

## Royal Contract 391

### Chapter 391 - Overstayed The Welcome

"Cassie, are you still awake?" He walked to the door excitedly, carrying a paper bag in his hand.

He was supposed to have a late shift, but the operation did not push through. Miraculously, the child recovered from her comatose and appeared to be doing well even without the need for operation.

He had been looking forward to going home earlier than before since she had stayed with him at his apartment. His lonely life had been more colorful with her around.

"In here." She shouted at him, directing him to follow her voice into the small kitchen.

She was not expecting him to come home early. These past few days, he had been practically living in the hospital. He would only come home to take a bath and change, and then, he was off again.

"Where?" He looked around the source of her voice, but he found the room empty. There was no sign of her anywhere. He wondered if he only imagined her voice as his eyes roamed around the room.

"Down here, Jacob." She spoke again as she continued with her business.

She was about to prepare dinner when she accidentally dropped her small pouch on the floor. When she retrieved her things, she found some of them had rolled all over the place.

"Oh, I hope dinner is not down there." He jokingly commented, finding the scene interesting.

He found her underneath the kitchen counter, with her bum sticking on the air. She knelt and bent on the floor, reaching for something under the covers.

He knew that she had a body that many men would die to have, but he did not realize that he would be one of them. He had not noticed her in that way before. But now, he began to appreciate her figure at his angle.

"Fortunately for you, nope. I dropped some of my things." She explained to him, finally picking up the last piece, her lipstick.

She slowly stood up from her position, finding her knees a bit stiff after kneeling too long. Jacob quickly grabbed her by the arms to help her stand straight, seeing that she had some difficulty.

"Do you need some help?" He asked as he checked the floor for any remaining things she might have left still scattered around.

She thanked him, fixing the shirt and the shorts she was wearing before facing him. She found the gesture very endearing. If his brother stood in Jacob's shoes, Nick would never have bothered to give her the time of day to help her.

"I'm good. Why don't you sit down while I start dinner." She instructed, pointing to the chair by the counter.

She grabbed the ingredients she would need in the ref, deciding on a quick and easy meal to prepare. She was not an expert, but she did make a delicious pasta meal.

"Ok, by the way, I brought you this." He placed the brown bag in front of her that contained a bottle of wine.

He felt like celebrating with the turn of events at the hospital. In addition, he was not working the next day. It was a perfect way to enjoy and relax for a change.

Besides, it would be nice to drink with good company. In the few times that he had the pleasure of conversing with her, he learned that he liked talking to her.

"Wow! What is the occasion?" She grabbed the bottle on the table and read the label.

It was not the type of wine that she usually had before. It was a cheap imitation of a famous brand, but she did not care. She believed it would taste better since she would be drinking it with someone not as bitter as Nick.

"Do we need an occasion? Maybe I only want to enjoy a night without thinking that tomorrow will be the end of everything." He told her as he took a comfortable seat on the counter, watching her move around his kitchen.

He saw her clutch a knife and chop some vegetables on the board with ease. It was like he was watching her create a masterpiece in front of him.

"I used to do that. Look at where it had gotten me." She warned him, thinking of how she wasted her life because of her wrong decisions.

If only she had planned more carefully and thought of the consequences of her actions, then maybe, she would not be in this mess.

She might be living a different life. She suddenly remembered her best friend and ex-lover. She might be with Troy by now, married and occupying a white picket fence two-story house.

"Well, you have been hanging out in the wrong crowd." He corrected her. He could not help but compare him to his brother.

He believed that he was a better man than him, not only because his brother was a criminal while he was a doctor. But because he treated women with respect.

"Are you saying that you are the right one?" She raised her brows at him, looking at him with skepticism.

"Do you think you are better and nicer than the rest of them?"

She temporarily stopped her mincing as she stared at him, waiting for his answer. She did observe during the short time she had been staying with him that he was indeed a good guy.

"Modesty aside, I do think so." Jacob knew that she was only taunting him, but he could not help but ride along. "I believe that you won't find any other men out there better than me."

"What about you?" He diverted the attention away from him and redirected it back to her. "What can you tell me about yourself?"

They never talked much about anything personal about her. Cassie did share things about her past, but mostly it revolved around his brother. She was yet to tell him about her interests, ambitions, or dreams.

But he usually did not push her to tell him anything that she was not comfortable sharing. It was slow progress of getting to know each other, but he did not see the urgency of the matter.

"I decided to leave tomorrow." She unexpectedly blurted out.

She could not remain hidden forever in his apartment. She would eventually have to leave.. She felt she already had overstayed the welcome.

### **Chapter 392 - Deserving Of The Crown**

"I called for this meeting because there is a current threat circulating about the upcoming wedding." The Duke opened the meeting, getting directly to the heart of the problem.

It was the main issue that needed immediate attention. As head of the Council, he would never allow anything to happen to the wedding.

He might not be the current king nor probably the future ruler of this kingdom, but he was his son. He would protect him and his future wife as long as he had the power to do so.

"Do we have confirmation of this threat?" One of the council members asked. "Do we have any lead to who would be behind this threat?" Another one voiced out his concern.

Threats against the royal family and the rest of the royal hierarchy were a common occurrence in the palace. But the Council still checked every danger to the lives of its family seriously.

"Our teams are on top of the situation. They are doing all they can to find out more about the authenticity of these rumors." Fred told the other council members.

He had put the top of their investigators on the case. He did not want to take any chances that the rumor might be true this time. He would not put Alex and Dani's life on the line.

"Who is this source? How do we know that we can trust this source?" Another voice echoed in the room, making all of them turn their heads, knowing too well who arrived to join them.

The door of the Council Chambers suddenly opened, revealing the identity of the person who walked past through the double doors.

"He had been feeding us information about what is going around the city for years. So far, he had been very reliable, Your Highness." Fred answered, seeing King Edward walking towards the table.

The Duke referred to the source in the male gender just for reference, but he did trust the person behind the hidden identity. The secret informant had been working for him for years and had yet to fail his trust.

