was still a significant part of life. It was a necessary reaction that the body needed to release tension.

Without it, the person might be overwhelmed and suffer more from depression. The negative emotions would only build up inside a person and eventually explode into one massive heartbreak.

"Thank you." He wanted to express his gratitude for all she had done for him. At the moment, all he could do was hug her tight.

"Anyway, I have something for you." She showed him a small box wrapped in blue striped paper. She bought it when she saw it and reminded her of him.

"Oh, you did not need to give me anything else." He told her, shaking his head on the gift, but she insisted, seeing the joy in his eyes.

"Are you sure?" Jeremy asked, slightly hesitant at first. When he saw her nod, he could not contain his happiness anymore.

He quickly ripped the box open, excited to receive his first gift. His parents might have given him several presents before, but he did not remember much of them anymore.

"Did you like it?" Dani asked, hoping that she did pick the correct toy appropriate for his age. Having no siblings, she had no idea what kids his age would like.

"Wow, that is a nice car," Alex butted in the conversation once he took the car out of the packaging.

"Of course, this is great," Jeremy exclaimed as he inspected the beautiful car in his hand.

At his age, playing with toy cars might be too old for him, but since he never had the chance to enjoy his childhood, he greatly appreciated the simple gift that she gave. He planned to cherish it throughout his lifetime.

It was hard to say goodbye to the boy once their visit was over. They had lunch together and discussed the process of his new adoption. The social service was still looking for suitable candidates that might be the right fit for him.

Once inside the car, she turned to Alex, who had been supportive of her decision to help Jeremy. "Do you think we will find a good home for Jeremy?"

"I am sure that you will." He did not doubt that if anyone could help that boy, it would be Dani. "I feel so lucky because once we have our kids, I know that they will have a great mom."

"I also have no doubts that you will be a great dad." She responded in his statement. Suddenly, she could not wait for them to start their family.

"Don't worry, a few more weeks, and we will be married soon." He, too, was starting to be impatient. As if time was working against them as it slowed down its countdown.

"Maybe it would have been better if we just elope and have our Las Vegas wedding." She jokingly said to him, remembering one of their past conversations.

She was glad that the misunderstandings they had were way past behind them now. She was lucky to have a very broad-minded boyfriend who always looked at things rationally.

If she found herself subjected to the same condition, she hoped she could also be as understanding as him. She remembered how jealousy drove her to do irrational actions, staking a claim on him, even if he was not hers in the first place.

"Well, we can still do it. We can have the King as our witness." Alex replied to her jester, enjoying the moment they were sharing.

The joke was not lost to her, knowing who he referred to stand by them during the ceremony. She wished it could be that simple, but she knew that many had sacrificed to make their wedding happen.

She could never disappoint their parents who would like to witness their union. She would have run away with him without a second thought if not for them.

"I know, but I still want to have our family and friends joining us on that special day." Dani implied her wishes for her wedding.

She did dream of a wedding where her father would walk her down the aisle. She envisioned her family and friends would be on the sideline cheering her on.

"I want that also for you." Alex expressed his wish to fulfill her dreams. He could already imagine her in a beautiful white gown, smiling radiantly at him.

Then, at the end of the long wait, he would be at the front of the altar, with his eyes only focused on her.

"Anyway, time fly fast. We will not be waiting that long.." She finished.

Chapter 390 - Over Even Before It Began

He had been outside her apartment for several minutes now, unable to knock on her door. He carried with him several flowers as a peace offering.

He had planned to see her since he had returned, but work had occupied most of his time. That had been his excuse. But honestly, he was just confused about his situation.

Suddenly, his phone rang, breaking his trance. He turned and stepped away from the door to answer the call. "What is it, Edward?" He quickly replied when he heard the greeting on the other line.

"What's with the tone?" Edward questioned him, hearing the edge on his voice. "Anyway, where are you?"

"I'm on an errand." He gave him his brief answer. "What is this all about?" Feeling irritated with the interruption and not particularly liking the caller.

"Well, I heard that my cousin is back, so I wonder if you would like to join me for dinner or a drink," Edward explained the reason for his unexpected call.

He was never closed to any of his cousins. Well, it was not the case when they were young. They did enjoy playing together as they grew up.

That changed when they reached puberty when the King and the Council started comparing him to his cousins, especially Alex.

He tried to be friends with them, but he felt threatened. Alex, particularly, was excelling in everything he did, whether it be in their academic studies, training in combat skills, or other activities.

"I am sorry, Edward, but I have plans." He made an excuse. "Maybe next time." He planned to end the call soon. He did not want to prolong their conversation.

He did not hate Edward since he had not done anything wrong against him, not yet anyway. But he had nothing in common with him. He also disapproved of his ways.

He always believed Edward should be more mindful of his actions and words. As a future king, he should be more responsible. But until now, he could not see him as his king.

"Sure, Lance. Maybe next time." Edward repeated his words.

He wanted to get his support in his fight for the throne. If he could convince him to stand by his side, his claim would be more effective.

At the moment, persuading him to leave Alex and be his partner in this endeavor had proved to be more difficult, just like he already suspected. But he was not giving up that easily.

Lance quickly ended the call, putting his phone back in his pocket. He returned his attention to the door as he moved closer, contemplating if he should proceed with his plan.

But before he could decide, the door swung open, revealing the woman that he wished to see. She was as surprised as he was to see him standing outside her door.

"Hi, I did not mean to startle you." He quickly said, seeing the slight shock on her face.

"Lance, what are you doing here?" She questioned upon finding him at her apartment without any notice.

She did not even hear that he was back. When he left, things between them still stood in limbo. Although, he did call her occasionally to say hi and talk about nonsense.

Their relationship had not moved forward to anything else but friendship. Jacky did feel that he wanted more, but he never did pursue it.

She did not want to analyze their situation since she was unsure of her feelings about him. She always felt that something was holding both of them back from taking the next step.

"Well, I was in the neighborhood and thought of dropping to see you." He automatically handed the flowers he had been holding on to for some time. "This is for you."

"Thanks. They look lovely." She took them into her arms as she held the door open. "Why don't you come in?" Remembering that he was still in the hallway. "When did you come back?"

Work had preoccupied most of her waking hours. Add to that her responsibilities as the maid of honor of her best friend. She did not have time to keep track of the latest happenings around her.

"More than a week ago." He admitted. "I was planning to call you sooner, but..."

"Hey, there is no need to explain." Jacky interrupted him. "I know we are all busy."

She was unsure what she felt, hearing that he did not bother to call her immediately. But she was not hurt by his action. She might feel a bit disappointed but not devastated.

"Still, I should have called earlier." He felt a bit ashamed that he was too much of a coward to face her.

"Anyway, how have you been?" She quickly changed the topic, avoiding the awkward situation of explaining their actions and feelings until they were both ready to talk about it.

She offered him a seat on the living room couch while she made some refreshments on the bar. She was giving him time to compose himself, at the same time, for her to figure out what she also wanted.

"Things back home had been complicated since I left. Now, well, I am just trying to help sort things out." He explained to her vaguely.

He was not here to discuss his problems with his family but to figure out what he planned to do with her. She had become a part of his life, but how much.

He had always been attracted to Jacky since he first saw her at the party. But her physical attributes were not the only things he liked about her.

He was always fascinated by her unique personality. She was quite different from the usual women he dated or had relations with before. But was that enough to make him love her?

"Am I part of the things you need to sort out?" She could always read between the lines. She could assess the situation based on facial expressions and body language.

Right now, her mind had already concluded that he was here to end things with her. Even if nothing had yet actually started between them. Funnily, her heart had already accepted it.

It was over even before it began.