

Royal Contract 441

Chapter 441 - Party For One Or Likely Two

"Have you seen Dani?" She asked a familiar face, among the crowd of strangers.

She had left her friend on the table to discuss something with Antonette. There were several last-minute changes that Antonette made to the program that included her tasks.

By the time she returned, she could not find her friend anywhere in the vicinity. She spotted her parents on the other table, mingling with the other guests, but no sign of Dani or Alex.

"Yes." He leaned closer to her and whispered near her ears, not wanting the people he was conversing with to hear what he knew. "I think I saw her sneaking away with my cousin a few minutes ago." Pointing to the back exit.

He assumed that the couple had enough of this circus and would rather be alone. If he had a choice, he would probably do the same. Unfortunately, he was obligated to stay and hold the fort.

"Are you sure, Lance?" She could not believe that her friend would ditch her party and her. But his serious look confirmed it without saying a word. "Oh! I guess they are long gone." She concluded with a sigh.

She was looking for her friend because she hoped to spend time with her. In addition to that, she needed something from her too. But it would seem that she had no option but to wait till she had time for her.

She could not blame her for running away with the groom. She would probably do the same. She was not the bride, but she could already feel the pressure of this wedding in her sanity.

"Jacky," Lance called out to her, making her pause on her tracks. "Do you need help with something?"

He did sense that something was off with her. After seeing and talking to her briefly last night, he gathered that she might be lonely.

At first, he wished her solemn look had nothing to do with him. He liked her, but he knew he could never pursue her. It was just not possible. He did not want to put her in a lifetime of misery if she ended up with him.

"No. I am good." She told him, not wanting to interrupt him any further. "I better attend to my duties. I am sure you have yours."

She could already guess that he was a busy man. He was a prince in this massive kingdom. He probably had responsibilities she could not even imagine.

"Jacky, do you want some company?" He offered, seeing that she was alone. Judging by her facial expression, she looked like a woman lost amid strangers.

Not that she could not handle herself with these people. If anyone could pull off a stunt unscathed in this scenario, it would be her. But he would prefer she did not do it alone.

"I think I can manage. But, thanks." She moved away from him, scanning the room.

She found herself surrounded by prominent people in high society. People that she admired and idolized because of their accomplishments.

But she never wished to be anything else than herself. She was satisfied with who she became and what she sacrificed to be here. She was letting these people intimidate her and think less of her.

"Do you mind if I tag along?" He could not help it. He did not like her to be alone if he could accompany her.

She was alone in a foreign land with not many friends or family with her. He could not abandon her to fend for herself, remembering the first time he met her.

"I believe you are busy discussing some foreign international incident with the king and queen." She looked at him, surprised that he followed her.

The idea of a friendly companion sounded appealing. She would not mind taking him on with his offer, not wanting to be alone in this crowded place.

"First of all, they are not the king and queen, but they are part of the royal family. Second, I am bored and needed some lively company." He explained as he continued to walk with her and smiled at the other guests.

"Wait, what is the color of my clothes? What about my hair? Do you see a smudge of makeup on my face?" She rattled him with a series of random questions.

"What is with the questions?" He asked, confused but curious with her answer as he sported a dumbfounded look.

"I thought you have mistaken me with the court jester." She looked away from him, laughing at his reaction, but her eyes landed on another set of eyes.

Her smile quickly faded, reading the pain reflecting on those piercing eyes. But it quickly disappeared when he realized that she was looking in his direction.

She was sure of what she saw but had no idea what to do with that information or what it meant to him. The smile on his lips as he walked towards her told her that whatever his eyes were telling her earlier, he had long buried them deep down his mind.

"Nice to see you again, Lance. Jacky, you look great as always." Marcus interrupted the two from whatever they were laughing about as he greeted them. He was late in the event since he had a terrible hangover.

After leaving Jacky last night in the company of Lance, he decided to drive to a bar. He had a few drinks. He even tried to pick up a girl while he was on it.

Unfortunately, he was not drunk enough to push through with his plan. As he was flirting with the girl, his mind just kept going back to her.

He kept comparing everything about her to the only woman he wanted to be on his side. In the end, he had to go home more frustrated than when he had left her side. He ended up finishing the bottle of alcohol in his room.

"Is that you?" Jacky had to scrunch his nose at him, sniffing the vague smell of last night's fermented stench of alcohol in the air.

"I already took a bath twice. You can still smell it?" Marcus subtly tried to inhale his body odor.

He thought he might get away with it, but apparently, he still wreaked alcohol despite his effort. But there was nothing else he could do with his situation.

"Well, unfortunately, you do stink." Lance seconded Jacky's observation as he clapped Marcus on the back.

If he had to diagnose Alex's best man, he would say that Marcus was suffering from a deadly disease. It could cause heart failure and even death if not treated immediately.

Luckily, it was curable, but unfortunately, the cure was not alcohol or any over-the-counter drug. It was a little more complicated than buying medication to take the pain away.

"You should get some coffee," Jacky suggested as she walked past him, giving him friendly advice, with Lance following close by.

She wondered if there was a party last night, but she did not see it in the itinerary. Well, he did leave in a hurry last night. She eventually came up with a conclusion.. He was just in a party for one or likely two.

Chapter 442 - Hit The Tabloids

She could not help but smile at their situation. She could hardly remember when was the last time that she had a piggyback ride. Maybe when she was little, when her father could still carry her on his back.

"We are almost there." He announced. "Are you enjoying the view?" He teased her, fully aware that she was not watching where they were going, but she had her eyes closed as he carried her to their destination.

He wondered what was going through her mind as she laid her head on his shoulders, leaning her body on his back, with her arms mildly wrapped around his neck and shoulders.

"Well, my mind is running quite an imagination, if that counts." She confessed to him, smiling as she continued to close her eyes.

He did say he wanted to surprise her, so she would wait until they were at the spot before opening her eyes. She would enjoy the images that popped up in her mind in the meantime.

She admitted a slight discomfort, but the feeling of his body and hers molded into one was all worth it. All she could focus on was the steady rhythm of his beating heart together with the calming up and down motion of his back as he breathed.