He did invite the king to attend the meeting since the event was part of the palace traditions. His blessings would be an integral part of all the programs that would take place during the ceremonies.

"Then, do everything you can to get to the bottom of this." King Edward stated as he took his place at the center of the table. "Shall we proceed with the other matters at hand?"

He did give his approval of this marriage, seeing nothing amiss with the union. But he was still wary of what it would symbolize with their people. He still had to prepare for its impact on his kingdom.

"Aside from the rumors, there are no more impediments in the wedding proceeding. Everything seems to be in order and on schedule." One of the Councilors reported what he had learned from the coordinators.

He was rooting for the new couple, just like everyone else. He was excited about their upcoming wedding. It had been a long time ever since a grand wedding occurred in the palace.

It was a celebration that would make people stop whatever they were doing and watch the ceremonies. He believed it would be the wedding of the century.

"Let us discuss the other agenda for today," Fred said, moving along with the other topic in the list of matters that required their attention.

There were still several matters not related to the wedding that was causing some problems with the kingdom. Although it was not as worse or urgent as the wedding, it still needed a resolution.

"I think that concludes the meeting today. Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. Your Highness, it had been our pleasure to have you here with us." Count Wellington announced to the group.

He was glad that the session had addressed most of the issues of the kingdom. At least for now, they could rest easy, knowing that things were running according to plan.

"Fred, could you stay for a few minutes? I wish to discuss something with you." King Edward stated in a low volume voice, directing his words to his younger brother.

"Your Highness!" The other members bade their farewell to the two remaining in the room. The king acknowledged them with a wave of his hand and a nod, dismissing the rest of them.

"Your Highness, what do you wish to discuss with me in private?" The Duke stood up from the other side of the table and walked closer to King Edward.

He went to the decanter and poured two glasses of wine, serving the other one to his brother and taking the other with him as he returned to his seat.

"Stop with the formality, Fred. We are just the two of us." King Edward always respected his brother for all he had done for the kingdom and him, particularly.

He would also do anything for his brother if he could, but his hands were tied. He either had to choose between him or his son. If he found himself in a corner, he would have no options but to choose the latter.

"Ok. Edward, what is this all about?" As the leader of the Council, he almost knew everything that was happening around the palace and the kingdom.

He assumed that the discussion would be about the topic earlier. But he would not preempt what his brother was about to say as he waited for his answer.

"I will go direct to the point." King Edward picked up the glass of wine and twirled the liquid inside the glass, sniffing the aroma it produced in the process. "Are you suspecting my son to be involved in this rumored plot to cause chaos at the wedding?"

He was not naive about what his son had been doing in the past. He was no saint, but he wanted to believe that he was not the devil, too.

Although, his records would show that he had done many undesirable things that a king was not supposed to do.. But of late, he hoped that the young prince had changed his ways, proving himself deserving of the crown.

### **Chapter 393 - Scrap Of Love**

"Hey, Dani! Can you spare me a few minutes?" Jacky strode to her office with determination and a purpose.

She had been planning something special for her friend before her wedding, but she could not seem to get her friend in a room for one decent conversation.

Jacky understood that Dani had tons of work she had to finish or at least work on before she took her leave of absence from her job for her wedding and honeymoon.

"I am busy." She automatically replied to her friend without even lifting her face from the papers in front of her.

Her priority, at the moment, was the case against the foster family that abused Jeremy and the other kids that were under their care.

She did not want them to get away with their evil ways. She wanted them to go behind bars. People like them did not deserve pity after they never showed any mercy to those innocent kids they used for their benefit.

"But you need to make time. We need to talk about your wedding. I am only your maid of honor. I am not the one getting married." Jacky pointed out, standing up closer to her table, trying to catch her attention.

Dani still had many last-minute decisions that she had to take care of regarding the wedding. The wedding coordinators were already at their wit's end as they attempted to get in touch with her.

In the end, they continued to bother her since she was her assistant and maid of honor. Also, she was the only one they could talk to about the preparations.

"I will look at all of them later," Dani finally looked at her friend, knowing that she was not going away if she did not listen to what she had to say.

She held the papers that Jacky placed on the table and waved them in front of her, indicating that she would check them after her other works.

She also would like to make time for her wedding. Just like every bride, she wanted a beautiful wedding. But most of all, she wanted to get married soon.

"You promised." Jacky only wanted her friend to give her a few minutes to pick and decide on the selections. "Maybe we should do it now. I can help you if you want." Changing her mind.

She sat down on the chair in front of her desk, refusing to leave. She could already foresee Dani would go back to her work once she left the room. Then, she would forget all about the preparations.

"Fine." She finally gave up, seeing that her friend was not leaving her alone until she got what she wanted.

She dropped her pen and leaned on her chair as she looked at her friend with a satisfied smile. She did agree that maybe she could spare her a few minutes to finalize the decisions for her wedding.

"Good," Jacky jumped from her seat and moved to her side, bringing her chair along with her. She moved closer to her friend so that they could check everything one by one. "Move a little." She said as she made room beside her friend.

Jacky placed the first pages of the files in front of her. It was several photos of various flower arrangements that would need her approval.

"So, where do we start?" Dani allowed her friend to take the lead. She was glad that her friend was as excited about her upcoming wedding as she was.

Although, the wedding would still take place without consulting with her. But the Duchess did not wish to proceed with the preparation without obtaining some input from her.

It was her wedding, so her preference was relevant. Although, she already expressed that all she wanted was to marry Alex. Still, they insisted that she should participate in the wedding planning.

"Ok. Satisfied." She finally told her friend when they finished the last set of papers that needed her approval.

She did enjoy working on them with her friend, not realizing that it could be fun. Although, Jacky insisted that she should be doing this with Alex.

But she did not want to burden Alex with this mundane task. He was also busy with his many responsibilities to tackle on this one. Though, it would have been nice to share this with him.

"Yep. Now, I will leave you alone in peace." Jacky stood and returned the chair to its original position, giving Dani her space again. She took the files and walked out of her room.