Besides, he did not seem to mind her weight as he carried her effortlessly on his back. But she did feel his muscles contracted in every movement that he made. It did feel great underneath her touch.

"Oh, I can't wait to hear what you are thinking." He made a few more steps until he reached a large clearing, unobstructed by the trees behind him.

He had been thinking about this place when he saw her open up her eyes this morning. But he could not shake off Antonette from their backs as she started barking orders as early as dawn.

Then, there was the late breakfast with their parents and the guests for a bit of early get-together welcome party. He would have liked to bring Dani here at sunrise, but he had to settle for now.

"No, you can not." She replied, sensing that he finally stopped. "Are we here?" She could not contain the excitement from showing in her voice as he slowly set her feet down on the ground.

She strained her ears to filter the different sounds in the air. She felt the slight breeze softly that grazed her skin, tickling her in the process.

It was as if she was young again, and she was playing a guessing game. She loved every minute of it, letting the warmth of the sunbathe her entire body.

She would choose this over the weather that they left behind. In addition, she appreciated the lack of pollution in the air and missing nonstop honking of horns.

"Yep, you know you can open your eyes now." He recommended, wanting to see her reaction upon seeing this place.

He never claimed that he hated the place where he had grown up. On the other hand, this was his home and would always have a special place in his heart.

But he also had grown to love what he had built for himself. A life that did not tie him to the kingdom, the tradition, and the responsibility of a throne.

But still, he would like to share everything about his past with his future wife. Then, he would live with her through the present and plan the future with only her on his mind.

"Oh! What is this place?" It was an anti-climatic response to his surprise as she expressed a bit of disappointment in her voice when she finally opened her eyes.

She stood in front of him, scanning the place and continuing to look like she could not see sense why he would bring her to a place like this. All trace of her excitement in her face was gone.

"I'm sorry. You did not like it." He was surprised, more or less stunned by her reaction. It was not what he was expecting from her.

After all the things he had shared with her before, this would be the first time that she appeared to dislike what he liked. He always assumed that they would have a similar taste in everything.

Eventually, he understood her. He was not dismayed about her reaction. He was bound to discover that they might have several differences, which was healthy for their relationship.

"What is there to like?" She said, finally turning around and looking at him. She turned her serious face into a frown before wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him down to her eye level.

She dared him to answer her question, wanting to know what he had in mind. She was intrigued to know how he would salvage their situation and not ruin the remaining of the day.

"I guess there is only me." He answered back, locking his eyes with her. If he could not entice her with the view, and then she would have to settle with him.

He was confident that he would always be enough for her, just like she would always complete him. He would not need anything else except her in his life.

Her lips finally turned upright, forming a sweet smile upon hearing his response. "You certainly know how to make a woman swoon. You always say the right words."

She held tight on his neck as she pulled him even closer to her lips. Just enough to feel his breathe but still plenty of space between their lips.

"You are the one putting those words into my mouth." He confided in her. He was never a poetic person, not much of a romantic either. But when it came to her, he always came up with the perfect act.

"But, I have a confession." She uttered in a tiny voice as if she was guilty of doing something terrible.

She smiled a bit at him, but only enough to express how much she was sorry. But also to tell him that she was ashamed of her current behavior.

"What is it?" He asked, suddenly on alert again.

He was not used to her confessing because she hardly did anything he did not like. But he was open to whatever she was about to say. He would always prefer to have open communication with her throughout their marriage.

"I am sorry I did not like your surprise." She was saying when he interrupted her.

"No, you don't have to apologize or explain yourself. I..." But she shut him down with her finger, muting his lips to silence.

"Let me finish. When I asked what was there to like about this place, I wanted to hear your opinion. But you took it the wrong way. And I jumped into the chance to see your reaction instead of correcting you." She continued clarifying her side.

"I am sorry. But I am completely in love with this place." She added when he maintained his tight lip, just looking at her. She forced a smile on her lips, trying to look adorable, hoping that it would work on him.

"As always, you never failed to make our relationship unpredictable. You always keep me on my toes with your innocent stunts." Instead of getting mad at her, he laughed, glad that she also loved what he loved. That was what mattered to him.

He finished what she started, covering the remaining space between them. He pulled her even closer than possible, almost crushing her body against his.

His lips sought hers, like a thirsty man needing refreshing water. He would ravage her, here and now, if it had not been a public place.. He had no doubt that would hit the tabloids.

Chapter 443 - One-man Woman

"Where did you run off too? I hope you have a great alibi for ditching me alone in that welcome party." Jacky looked at her as if a wrong answer would cause her friend dearly.

In all honesty, she did enjoy the rest of the party with the help of Lance, introducing her to the people she should know. Afterward, he even offered to go out with her, down to town.

He served as her chaperon as she did her window shopping. He offered to buy her several things, but she adamantly refused. She did not need him to buy her stuff for them to be friends.

"I am very sorry for leaving you like that, but Alex brought me to the lake." She said dreamily, still reminiscing every second of that experience. "You should see it. The place was amazing."

The site was spectacular because of the view. The entire lakeside was surrounded by an assortment of wildflowers. With several trees sporadically situated to create shadows and shades around the area.

But it was not what made the moment special. It was the way he had always made an effort to make everything seem perfect. Not because he had money to lavish on her, but the simplicity of his actions.

"I guess that is good reason enough." Jacky could not contest that, seeing the happiness and contentment in her friend's face.

All the tension that she saw in her friend earlier seemed to vanish after her secret rendezvous with her groom. That was what mattered most at the moment, to find her friend relaxed and enjoying herself for a change.

"I heard that you went out today with Lance. How is he?" Dani asked, finishing the final touches of her makeup.

She was getting ready to go out with Jacky to her surprise party. She remembered the last time her friend planned a party for her. She ended up in an accident.

But this time, Jacky was not taking anything for granted. She would be accompanying her to the venue with Ben and some other securities to assure her safety.

"He is a friend if that is what you are asking. When you left, he was kind enough to show me around." Jacky said, walking towards the bed and sitting down on it.

She was glad that she had met Lance in her life, but she was not sorry that it did not work out for the two of them. She accepted that love should not be forced, but it should flow like a river, unhindered.

She did love him. She also believed he felt the same. But it was just not enough for them to fight for it. She did not love him enough to commit herself until the end.

"So, there is no chance at all that anything will happen between the two of you." Dani wished that her friend would finally find the right man for her, but if Lance was not the man, then that was it.

"Nah. We are just friends." Jacky confirmed, finally concluding what she always thought about Lance.

She did wish to find the perfect man for her. But she would not force herself if it did not happen soon. She would wait for it until fate decided to intertwine their fates.

Then, her mind went back to the earlier scene. She was, once again, reminded of those soulful eyes. She could not shake them off as they kept nagging at her to find out what it meant.

"Anyway, shall we go before Antonette loses her temper because we are not on time?" Jacky finally settled to follow the protocol of the kingdom after Lance explained to her how important this was to their families.

After more than half an hour, the two walked to the venue of the bachelorette party. The place was already full of their friends and some young ladies of the kingdom.

All the guests greeted and congratulated Dani for her upcoming wedding. Many of them even flew from different places to celebrate this moment with her.

If she had genuine friends at the party, wishing her the best. Some of her guests also envied her success in life, especially those eyeing the prince to be their husband.

They could not believe that Prince Alexander would choose a wife outside their kingdom. Many expected that after he broke up with the famous model. He would settle with one of the princesses or noblewomen in their country.

"Shall we start with the party?" Jacky said after the introductions, making the girls go wild. Glasses of alcohol started circulating in the room, carried by muscular waiters wearing only their pants and a silly bow.

She had limited time to perform her task as the person in charge of this celebration. But, she would guarantee that it would be a memorable one.

She had prepared several parlor games for the event, suitable for the occasion. Then, she arranged a few shows to liven up the party. Thanks to Lance, she was able to pull up this stunt behind Antonette's nose.

"You have been busy. I don't know how you manage to do this." Dani was surprised to see that Jacky had organized such a party under the circumstances.

It was something that she imagined Jacky would do with her bachelorette party. Not the one that was in her dream. Nothing about this situation would qualify as boring at all.

She would not be surprised if Jacky was even able to get a male stripper to dance for them. She could almost see the eyes of Antonette bulging out of her socket once she learned of Jacky's stunt.

"Nice party." One of her friends in college said, congratulating her for finally landing a good man. She was now happily married with two kids, so she had only good things to say to her friend as she entered married life.

Many more old friends that she had not seen for a long time came to celebrate this special occasion with her. They had joined every game that Jacky had organized, even the weird ones.

Then, as she expected, the final show came. A man came out of the small stage, wearing a prince costume with all the trimmings. He looked handsome and could actually pass up as a prince.

But when the music started, he performed a very sexy dance for everyone before finally focusing on the bride. He pulled her towards the center of the stage and started dancing for her.

"Jacky, I am going to kill you." She mouthed, a bit embarrassed by the scene. But everybody was shouting for her to enjoy it. So, she sat stiffly on the chair as the man continued to grind his body in front of her.

"This is your last time to ogle another man's body, so better enjoy it while it lasts," Jacky shouted back over the noise of the music and the cheering of the crowd.

She knew her friend was right. After the wedding, Alex would be the only man to fill her life and her bed. There would be no reason for her to look at anyone else.

"Come on, slap that ass." Another of her friend shouted to her. Clearly, everyone was having a great time at her expense.

Finally, she realized that she should enjoy her last day as a single woman. She closed her eyes and obeyed the cheering of her friends.

With the palm of her hand, she smacked the man on the cheeks of his ass. Luckily, it was still enclosed in his mini brief. But when they cheered for more, she knew she had enough.

She was more than happy to have one man in her life forever. She would not want anything more.. She was content to be a one-man woman.

Chapter 444 - Never Judge A Book By Its Cover

After the very naughty party that Jacky had prepared for her, she was whisked off back to the palace for her next appointment. She never thought that getting married could be this exhausting.

She just hoped that she did not have to deal with more visitors. Her cheeks were about to have muscle spasms from all the smiling she had been doing so far.

"Where are we going again?" Dani asked one of the coordinators assigned to her today.

She figured she was not going back to the palace because they had just passed the usual route that would take them there. She only got a glimpse of her itinerary today and missed checking the details.

It was Jacky's fault that she did not see the itinerary. She kept disrupting her with her non-stop questions early that morning. Now, she had to rely on the coordinator for her schedule.

"If you bother to look at your schedule, Ms. Hamilton, it would have informed you that you are meeting the king this evening. You are to have dinner with him." The coordinator said a bit sarcastically.

She was one of those women who had worked for the royal family almost all her life. She had watched the kingdom fight for its glory for decades.

She was afraid to see that it would finally fall because of this unsuitable marriage. Seeing that the only king suitable to rule their kingdom, marrying a foreigner. Then, choosing to live with her in a foreign land.

"I gather you don't approve of me." She had enough of the odd looks and the innuendos thrown at her since she had arrived.

She was not naive not to figure out when she was not welcome. Based on the not-so-warm greeting she had been receiving so far.

But she would like to know what she did for them to act this way in her presence. She would like to get to the root of the problem to find a solution and address it accordingly.

"It doesn't matter what I think." The older woman said, then zipping her mouth, thinking she already said too much.

It was not her place to express her opinion in this matter. She was just an employee of the kingdom. She knew better than to

show her personal sentiment in a situation like this.

"Well, it does to me. I want to know why you feel like I am the enemy when I could not remember doing anything to deserve it." She shifted her attention to the woman who sat beside her in the car, giving her undivided attention.

She might have a slight idea of what could be causing the issue. But unless confirmed, it would be pure speculation on her part. She did hear something about her being not one of their kind from one of the maids in the palace.

"I am sorry for the way I came out too strong. I did not mean to offend you." The woman said to her, but she slightly hesitated before continuing. "But, you see, you are a foreigner, marrying one of the future leaders of our land."