"Thanks, Jacky." She called out to her friend before she went out of her sight. Life had been more colorful with her by her side.

She believed that meeting and having her as a friend had been one of the most exciting and enjoyable chapters of her life. Now, she was ready to embark on another one because of her never-ending support.

If not for her friend, she would not have the courage to take another chance with life. After being scourged by love, or what she thought was love, she never thought she would love again. But her friend convinced her to take a leap of faith.

"Your welcome," Jacky responded before she was gone. She returned to her seat, ready to email the details to the coordinators.

Afterward, she ended up staring at the files in her hand, imagining that she was the one picking the flowers, the colors of the candles, the designs of the napkins, and more.

"Your time will come." She mumbled to herself, not wanting to give up on love. Then, her thoughts returned to the other night when Lance showed up in her apartment.

"Am I part of the things you need to sort out?" She remembered her question clearly in her mind.

"I'm sorry if I kept leading you on, but I don't think that I am ready for a relationship." He finally decided, even if he was still confused with his situation.

He knew that there was a likelihood that he might like her more than he felt right now. But he knew that his obligation to his family and country outweighed what he felt for her.

It was unfair to her if he kept telling her that he liked her, but he could not even commit to her. He did not want what they had built to be a one-sided relationship.

"I think that is a good idea." She quickly accepted his decision, not at all bothered by it.

She believed that she had known about it for a while. Hearing the words finally confirmed what she felt and sealed their fate. But honestly, she did not feel bad about it. She was glad.

"Are you sure you are fine?" Lance felt relieved to see her reaction. "Do you think we can still be friends?" Wishing to keep her as a friend rather than a past he needed to forget.

The ringing of the phone snapped her out of her reminiscing. She quickly closed the files and set them aside to attend to the phone call.

"Yes," Jacky answered the caller, but her mind still thought of her current love life or the lack of it.

But she did not mind being single again. She accepted that Lance could only be a friend. She deserved more than him.. She earned the right to demand a man who could give her everything and not just a scrap of love.

#### **Chapter 394 - Divorce Increased At An Alarming Rate**

He drove the two of them to the City Hall building, where they had an appointment in ten minutes. He could not help but fret whether they were doing this for the right reasons.

"Are you sure about this, Tyra?" He asked again for the hundredth time, sitting on the driver's side.

Although they had discussed their decision to push through with this plan thoroughly, he still had some doubts, not about his decision, but how she might feel about this.

He was afraid, after all this, she would eventually change her mind. Then, she would regret getting involved in this ridiculous charade.

"Yes, Troy, I am sure. Don't worry. I already thought this through." She assured him, seeing the hesitation in his eyes. She hoped to sound convincing because she did not want him to back out now.

Last night, her father called, only to go on about finding her a more suitable husband despite her explanation that she was already engaged.

Having a fiancé still would not stop her father from setting her up unless she was married. But then again, she was still doubtful if a piece of paper would be enough.

"I need to be sure because this is a big commitment. I don't want you to feel that I have pressured you in any way to do this." He extended his hand and held her hands in his.

He had nothing to lose in this arrangement, but he felt that she might have. He did not want her to end up losing in the end when all he ever wanted was to help and save her from a sure disaster.

In the short time they had known each other, he realized that she was not hard to like. But entering another relationship after ending a long one was not yet in his priorities.

"No, I assure you that I am doing this with my free will and with a sound mind." She turned to him in her seat and stared into his eyes. "This is a business deal that would help both of us in the long run." She hoped to appear confident.

She believed she was gaining more from this deal than he was. She could not help but wonder why he had agreed to her plans in the first place.

Not that he needed the money that she offered. She recently learned that he was doing very well with his business. So, it could not be his reason for sacrificing his freedom and being tied to her in marriage.

A broken heart could be a great motivator to do stupid things. Tyra would know since she had been in his shoes before. Tyra wondered if that was his only justification.

"Then, I guess it is time to get this show on the road." He squeezed her hand in his, reassuring her that things would work out just fine.

If anything, she could count on him that his intentions were pure. He was not helping her out to take advantage of her vulnerability.

On the other hand, he only wanted to protect her from her father and his plans. In truth, he had learned to care for her. She was not an ordinary acquaintance anymore but a friend that he would like to cherish.

"Ok." She inhaled deeply, nodding at him in acknowledgment. She waited for him until he opened her door and assisted her out of the car.

If they had met in another circumstance, maybe things between them might have been different. Tyra could see herself getting attracted to a man like him.

But, right now, it was the last thing that she wanted. She was only doing this to get her father off her back. At the moment, all she planned to do was work her way back to the top of her modeling career.

They walked into the building, up to the room of the one officiating their wedding. When the secretary saw him, she immediately showed them to the room.

"Uncle Ben, I hope we are not bothering your busy schedule." Troy greeted the man behind the desk. The judge, who was about to perform the ceremony, quickly stood to welcome them.



The bald man was not his uncle by blood, nor did they have any family relations. But their relationship had been thicker than any blood relations.

He was the first man to help him through his darkest hours. He had guided him out of the shadows that had been his companion since he was young.

Other than Cassie, Ben was the only other person Troy loved, trusted, and respected. He always considered him as his family. If not for him, he might still be in the slums, scavenging for scraps.

"Of course not. For you, I will always make time." The man hugged Troy back, clapping him on the shoulders. "You must be the lucky woman who had snared my nephew's heart."

He also gathered Tyra in his arms, giving her a warm hug. He had heard a great deal about Tyra not only from Troy but also from the research he had done on her.

He could not help but be wary about Troy's association with her, seeing who her father was and her past association with his niece's fiancé.

But he was hoping that this was mere coincidences and had nothing to do with fate playing tricks on them. The last thing he wanted for Troy was to be involved in a tight situation.

"Yes, I believe so. But I am also hoping that I can bring some luck to his life." Tyra looked at Troy, wishing that her words would come true.

She agreed with what the sweet man said about Troy. She was lucky to have met a man like him. Aside from Alex, she believed that Troy also possessed good qualities that made him unique and special.