She knew she could not keep quiet when she already had an opportunity to say what was on her mind. She could care less if she was charged with treason for speaking her mind.

It was her chance to send the message across to this foreign woman who wanted to be part of their kingdom. She should become aware of the series of problems she was getting herself into. In turn, the effect it had on the citizens.

"No, don't be. You are entitled to your opinion. But, I wish I knew what I am being accused of so that I can defend myself accordingly." Dani could see that there was a deep-rooted problem in her midst.

She would rather face it now than find herself in a deep mess later. She always believed that facing the problem head-on was the only way to find a solution.

"First of all, you have no idea of our life, tradition, and culture. All you city folks could think about are making money and acquiring power." She began enumerating the numerous reasons Dani was not suitable to marry the prince.

"If you haven't heard, the Council had chosen Prince Alexander to take the throne. But because of you, he had declined. He opted to stay and live in your land and your uncivilized ways." She should not have said those things, but the girl asked for it.

"I guess I did ask for it. But would it be too much to ask if you would listen to my version of the story?" Dani understood her plight. Putting herself in her shoes, she might also think the same.

She already knew about this, and it was her opportunity to explain her side to her. Maybe it would somehow enlighten her and her associates with the truth.

"You listened to me. I think it is only fair that you air your side." The older woman felt obligated to listen to her out of delicacy.

But she believed that nothing she would say would convince her otherwise. This woman would only cause more problems for their kingdom than any solution.

"Thanks. I guess." She shuffled her brain for a better way to say what was on her mind, but the truth would always be the best way, she concluded.

"If you have done your research on me thoroughly, you might find that money and power are the least of my priority." She answered the first concern she had about her.

She did not like to elaborate more on the subject matter, not wanting to appear like she needed to prove herself to her. She just wanted to clarify that matter to her. It would be up to her to verify the truth if she wanted to.

"Next, it was never my intention to stop Alex from taking the crown if he wanted it. But I could not force it on him if he believed he did not want to rule over this land." Dani looked around the vast land that was before her.

She could not think of someone turning their back on such beauty. The beautiful countryside depicted nature at its very best.

"But..." The other woman was about to express her opinion again until she was cut off.

Dani was not done explaining herself. She still had one more thing to say to her that should prove her point. These people should stop judging other people for what they thought they knew.

There was such a saying that never judge a book by its cover.

Chapter 445 - Different Did Not Mean Not Good

"Lastly, I don't care about the politics, tradition, culture, money, power, and all the things that you might think I wanted from this marriage. All I care about is how we both feel for each other." She finished her statement just in time for them to stop in front of one of the largest castles she had ever seen in her entire life. She had been to some in her trips, but this one was spectacular in its grandeur.

Most of what she had seen before had been renovated to adapt to modern times. But this one, although she could see some adjustment in some places, still maintained its past structure and architectural elegance.

The door to the car was immediately opened. She was ushered inside the palace that was well guarded at every corner. The older woman accompanying her had kept her mouth shut after that. Only speaking if necessary.

"We have to wait here until the king is ready to see you." Her chaperone stopped her in one of the rooms, a waiting area for the guests.

But they had barely sat down when a man dressed elegantly in a black coat and bowtie came to see them. They were not given a chance to finish their conversation.

"King Edward is ready to see you now." The well-uniformed man announced as he stood by the doorway.

Dani walked with him, leaving her chaperone behind towards another big room at the end of the hallway. She waited until the big double doors opened and revealed the inside.

All she knew was that she was about to have an audience with the king. She had no idea what the protocol was, but she had hoped that Alex would be here to accompany her.

Unfortunately, he had his own appointment he had to attend to, which did not include her. If her assumption was correct, it would be his bachelor's party organized by Marcus.

"Please, Miss, you may proceed inside." The man called her attention as she was busy thinking of what to expect from this meeting and where her future husband would be at the moment.

"I am sorry." She quickly replied, slightly embarrassed for her absentmindedness.

She realized it was not the time to be sailing off to la-la land. She needed her full wits in facing the king. She had no idea what the gathering was for, and she should be prepared for any eventuality.

She suddenly remembered the incident with her chaperone and how she saw her presence in the kingdom. She wondered if the king also had his own thoughts on the matter.

"Oh, there you are. You look lovelier than the first time I saw you. It is probably the wedding bliss that is making you glow." King Edward stood from his seat and moved towards her to welcome her.

He did think that Alex could not have chosen a better wife in her. He could only hope that his son would also find the right one. He knew he should stop comparing the two.

But he could not help himself. He could not stop seeing how Alex was excelling in everything he did. He always thought that Alex was the son he never had.

"I guess I should say thank you for the compliment." She was used to it, but she still felt embarrassed from time to time by it. She had no idea if she should bow or kiss his hand, but when he extended his hand for a shake, she took it.

She could feel her cheeks heating up, but other than that, she was still able to smile at the host of the event, which would appear to be a party for two, noticing it was just the two of them in the room.

She was expecting to enter the king's room with huge columns and a massive stage at the other end of the room. Then, the king would be sitting on his throne, wearing his crown and carrying a scepter.

Well, at least not this king, who was wearing a black coat and tie and sporting one big friendly smile on his lips. But she would prefer to deal with this one than a pompous king who put himself on a pedestal. She did remember his son, Edward.

"Come on, shall we sit down. Dinner would be served in a short while." King Edward gestured for her to take the vacant chair on his right.

She took a seat and waited for what would happen next. She did not want to second guess the king's plans for the night. She would rather wait till he revealed his purpose for this meeting.

"Would you like some wine? Our people made this in our vineyard." He offered, not failing to include her in the sentence. He already accepted that she would be a part of this family soon.

He moved to the table carrying the wine and a couple of glasses. "I was advised by my doctor not to drink too much alcohol, but what do they know." The king jokingly said as he poured himself one before turning to her for confirmation.

"Sure, Your Highness, I would like to taste your wine," Dani answered, remembering the proper way to address the king in his presence. But the pronoun used was not lost in her.

It might be his way of welcoming her to the family or a sort of intimidation tactic. Whatever it was, she was not about to make an abrupt conclusion until she had gotten to the bottom of this meeting.

"When we are alone like this, you can forego with the formalities. Just call me Uncle Edward. That is how you say it in your country, right?" King Edward told her as he walked back to their seats and handed her the wine.

He gestured for her to taste it, proud to promote their local product to his guest. There were several justifications for why he wanted to see her. One of them was to get to know her for obvious reasons.

"This is absolutely delicious." She tasted the wine after swirling and sniffing its aroma. It was simply divine.

If this small country could produce such incredible products, why did Alex want to leave this place? He could make millions by exploring what this country had to offer.

She fell in love with this country at first sight. It was different from where she had grown up.. But different did not mean not good.

Chapter 446 - The Last Laugh

In the middle of the city, a private party was in full swing. All guests were men wearing expensive clothes, accessories and driving high-end luxury cars.

"Congratulations, Prince Alexander Princeton Blackstone," Evan announced to everyone as soon as Alex entered the premises. "...or was it King Hamilton now?" A wisecracked that Alex did not find funny but had to go with it.

"Just Alex." He corrected, waving to all the guests who arrived to celebrate the night with him.

The bright, sparkling lights in a darkened room and the loud noise reminded him of what it was like when they were all still young.

The many years of bonding and getting through tough times with his buddies had been memories he would cherish forever. But this time, he would be entering a new life and creating new memories with an extraordinary person.

"Congratulations!" Another set of friends greeted him, while others wished him luck. As if he would need luck when he felt like he was the luckiest man in the world.

After a short introduction, the party continued. The boost and the scantily clad girls flooded the floor. Strippers jumped on their poll stand, entwining their bodies along with the music.

"For the last couple of days of your bachelor's life." David raised his glass to the entire guests present in the room, dedicating the toast to their friend.

David had long given up his bachelor's life ever since he got into a committed relationship with Rosella. He even brought her to the wedding as his plus one.

He had been contented to have her by his side since they settled to date exclusively. Correction, he decided to stop going from one woman to another for affection.

"I know how much you wanted this, and I am very happy for you." Marcus was the second to make a toast for him. "As your best man but not your only friend, I hope you like my small presentation."

He knew it was his obligation to come up with this bachelor's party. The old him would thrive in a party like this, but the new one would settle for a simple get-together.

"Thank you, man," Alex appreciated what his friend had done for him. Actually, he had been expecting this kind of stunt from him.

He could see all his friends enjoying the gathering. But unlike before, Marcus seemed to be satisfied just drinking with them. He did not even mind the girls that kept looking his way.

"Well, my turn." Evan tried to catch everyone's attention. "In my opinion, this is your time to split. Put on your running shoes and get on your plane and fly as far away as possible." Evan was still convinced that Alex was making a big mistake.

He did not want Alex's plans to precedent a chain of reaction. He could already see that David was about to follow him in the holy vow of matrimony. He just did not want their group to disband this soon.

"Sorry, but I already tied my shoes to hers. There is no way I am running away from her, nor am I letting her get away from me."

Alex clarified his young friend's misconception.

He understood Evan for thinking this way. He was young and the only one left in the group who still had to meet his match. He still had much to learn about love and relationship.

He still enjoyed his young and single life. But they believe that he would soon enough realize the errors of his way just as they did once he met the right one.

"But seriously, how do you feel? Share it with us mere mortals who still have to find the right one." Marcus finally came out of his mood swing and decided to join the fun.

He could not keep sulking around just because he had let the right one out of his grip. He had to move on and find a new life, meaning a possible new girl to love if that was even possible.

"Oh! Do share." Another voice interrupted the conversation, joining them in the table they were occupying. "I am interested to hear the answer to this one."

He was a bit disappointed that the best man had failed to mention to his assistant about this celebration. It was an utter disrespect to his persona and his title to be ignored deliberately.

"Edward." He simply acknowledged his cousin, who he still suspected to be part of the conspiracy that caused the accident of Dani.

He knew that he could not make a scene in his own party, accusing him of any wrongdoing without sufficient evidence. He had to hold his tongue and gather more evidence before coming after those responsible.

"I think my invitation got lost in the mail. Luckily, I still have many pigeons flying around, informing me of the latest happening." Edward announced to the group purposely.

He had no idea if Alex had something to do with it, but he was not taking this lightly. It was only fortunate that someone from his team heard about this event that made him aware.

"Oh! That is a shame." Marcus responded but also whispered behind his back. "You should know when you are not invited."

He had enough of his scheming and trying to get rid of his friend. Alex only wanted to help him get his throne. But in return, he stabbed him in the back by teaming up with Nick.

He believed Prince Edward should not be here, celebrating something that he would like to stop from happening. He might be blood-related to Alex, but he had not been a family to him.

"But I do deserve to be here." Edward pointed out, saying it to his face. Then, he turned again to Alex. "Don't stop on my behalf. I think you should continue with your story."

He walked away from the group and greeted some mutual friends and allies. He drank with them while Alex and his buddies continued with their conversation.

Alex and his friends had undermined him for far too long.. But he would make sure that he would have the last laugh at the end of this grand scheme of things.

Chapter 447 - The King Had The King

As the king sipped his wine, he studied her under his watchful gaze. Several rumors circulated around the kingdom about the would-be princess. Whether they were true or not, he still yet to find out.

Based on what he had observed so far, she was no ordinary woman. She might not have royal blood, but she carried herself more than a noblewoman would.

"Can I interest you with a board game?" King Edward offered, seeing that her guards were still up.

He had to earn her trust before she would open up to him. He was not after her secrets, only to learn more about her. He never relied solely on rumors or reports when assessing a person.

A relaxed conversation while looking through the eyes was his key to the inner workings of each mind. He had to slowly tear down the walls to find out the truth.

"What sort of game are you thinking about?" Dani asked curiously, finding the jolly king entertaining.

He was not exactly what she expected when she learned of her meeting with him. She pictured him as this pompous king with a sour face and a big belly.