She only hoped she was not ruining his life by getting involved with her. If she could help it, she would try to help him achieve whatever he was aiming for while they were together. It was the least she could do, to repay for what he was trying to do for her.

"I beg to differ. I think I am the one who is lucky to have met a woman as kind and lovely as her." He moved closer to Tyra, putting his arms around her waist, appearing that they were a loving couple.

Then, he looked into her eyes when she coincidentally looked up to see his face. In a way, they both knew that this was what they needed. They both silently agreed to proceed with their plans.

"Then, can we all agree that your presence here was not coerced or forced by the other?" Both automatically nodded in agreement with the judge's question.

Ben was still a bit doubtful about their decision to tie the knot. He gathered that they only met recently. He did not see the need to rush the matter unless there was some other reason for it.

He just hoped that they knew what they were doing. He could not help but think of his niece, who was also about to undergo the same process.

He could only speculate about what young couples thought of marriage these days.. But he had a clear idea why divorce increased at an alarming rate.

## **Chapter 395 - No Escape**

As the wedding came closer every day, so was the pressure of accomplishing everything before the big day. Time was ticking, as well as all the deadlines.

She was just glad that weekdays were almost over. It was just a couple of hours more, and she would be free from her responsibility from her job.

"Jacky, can you remove the files that I already reviewed and take them to David." She instructed as she piled them up on the outgoing tray. "By the way, I am going home early."

She prided herself for her dedication to her profession and with the people who depended on her. But since she met Alex, her view of life and work had drastically changed.

Her world had stopped revolving around her career but slowly included Alex in everything she did. She had put him at the forefront of her every plan for the future.

She looked at the time and wondered if Alex was about to go home too. She would like to surprise him with dinner or anything that would break their monotonous activities.

"I am glad that you still remember your fiancé. I thought that you already buried yourself in all those rubbles." Jacky ridiculed her friend, pointing to the papers still waiting for her perusal.

She could not help it. She had suggested to her friend cut down on her responsibilities in the firm. Her wedding was almost near, but she insisted on maintaining her load.

"Just clear this up, so I can go home early." She smiled at her friend, knowing too well what she was implying. She heard her friend, but she had no time for her sermons.

David and Evan already told her that they were taking over some of her clients while she was on leave, but she did not want to leave her responsibilities just like that.

She had to assure her clients that they would not be left hanging when she took her absence for her wedding and the honeymoon. Not that she did not trust David and Evan to do a good job, she could not pass her cases with a crappy job.

"Fine," Jacky took the files and left her alone to finish the rest of the papers still on her table.

She was almost at her table when she noticed a woman was approaching her table. At first, she tried to remember where she had seen her before. The woman looked familiar, but she looked different as well.

The unexpected visitor was already standing in front of her desk when she remembered who she was. She sat down on her chair as she stared at the newcomer.

"Yes, is there something that we can do for you?" She tried to be cordial since she was in the office.

However, all she ever wanted was to launch at her and shove her on the floor. She could not let her get away from all her sins against her friend.

She could not believe the nerve of that despicable woman to show her face in her friend's office after what she had done. She wondered what evil scheme the unwanted visitor was planning this time.

But the terrible woman was not alone. A man stood by her side, but this time, Jacky was sure that it was the first time she had seen the guy. She believed he was not from around here.

"I am here to see Ms. Daniella Hamilton." The woman spoke up sweetly, hoping that the other woman behind the desk would not recognize who she was.

She had to see her former friend and speak to her about something urgent. She feared that if Dani learned her name, she might not talk to her or even see her.

"I am sorry, but my boss is quite busy right now. Since you don't have an appointment today, I can't let you in and see her." Jacky politely made her excuses, but deep inside, she wanted to shout at her and call her names.

"Hey, I am sorry if we came without an appointment, but maybe you can tell your boss that it is important that we speak with her. Maybe she would make an exception." This time, the man interrupted Jacky.

He knew the importance of their reason for coming to this office, so he was not about to leave without seeing some results. He still wondered why his companion insisted on seeing her.

He had met her before at the hospital. He could not stop wondering what the connection of this lawyer was with his friend.

He only knew that this lawyer was the ex-fiance of his brother. But he never met her before except when she brought a questionable kid to the hospital.

"I don't know who you are." Jacky pointed to the man with her fingers, "But, I know you, Cassie." Telling her that she was busted. "I don't think Dani would appreciate seeing you."

She felt the need to protect her friend from the likes of her. For all she knew, Cassie was here to ruin the upcoming wedding. Maybe Nick sent her to spy on them.

Jacky was not aware that her friend was looking for Cassie. Dani failed to mention that to her, so now, Jacky was hell-bent on sending Cassie away before she caused any more trouble.

"Please, Jacky, right? I need to see Dani. It is urgent. It is a matter of life and death." Cassie pleaded, desperate to have a word with her former friend. "I am willing to wait for as long as it takes."

Instead of going to Alex, she decided to turn to Dani. She knew that Nick's men would be all over town. And the possibility that some of them might be watching Alex's place was very likely.

But she knew that Nick would never think that she would seek Dani's help. After all, their friendship did end badly. Even she never believed that she would end up in her office after all she wronged her.

"That is not how it works. You can book an appointment, then come back again." Jacky insisted, not wanting them to wait and see her friend.

"Please, we did not come here to make trouble. Cassie only wanted to correct her mistakes. Please, give her a chance." Jacob finally spoke up.

This time, Jacky could see the difference in Cassie's movements. She did not appear to be acting the same way when she was with Nick. Even the guy beside him looked sincere when he said those words.

She looked at the two uninvited guests and wondered if she should believe them. But it could be a trap, concocted by Nick. She still should proceed with caution.

"Why don't you wait over there." Jacky pointed to a chair on the side as she checked on Dani.

The two moved to the side and decided to wait. Jacob was still skeptical about Cassie's plans. He would have preferred that she had run as far away from this place as possible.

He could not help but think of what Cassie would need with this woman. Or the man that she called Alex. He just realized that moving into this place had proven to be more complicated than he initially thought.

As much as he wanted to separate himself from his brother's world, fate seemed to have a different plan for him. Suddenly, he understood what Cassie was doing.

There was no running from his brother.. Unless she fought it head-on, there would be no escape for her.

### **Chapter 396 - Side Of The Story**

When Jacky told her who was waiting outside her door, she had mixed feelings. She had been anxious to find Cassie, but at the same time, wary of her intentions for suddenly showing up.

She had trusted her before, but Cassie betrayed her. She wondered if she could ever believe anything that would come out of her mouth. But she needed to hear what she had to say.

"Are you sure that it is wise to see her?" Jacky said as she looked at the closed door.

She knew that their visitor was still outside, waiting for a chance to see Dani. She would not be surprised if Cassie would force herself inside the room. Jacky did not buy the good and decent act she was portraying.

"You know I have to see her. I need to hear what she has to say. Don't worry. I will be careful. Besides, I want you to be present when I see her." Dani told her friend, who still showed skepticism about her plan.

"I hope you know what you are doing," Jacky said as she walked back out of the door. "I will show them in."

She walked towards the two, who seemed to be conversing in low voices. She wondered what they were whispering about in the corner. Were they conspiring something against her friend?

"Ms. Hamilton will see you now?" Still maintaining her professionalism. But before Cassie could take another step, she blocked her path. "If you do anything funny, I will make sure you will regret it."

She had to warn her before she even thought of doing something stupid while inside Dani's room. She would protect her friend from any harm that might come her way.

"I assure you that the last thing we want to do would be to cause trouble." It was the unknown man who answered this time.

He could not blame her for doubting their intentions. If his assessment of what Cassie told him was correct, then Cassie did a number on his brother's fiancée.

"Please, follow me." She instructed, giving them a warning look.

She led the way to the office, opening the door for them. Then, she let them proceed inside first before following behind. She watched their every move, not trusting them even one bit.

"Thank you for seeing us even without notice." Cassie immediately stated as she entered the room.

She knew she had to make her case quickly before Dani showed them the door. She still did not know how she would react to her presence, especially after all the evil things she did to her.

"I hope that I will not regret it," Dani responded with slight doubt in her voice.

Although, she had been searching for her because of her many questions. It still did not mean she would get the answers she wanted to hear. Or if she would be telling her the truth.

"I get it. I think I deserve that." Cassie and her companion remained standing in front of her desk, waiting for her to offer her a seat.

She could not expect a warm welcome now, could she? She looked at her former friend, regretting what she had done to her. She knew that saying sorry would never be enough to gain her forgiveness.

"I did not know that you two know each other. It is nice to see you again, Dr. Dawson. Please, do take a seat." Dani offered the two available chairs while Jacky stood on her other side.

She did recognize the man beside Cassie as the one who helped her with Jeremy at the emergency room. Based on Sebastian, he was not from around here. He just transferred recently.

Now, she wondered how the two knew each other and what they were doing together. In her opinion, it was an unlikely association, but she could be wrong.

Then again, she was left thinking about what happened between Nick and Cassie. What made Cassie turn against Nick? But could she trust Cassie that she was genuinely doing this out of the goodness of her heart?

"It is good to see you again. But call me Jacob." He said as he settled to the chair in front of her. "I hope that you don't mind if I came along."

He did not have any business in this meeting, but he could not leave her alone. Not until he was sure that his brother was not hunting her anymore.

Besides, she asked him to join her for support. In a way, they had established a friendship in the short time they had spent together. He could sense that she had learned to trust him even with her life.

"Not at all, Jacob. I still have to thank you for what you did for Jeremy." Dani stated, acknowledging the good deed that the doctor had shown to the young boy.

"It was nothing. It is my job, and any doctor would have done the same." Jacob told her. "I hope the boy is doing well."

Jacob knew what she was talking about, but there was no point dwelling on the matter. He understood the situation, so he only did what he believed was the right thing to do.

"He is doing well now. Only waiting for a new family that would adopt him for good." She explained to him.

She was glad that their mild conversation had eased the tension that enveloped the room as she waited for the right opening for her questions and Cassie's reason for seeing her.

"But I am relieved that you came, Cassie. In truth, I have been looking for you." She continued before anyone else could speak up. "I thought that something happened to you because you suddenly vanished."

She had enough of the pleasantries. It was time to know what was going on with her and what she needed to warrant her visit. Besides, she also had questions that needed some answers.

Answers that she was the only one who could give. Because as of now, she was still confused with what her father had told her.. She still wanted to hear her side of the story.

### **Chapter 397 - The Wrong Side Of The Fence**

Jacky remained standing at Dani's side as she observed the exchange happening between the two. She stayed and quietly watched by the sidelines.

So far, she did not see any threats from their visitors, but she still kept her guard up. She could not be too sure of their intentions.

"I am surprised that you even thought of me. I know that what I did to you was unforgivable. Seeing me must be hard for you, but I am here because I need your help and Alex." Cassie finally stated her case.

She knew to survive this. She needed all the help she could get. Although Jacob offered to help, it would not be enough to stop Nick from exacting his revenge on her.

"I am willing to overlook the past. If you are sincere about cleaning up your act, then maybe we can forget whatever happened between us." Dani placed her hand on top of the table as she looked directly into Cassie's eyes, wanting to see her reaction.

"I assure you that it is my intention." Cassie did not break eye contact when she said this to Dani. "I want to ask for forgiveness even if I do not deserve it. I wish to bury the past and start all over again."

After a very long time, Cassie felt tears run down her cheeks. She had been carrying the burden of hating the Hamilton family that her heart had turned to stone.

After hearing her own words, she felt like floating in the clouds as the heaviness in her heart lightened. She never thought that she would ever feel this way ever again.

"Then, what happened?" Dani needed to hear her explanation, to understand the whole picture. "If you don't mind, I want to hear the entire story."