A kind of ogre that would raise a son like Prince Edward, she thought. Then, from the way Alex had depicted him. But surprisingly, she was mistaken.

"Chess, of course. The game of Kings." He proudly declared with a friendly smile on his face. "I am sure that a person with your level of intellect knows how to play this game."

He challenged her, determining whether she was a fighter or the opposite. She might appear not to cower at his presence, but what about her ability to think under pressure.

He wanted to see how she would react to a simple game against him. A lot could be discerned with how she would initially move her piece. What would be the action she would be taking when back in a corner?

"I will say, Your High..." She quickly stopped, seeing his raised eyebrows. "Uncle Edward that you have chosen the wrong game. My father and Uncle raised me in this game."

Though chess was not the first game she had learned and loved in her youth, it had played a significant part in her growing up. She had learned many valuable things in life during the battle on the checkered arena.

"Then, it will be an interesting game." He playfully smiled at her while guiding her towards the already displayed board set.

He allowed her to settle first on a chair before sitting on the opposite side of the table. He picked two different colored pawns and hid them behind his back.

Then, he placed his closed hands before her, letting her choose between the two. It would determine which color she would be playing with.

"Well, I guess it is my move." She figured when he opened the palm of his hand and revealed a white pawn inside.

Usually, she found it advantageous if she made the first move. She managed to set the play she wanted and had her opponent guessing what she would do next.

But, it was not always a guarantee, not when she was against an opponent who was well trained in strategies and battle planning. She had to keep her mind sharp at all times.

"So, tell me. How do you like our kingdom so far?" The king asked out of the blue as he made another move, taking out her pawn.

It was his way of putting his opponents out of their elements. In this case, the beautiful and intelligent lady on the other side of the board.

In this way, he was killing two birds with one stone. He would be distracting her from her next move and getting the information he needed. In the end, it would be a win-win solution.

"Honestly, I had nothing to complain about. I love this place." Remembering the beauty of the sceneries. "I love the hospitality of the people." Except for the exception of the few. But she could not blame them for they were misinformed.

She moved her white bishop to take on the black horse guarding the black queen. Knowing that the queen could not take the bishop because another white horse was already in play.

"Oh, that is such a classic maneuver. Let me see what I can counter it with." King Edward smiled, allowing the play to proceed according to her plan.

He would allow her to think that she was winning before going for the kill. It was the only way to win her trust. The only way he would get the information he needed from her.

"I guess I win that one." She made the final move, putting the finishing kill. "Checkmate." Dropping the black king on the board. "Another game?"

She agreed for the best of three, giving a chance for a deciding game. In case he won this time. It was only fair for the two of them to have a rematch if necessary.

"Always up for the challenge. Bring your A-game because I will not let you win this time." He warned her before making the first move.

He persisted in asking her basic questions about her life as the game continued. Nothing he believed would send red flags and forced her shields up again.

The master-servant came to view by the door, interrupting their highly concentrated game. "Dinner is ready, Your Highness."

He announced before leaving the two of them again in peace.

"Sometimes, we have to sacrifice what is important to us to get the bigger reward." He uttered in almost a whisper, but he made sure she heard him. His eyes focused on the board before using her previous tactic against her.

She took the queen just like before, almost tasting victory on the tip of her lips. But she still needed a couple of moves to finally declare success.

But what she did not see coming was the black bishop who patiently waited for its time to shine.. With one more move, the king had the king cornered and nowhere to go.

Chapter 448 - Not Destined For The Throne

The board game had to be discontinued some other time, leaving the two of them on a tie match. With one equal winning, no one could be declared the winner. Not until they played another set.

"I guess we have to continue the decision game at a later time." The king stated, not a bit disappointed but glad for an opportunity for another game with a worthy rival.

He could sense he had not seen her best yet. She was still holding out her best cards. Just like him, she was also assessing her situation. But in their next matchup, he expected to have a hard time beating her.

He assisted her out of the room, at the same time, touring her around the castle. He talked about the history of the portraits they came across along the hallways.

"I will be looking forward to that." She answered back, genuinely excited for their rematch.

But for now, she looked forward to dinner and a more interesting conversation with a very intriguing man. Her earlier assumption that she might not like his company had proven her wrong.

She just could not believe that this was the king that raised a man like Prince Edward. Based on what she had seen so far, he was nothing like his son.

"I hope you enjoyed our local delicacies." The king directed her attention to the assortment of dishes displayed on the long mahogany wood table.

He took pride and supported what the locals of their community produced. It was his way of giving recognition to their hard labor and efforts.

He and the Council had made sure to support their local farmers and other food producers so that the economy would continue its growth.

"Absolutely loved it. I found some of the dishes were not so different from what I had so far, but there were definitely some that intrigued my palette." She commented, excited to taste a few more new dishes she spotted on the table.

She could see so much potential for growth and development in this country as far as she had observed. She was not an expert in the business field, but she did not need to be a genius to see that.

"Glad to hear that. Then, let us dig in, Daniella." The king mimicked a common lingo he had heard them use in their culture, trying to make her feel more comfortable around him.

He had never wished for a daughter before, not even when his wife told her that she wanted one. As a future king, he was raised to focus on having a son as heir to the throne next in line to him.

But having her around suddenly made him regret not to have one. He had never known the joy of having a daughter in his life, and if this was it, then he had seriously missed out.

"Just Dani would be fine since we are discarding with formalities, Uncle Edward." She corrected the king, feeling bolder and more relaxed in his presence.

She never thought she would like this king after all her initial assumptions. But he was, after all, the brother of the duke, who she could only see some minor faults.

Well, she guessed that Prince Edward was a bad apple that fell quickly from the tree before its time. He failed to acquire the qualities of a decent human being, much more a king.

"Ok, Dani. Tell me about what motivates you. What are you passionate about?" King Edward felt it was safe to dig a bit deeper into her life.

He wanted a more meaningful conversation as he let her sample the different food displayed on the table. It was time to get to know her more on a personal level.

"I guess it is my work. I love the law and all its trimmings." She began to tell him, but she stopped, slightly hesitating to elaborate more. "I am sure there are more interesting topics than my job."