She leaned on her chair, dropping everything she was doing. She already had texted Alex about her unexpected visit. She would be expecting him to arrive soon.

Whatever she would learn from Cassie. She also wanted Alex to hear about it because they were in this together. She was through fighting this battle on her own.

She believed that everything happened for a reason. Cassie hated her and her family because of something that occurred in the past. She could not judge her until she heard every detail.

"It is a long story. I hope you have time." Cassie looked at all the people present, waiting for some form of confirmation. When she saw that everyone seemed to be waiting, she prepared herself for her narration.

"I hope you still have room for one more." Alex walked into the room and went straight to Dani's side.

Although he already knew most of the story, he still wanted to hear Cassie's point of view. It would probably shed some light on why Cassie was so determined to destroy them at the start.

Then, why did she all of a sudden change her mind and turn against her partner? Until now, that portion still boggled his mind.

"Well, you are just in time for my story." Cassie shifted in her seat before beginning to tell them her tale. "As you all know, my father made a business transaction with yours. Since they were best friends, your father offered to help him."

But her father lost the business. Many speculations circulated, and one of them was the accusation that Ethan fooled his father. Ethan used him until he lost everything.

This story stuck in her head, including the evidence she found against Ethan when she worked for him. Then, it all added up in her mind, bringing her to the conclusion that Ethan was not trustworthy.

"I always hated your father for what he did with mine. Your father ruined my family, then killed my father. But it did not excuse what I did. I should not have taken it on you." Cassie shared with them what she always felt.

The anger she kept burning, fueling her desire to take her vengeance against those who she blamed for her misery. It was the same hatred that Nick used as his instrument against their enemies.

She followed him like a blind puppet, moving according to his string. She thought that she had everything under her control, but she was wrong. Nick was only letting her believe that she did.

"I think you have it wrong." Dani was about to defend her father from her accusation, but Cassie stopped her.

"I know. I had been researching in Nick's files. I had seen the figures that he was keeping from me all this time. Your father had nothing to do with what happened to my father." She finally explained to them what she had learned recently.

She took out another set of papers from her bag and handed them to Dani. Then, she proceeded to tell them about the history of the said files.

"He fueled my hatred by keeping that information from me. He led me to believe that Ethan was a criminal, but I discovered that Ethan was only protecting my father." She pointed to the evidence that Nick kept in his vault.

She was lucky that she snatched those files without him knowing. Or else, she might be lying on a ditch right now, lifeless if he caught her.

"He wanted the files that I took from Ethan because it would incriminate him with the underground activities." She was talking about the previous papers she had already sent to Alex.

"But I discovered that he had acquired the rest of the papers that would have absolved Ethan from any criminal intent." Luckily, she found it.

However, she discovered on those papers a hard-to-digest truth. It was not Ethan but her father who had dealt with the criminal syndicate. Ethan only tried to help him extricate himself from the mess he made.

"I am sorry for everything." She felt her tears again, dropping down her cheeks.

But, it was too late. Ethan could not do anything about it. He could not stop her father's company from going bankrupt. Her father had done too much damage to fix it.

Ethan could not save her father from himself. Her father had become a lost cause that the only thing he could think of as a last resort was to end his life.

She finally realized her mistake. She learned that Ethan and Dani were not her enemies.. She had sided on the wrong side of the fence.

### **Chapter 398 - Welcome Home**

It was late when Cassie finally finished her story. She wished there was something more she could do to rectify her wrongdoings against Dani and her father, but at the moment, she could think of none.

Alex had arranged for her safe house where she would temporarily hide until he could prepare for her travel to a more secure location and eventually her freedom.

"Jacob, is it?" Alex asked when he had the chance to talk to the man accompanying Cassie to her new place. When he nodded, he continued. "I hope we can trust that her secret will be safe."

He had no idea of who the man was. All he knew was that Cassie trusted him to bring him along. They had no option now but to do the same.

"Of course. I also want the same thing. I am here to protect my friend." Jacob assured him as they stood outside the room while waiting for Cassie to come out.

She had remained inside the room, requesting a few minutes for a private conversation with her former friend. Jacky was hesitant to leave, but Dani assured her that everything would be fine.

"I am sorry again for hurting you and for ruining our friendship." Cassie apologized once more, knowing that her wrong judgment and actions resulted in a series of heartbreak on Dani's part.

She knew begging for her forgiveness would never be enough, but she should still do it. She should set aside her pride and show Dani that she genuinely regretted her past actions.

She fell on her knees, head bent down, unable to look into her eyes. She felt ashamed for what she had done, not only to her but as well as her father, who only showed kindness.

"Come on, now. There is no need for that." Dani stood up from her seat and walked towards her. "Let us see what we can do to keep you safe."



Dani could see her emotions pouring out of her. Either Cassie told her the truth, or she was just a good actress. But Dani would prefer to believe the former.

Outside, Dani found Alex discussing something with Jacob. She walked with Cassie by her side while observing the doctor's movements. She still could not figure out his involvement with Cassie.

After less than an hour more, Dani rode in the passenger seat of Alex's car on the way home to his apartment. But her mind still went back to the doctor who was currently helping Cassie.

"Do you think Jacob is the reason why Cassie suddenly dumped Nick and decided to change her ways?" She voiced out her curiosity, looking at the man at her side.

She still could not understand Cassie's sudden change of heart. She analyzed her story and realized that Cassie had already decided to end her revenge plot, even before discovering the truth.

Something must have made her realize that it was not worth it. That there were things much significant than getting her vengeance. And her association with Nick would only lead her to trouble.

"I honestly don't know. First, we don't know much about the guy, except that he was a doctor who recently moved here. Aside from that, his association with her remained a mystery." Alex answered her query.

He wondered if he should look into Jacob or let it be. After all, he seemed to be just an innocent bystander in all that was happening to them.

But they had no clue about the relationship of Jacob to Cassie and the man that they all despised, Nick. Jacob and Cassie failed or intentionally omitted to mention that part to them.

"I think Cassie is telling us the truth. Even the evidence supported all her claims." Dani concluded based on what she observed earlier.

In a way, she was glad that Cassie turned to their side, giving her the chance to clear her father's name. But there was no reason for them to reveal what they knew.

If word came out about Ethan's involvement in the crime syndicate, Dani would have no choice but to clear him, putting Cassie's father in the spotlight.

It would not do any good to the people concerned, especially Cassie's father, who was at the center of the issues. Dani would like to avoid that from happening.

"I also think so," Alex agreed with her, glad that she also believed in Cassie's story.

At least that answered many questions in their mind about the past. It cleared Ethan of any crime, and the company was safe from speculations.

"Anyway, since Cassie is safe. Can I invite you to dinner?" She changed the topic, giving him a sweet smile with imploring eyes.

She felt like she had to make up for her lack of time for him, and most of all, for the stupid things she had done. It was not that late to find a decent restaurant. If not, they could always find something else to eat.

"Hmmm?" He thought of her offer, considering the time as he looked at his watch. "What do you have in mind?" He finally asked as he stirred the car out of the parking lot.

He instantly liked the idea of going out with her. If he would have it his way, he wished they could do it more often. Even if they were married for ten years, he still planned to go out on dates with her.

"I was thinking of a quick meal, then probably a late movie." She suggested, letting him decide on the rest.

She looked outside her window, finally admiring the view of the city. It had been a while since she appreciated her surrounding. The place that she grew up and loved.

She let her eyes roam around, staring at nothing in particular, allowing herself to get lost in her thoughts. Her mind began to conjure up images of the two of them together.

She could see a simple two-story house with a small garden and a beautiful view of the countryside. She even saw a dog running about on a green, well-maintained lawn.

A familiar voice greeted her from behind that made her smile.. "Welcome home."

### **Chapter 399 - Little Secret**

"Dani?" A man's voice repeated to call her name. "Dani! Hey, wake up." He insisted. "We are here."

The last words finally registered in her muddled brain, making her instantly open her eyes. The words she thought she heard earlier were just a figment of a dream.

The image of the beautiful house suddenly vanished in her mind as reality dawned on her. She finally woke up from her enchanting vision of what she wanted for a home.

She tried to focus on the source of his voice, and her sight landed on his face. "I'm sorry. I dozed off." She excused herself as she straightened herself on her seat.

She could see him continuing to stare at her. It would seem that he was looking at her funnily. She wondered if there was something on her face.

She quickly rubbed her face, then down her chin, wiping it with the back of her hand. "Is there something wrong with my face?" She finally asked when she could not see anything wrong with her.

"Nothing is wrong with your face." He affirmed what she already thought, but he continued to sport his amusement on his expression. "But you were talking in your sleep."

"What?" She was surprised by what he said, unaware of what she did while unconscious. "What did I say?" She hoped that it was nothing embarrassing.

She had learned to be comfortable around him, almost not embarrassed with most of what she did. But she could still think of a few things that she still might not do in front of him.

Maybe not ever, even if they were already married and had kids. But then again, he might also felt the same way. Her mind began to enumerate things they had not tried to do together.

"Do you want to know?" He withheld the information, forcing her to work for it. "Are you sure? Well, I will need something in return." He began to think of a suitable price in exchange for his answer.

"Fine, what is the deal?" She knew that she would not squeeze anything from him until she gave in to his demand.

In truth, the information was not that valuable to her. But, she was enjoying the game that they were playing. She did not mind letting her fiancé win in this round.

"Well, you have to tell me something that you feel most embarrassed about." He could tell that it was what was running in her mind at the moment.

He had learned to read most of her mannerisms. He knew most of her quirks and habits. Still, he wondered what else was she keeping from him.

"But, maybe after we have ordered something to eat." He stopped her by placing his fingers on her lips even before she could utter a single word. "I am starving," Alex continued, holding on to his almost empty stomach.

"That is fine with me. I also need to put something on my stomach." As if on cue, her tummy started to make some crazy sounds. "I told you." She justified with a small laugh.

They entered a small establishment that they had visited before. They enjoyed the quiet ambiance of the place even if it was not the same as the other more expensive restaurants around the area.

It had been a long day for both of them. Food had been the last thing on their mind until now. Luckily, the service in this tiny joint was fast, but the quality was not that bad at all.

"I heard from Jacky that Lance would be staying here again to train with you." She began their small talk, remembering that Jacky had mentioned that Lance dropped by the apartment.

"Yes, the Council would like to resume his training since he had learned a lot. They feel that he would improve more as he continued working with me." Alex explained to her.

He did enjoy having his cousin around, shadowing him in the business. It would help their business, at the same time, the economy of their country if the kingdom kept growing.

He also thought that if there was a possibility that Edward would fail in taking over the throne, maybe he could insist on Lance as the new successor.

He believed that aside from him, Lance was the next suitable king in their kingdom. He possessed the characteristics of a great leader compared to Edward, who he believed would only bring chaos to their nation.

"That is great. I am looking forward to seeing Lance again." Although she had heard of what happened between Jacky and Lance, she did not harbor any ill feelings for him.

She understood that not every relationship would work, just the same way as hers and Alex did. Maybe Jacky was just not meant to be with him. She could not blame any of one of them.

Although, she did think that Jacky and Lance did look good together. They would have been a great couple. But she would not know what went wrong unless Jacky figured out how she truly felt about him.

"I am sure that he also feels the same way." He knew that Dani formed a friendship with Lance during the short time they had known each other.

Compared to Edward, Lance was an easy person to get along with, besides being funny and charming. He knew that Lance treated Dani as if she was already part of the family.

But he also heard about what happened between Lance and Jacky. He was disappointed that the Council felt the need to meddle in his personal life.

But as of now, there was nothing that they could do. It was the law of their land. They needed to abide by it to keep the honor of their family.

"Anyway, we seem to be forgetting our topic earlier." He referred to their discussion back in his car. "I believe you have something to share."

"Ok. Fine." She did not forget about it. She had searched her brain for something until she came up with a few choices.