It did occur to her beforehand that the king might ask her about her job. But, she did not expect that kind of question, not in that context.

"But, I did hear a but somewhere in there. Now, I am genuinely intrigued." The king raised his brows at her. Then, he stared at her as if he was trying to pry the continuation of her answer. "Would you indulge me with a bit of an explanation?" King Edward persuaded her to continue.

He enjoyed hearing her point of view. She was not just a beautiful face but an intelligent individual who knew when to use her intellect to her advantage without the intention of abusing others.

He could tell that she was an honest lawyer. Too young to be corrupted yet by the system. He could only wish that she would remain that way, strong-willed and incorruptible.

But life had a way of ruining people with lies, truths, hatred, and love. In his experience, human emotions created more chaos than peace.

"Well, if you insist, but don't tell me I did not warn you." She took a deep breath before continuing. "I love practicing my profession. But our laws are deeply flawed. I do wish I could help change how our justice system works." She elaborated, unable to deny the king some sort of explanation.

She had seen many innocent suspects denied justice simply because they could not defend themselves. While guilty criminals found themselves absolved of any crime due to their connections, power, and wealth.

"Then, what are you doing about it?" The king was more curious with her answer.

From what he heard so far, he could not see anything he would dislike about her. She had proven to him that she deserved to be married to this family.

"On my own, I doubt if I could make a dent in changing our ways. But as an individual, I can always fight for those who are not capable of defending themselves." She shared with the king her slight frustration.

For now, that was the only solution she could think of. But she had plenty of time to work on finding a solution. She would not stop until she did.

"Well, you did not fail to impress me. You are one amazing woman for your positive outlook in life and noble work." The king said to her. "I assure you, I don't give compliments that easily."

A king did not lightly give praise to anyone unless deserving. But to deserve such recognition, one must meet his high standard.

As the dinner progressed, she felt more comfortable sharing things with the king.

However, it had never been one-sided. The king also did relate some stories of his past. He also shared some of his unconventional experiences. He even whispered a few little secrets that had made her laugh.

"One more question, please indulge me one last time. Will you support Alex if he finally accepts to become my heir?" King Edward locked eyes with her, watching for her response.

He believed he also had finally accepted the inescapable truth.. As much as he loved his son, he was not destined for the throne.

Chapter 449 - Heart Desires

"Are you sure about this?" He asked her as he carried the last bag out of the house and deposited it into the car trunk. "We can still go back inside the house if you change your mind."

He had argued with her that this was a terrible idea. But she would not hear any of his reasoning. She insisted that her father would be suspicious of their marriage if she did not attend.

So, here he was packing at the backseat of his car, the last luggage she was bringing to the trip. Then, of course, also his luggage. He could not allow her to leave and attend the event alone.

"Troy." She moved closer to him and held his hand before he could close the backdoor. "I am good to go on my own if you wish to stay."

She could not force him to do something he was not comfortable doing. She already imposed on his kindness by using him by marrying her.

She already felt guilty for ruining his life by tying him to a life of misery with her. She realized too late that he never needed the money she paid him to agree with her proposal.

She already married him when she learned that he was as loaded as she was, maybe more. She misjudged what he did for a living, not knowing much about the industry.

"You know I can't do that, Tyra. Wherever you will go, I will go." Troy told her, pulling her hand gently out of the way as he closed the door. "Besides, I can never let you go and face your dad on your own."

He had made an arrangement with her when he decided to marry her. He was not about to break them just because he did not like to see her get hurt.

He believed attending the wedding of her ex would only end up badly. She was only setting herself to another possible heartache.

But, a small part of him was curious about her reaction to the wedding. Maybe hopeful that somehow she had learned to move on from her past.

"But do you really want to come? In truth, I feel like you are only forcing yourself because you pity me?" She had learned to be more vocal about her true feelings with him.

Since she married him, she had learned to trust him. She even considered him as her bestfriend. Telling her past to him had been easy. Something that she had found hard to do with someone else.

But, she did not want to continue to burden him anymore. She finally planned to end their sham marriage once she returned from this trip.

So, it did not matter if he came along or not with her. They never had to continue to pretend in front of her father about their relationship.

"Hey, stop that. No one is forcing me to do this except me. I am your friend and husband, and I will not abandon you in your time of trouble." He announced to her with finality, having enough of her self-pity.

She was not getting rid of him that easily. He would only stay if she would. Other than that, he would go anywhere with her.

His reason for doing this was deeply hidden in his mind and heart.

He could not reveal them to her until he was absolutely sure that it was the right time. Else, it would just blow on his face if she learned of the truth.

"Ok. If you are absolutely sure." She rode the passenger seat while he took the driver's side. He would drive them to a private hanger where his assistant was already waiting for them.

She could not continue arguing with him. She had never won against him anyway. But she was thankful that he was coming with her to the party. It would allow her to execute her plans.

At the same time, she would be able to spend some time with him before their inevitable end. Although, she was still arguing with herself if that was even a good idea.

"Relax. Let us just consider this as a vacation." He patted her hand before giving it a gentle kiss. "Don't worry. I know that you are apprehensive about attending this wedding because of him. But I will never leave your side, I promise."

He finally let go of her hand, hoping he had comforted her. He continued to drive and concentrate on the road, allowing her time for herself.

He had no problem being at the wedding. More than ever, he wanted to be able to support Dani to the next chapter of her life. But he wondered if she already knew about his marriage. He could already imagine her surprise.

"Thanks for being a great friend." She finally turned her face to look at him. One thing for sure, she was lucky to find a man like him. But he was fortunate to be stuck with her.

She had been busy planning to try and save Troy from her father's manipulation. Ending it with him would stop her father from taking an interest in him.

She could not allow him to take advantage of Troy's kindness because of his money. He did not deserve that, after all, he had done for her.

She could already tell that her father had Troy investigated and gathered his worth. He probably started scheming his next venture where Troy would be his primary investor.

Thus, his sudden interest to meet him and for her to bring him along with her. But she would make sure that would never happen. She would not allow her father to use him.

"If you find yourself having a hard time, just tell me, and we will leave immediately." He offered, giving her an option.

He could only imagine what she was going through at the moment, seeing the solemn look in her eyes. As if her heart was already in pain because she was losing someone she loved.

He had been in the same boat as her. Luckily, he was able to move on. All thanks to her. She had found a way to alleviate his pain, distract him from going back to the past, and teach him to let go.

She looked at him, momentarily confused but then realized what he was talking about. "I am sure, with you by my side, I will be ok." She smiled at him but felt more conflicted with her situation.

The funny thing was, she had forgotten the real reason why they were going in the first place. The wedding of Alex and Dani was not even a factor in her plan to go on this trip.

Thinking about Alex did not even cross her mind. Either her brain had shut him out, or she had started forgetting about him. Did it mean that her heart had finally healed?

"As long as you need me. I will be here." He suddenly wished that they had met in different circumstances.

Maybe things between them would have turned out differently. It would not be this lie that they were trying to live with.. But a life both of them could be free to do what their heart desires.

Chapter 450 - One False Move

"Cassie, do you like butter or cheese?" Jacob shouted over the counter, making sure his voice would be heard all the way to the living room.

He was preparing some popcorn that he bought from a nearby grocery before coming to her apartment. Fortunately, he had an early shift, and there were no emergencies tonight.

It allowed him an opportunity to visit her and enough time to prepare dinner. Something he enjoyed doing for her in exchange for a good companion and a movie.

"Can we have both?" She yelled back at him, switching from one movie to another, searching for the perfect one. "Jacob, how is work?" She added.

It was a routine between them to make idle conversation about their day. It broke the awkwardness of not seeing each other for a while. Since her minor mishap and his rescue, he had frequented her apartment.

She also appreciated his coming by to visit, checking up on her, confirming she was not in trouble. At the same time, making her prison a bit acceptable and livable. If not for him, she might have gone insane from boredom.

"Same as always. Many kids still love to stick things in the holes in their faces." He jokingly responded to her question.

He loved his job and loved taking care of kids. He enjoyed treating simple cases like today. It meant that there were no kids seriously ill.

He would always be there for those who needed special attention. He had worked hard so that he could help them get better.

"What is going on with your brother? Have you heard from him lately?" She asked, wondering about an update on his whereabouts and plans.

Although she understood that Alex was working hard to take down the man who wanted her dead. Still, she could not wait to get free. She was dying imprisoned in this apartment.

She could go out anytime she wanted, but she would be risking her life from being spotted by Nick's men. That would surely put her six feet under the ground, literally.

"He flew out the other day for some conference. So, don't worry, you are safe. For a week at least." He assumed it was her reason for asking.

He knew his brother was shady. But lately, he was learning the extent of what he could do for money and power. He would stop at nothing to get what he wanted, maybe not even for him.

Not that he believed Nick ever considered him a real brother. But still, they had half the same blood. To him, he was his brother despite what he did with his life. That should have counted.

But he would not condone his illegal activities. At least he believed he would not involve himself in it. He was raised better than to put dirt and blood in his hands, unlike his brother.

Although in his profession, he had no choice but bathed his hands with dirt and blood all the same. It was not from taking a life but by saving one.

"That is great." She shouted, at the same time, relaxed on the sofa with the movie she had chosen. While Jacob sat right next to her, cradling two bowls of popcorn in both his arms.

That was one problem she did not have to think for the meantime. Nick was distracted, and his concentration was not on her. It would give her time to breathe.

Maybe an opportunity to have fun for a change. She needed a change of scenery. This would be perfect for the plans that were growing in her head.

"I think I know what you are thinking." Jacob placed the other bowl of popcorn in her arms as he turned to face her. "I can see the spark of mischief running through your eyes." His eyes narrowed to a slit as if he was studying her.

He shoved a handful of the white fluffy, cheesy stuff into his mouth, waiting for her sassy remark from his statement. Judging from her expression, he could assume he was right.

He returned his attention to the movie, hoping that she would do the same and forget about going out. He could not seriously consider what she was implying.

"Would it be nice to walk around, feel the night breeze and breathe the fresh air?" She said, knowing too well that he understood what she was implying.

She could not let this opportunity for a good time outside of the confine of her home without fear of being caught. She had been cramped in this room that she felt like she had lost her connection to the world.

Now that Nick was busy with the wedding, which she believed was what Nick was referring to as the conference. She could assume that the men looking for her were also called off to assist him with his other scheming plans.

"You know that Alex strictly said that it is not safe for you to go out. But you still keep sneaking out." He put the bowl out of his arms into the table before him, then did the same with hers.

He pulled her hands in his and stared at her in the eyes. He was afraid that she was being careless when he was not around. But he had seen hints and evidence that she had been going out on her own.

"I don't know what you are talking about." She denied, looking at him as if she had done nothing wrong.

His suspicion was correct, she admitted in her mind. In her defense, she was very cautious every time she was out. So, it should not have been a big deal.

She could not rely everything on Alex and what he was sending her. She had to go out to deal with her other obligations. And, she had enough of looking at the different corners of her apartment.

"Stop lying." He smiled at her, telling her with his eyes that she still could trust him. "Come on, come clean."

He was not about to spill her secret, but he was more concerned about her safety. It was the precise reason he kept coming by to check on her.

"Fine. I am dying here." She finally confessed. "Not literally, but I feel like my brain cells are almost lifeless."

She pulled her hands off him and jumped out of the sofa. She stood in front of him and waved her hands, pointing to the corners of the room.

She was not the brainless bimbo she always portrayed to be, but weeks of being trapped in this apartment or more, she would be one.

"But, you have everything you need here. If you need anything else, all you have to do is ask." Jacob looked up from his seat and watched her have a slight meltdown.

He could see that this entire situation was not helping her mental well-being. She was physically healthy. But psychology, being locked up in this room, was starting to have a toll on her.

He understood her wishes, but he had to consider also the danger that was waiting for her outside.. One false move from her and her life would be over.