She realized she could tell him everything. She could share anything with him without judgment. She had nothing to worry about him, thinking the worse of her.

"Let me hear it." He waited excitedly, enjoying the slight discomfort she was feeling. "Come on, here is another deal. Whatever you say to me would remain between us."

Then, he added before she could reply. "As a bonus, I will also tell you something equally embarrassing as what you will tell me."

He did not want her to feel that he was pressuring her. He only wanted them to have a free conversation about everything. If they were going to get married, keeping things from each other should stop.

"You are right. I don't have to feel embarrassed about sharing things with you, no matter what it is." She nodded in agreement with him. He held her eyes, encouraging her to continue.

Another thing she now understood was that Alex had accepted her with all her flaws. She might as well open up to him about everything about her, whether it would be good or bad, embarrassing or not.

He might laugh with her, but he would never laugh at her.. She could trust him that whatever she would tell him would be their little secret.

## **Chapter 400 - The Test Of Time**

"Ok. I have a question?" He interrupted her when she continued to laugh with him about another of his embarrassing moments when he was young.

He took a sip of his wine while he waited for her response. Both of them were enjoying the delicious food and their unusual conversation.

"Ok. Ask away." She stifled her laughter, trying to regain control of her emotions. It was his turn to ask again.

They had been sharing about the past blunders that they never thought they would dare to reminisce about again. But they seemed to be enjoying the topic so far.

She never felt more closer to him than today. It was as if she had found the keys to the other locked chapters in his life. The same went with her as she allowed herself to open up freely to him.

"Have you ever farted in front of a guy?" He asked away, observing how she would react to his question.

It was not something that he would ask just anybody, let alone a woman. It was not a topic he would commonly talk about during dinner.

But he also believed that if serious conversations have a place on the dinner table, so as silly topics. Life would not be complete without a few laughs here and there.

"Are you serious?" She asked as she looked at him with a frown. She could not believe that he would dare to ask her something as gross as that.

Although farting was a natural reaction when the body produced too many gases, she still felt awkward answering his question. It was not ladylike to fart in public places.

"Do I not look serious? Besides, it is for scientific purposes." He wiped the smile on his face, pretending to be anything but serious as he waited for her answer.

He was enjoying the way her face contorted at his question. He could see that she was debating whether to answer him or ignore him.

"Yes, but only in extreme cases where I had no other choice. Luckily, no one has caught me doing it." She finally decided to tell him honestly. "I am sure that you also did the same thing more than once in your lifetime."

She believed it was a natural thing to do. A common occurrence in the human body that no one could control. She did not consider one bit that there was an exemption to that rule.

She told him about an instant that she had a bad case of the stomach flu. She was young back then, but she still remembered the incident like it was yesterday.

"It would not be fair if I will not admit doing it occasionally." He confirmed her assumption.

It might be a topic that nobody would like to discuss, but talking about a taboo subject somehow opened them to a new level in their relationship.

He believed it made their connection stronger. He only hoped it would be a way to open their communications more and build a solid foundation through trust, respect, and love.

"I think it is getting late." She glanced at her watch. "But we can still catch a late-night movie if you like."

She never thought that telling him about her awkward secrets would be so much fun. Instead of feeling humiliated about it, she felt better after getting them off her chest.

"Then, we should go. We don't want to be late." He assisted her out of the diner and back into his car.

He did find going to movies on dates was a cliché, but he did enjoy having her around. He did not mind more than an hour or two, sitting in the darkroom, with a wide-screen movie projector in front of them.

He would enjoy any activities as long as she was his partner. Besides, talking about the good points and the flaws of the movie might not be intellectual, but it was certainly fun.

"What about a horror film?" She suggested as they stood outside the ticketing booth.

She was not a scary cat, so watching something frightening would not be a problem. Besides, horror films were exciting. It would be fun to talk about its productions, costumes, make-ups, and the lines of the movie.

"Sounds perfect to me." He accepted her recommendation, agreeing with her assessment.

They settled in the middle section of the cinema where they had a good view of the large screen. There were several people around them but not too close.

Fortunately, the room was not full of moviegoers since it was already late. He did fear for their safety in such a confined and dark space.

"Maybe you would like to share those popcorns with me." She jokingly said, watching him hug the basket of the sweet, delicious treat in his arms.

But she did see that his eyes were roaming around the room as if he was assessing the place. It was rare that she saw him act this way.

Most of the time, he appeared to be calm and uncaring about their surroundings when they were out on a date. He usually trusted his men to protect them from any eventualities.

"Oh. I forgot all about it." He mentioned, looking at the kernels on his arms. He slowly moved it towards her, handing her the bucket. His eyes signal to his men to be on guard.

Two of their bodyguards joined them inside, but they stayed in the corner, not far from their location. Their eyes were watchful, but not on the screen.

They focused on the dark corners, constantly searching for something, any imminent danger. They could never let their guards down, not even for a single second since a lot might happen by then.

"Is there something wrong?" She could not help but be disturbed at the way he was acting. Instincts kicked in, telling her that something was not right.

"I don't know, but I suddenly had a bad feeling." He did not want to lie to her, especially when they had already established open communication.

"But, it could be nothing. I only want to be sure that nothing will ruin this night." He quickly added, seeing the worry lines on her face.

In truth, he already received word from his father about the circulating rumors about a threat to ruin their wedding. Although it was still unclear, his father only wanted him to take extra precautions.

He knew he could trust his men to do their jobs in protecting them, but his gut feeling was nagging at him to be vigilant once they entered the dark place.

He could sense that someone might be watching them. But it might only be his overprotectiveness kicking in and making him paranoid for no reason.

"Well, there is no reason not to be extra careful." She voiced out, suddenly agreeing with him.

She finally understood the length of what he would do to take care of her. She was through fighting him over it. This time, she would allow him to do what he must do to protect her.

She would stop defying everything he was doing for her. She had to trust him completely with her life.

They were still a long way from building a relationship that could withstand the test of time, but at least she believed that they were halfway through.