

## Royal Contract 491

### [Chapter 491 - The Secrecy Behind The Secret Chambers](#)

The Grand Palace was buzzing with activity. All the Council members were summoned to an emergency session called by the Council head, Duke Frederick. King Edward was also invited to attend the assembly.

But the royal staff were clueless about the reason for the urgency. After all, the wedding ceremony had just been concluded. The organizers and the staff were not even finished clearing all the remnants of the celebration.

"Prince Edward, I think you should see this." His personal assistant, with a confused expression, rushed inside his office. He only stopped when he was at his side.

He handed the papers he had printed for his perusal. He watched his boss check the document with a blank expression at first. It would show him some figures he had discovered in his personal account.

When his eyes reached the questionable data, his eyebrows raised in inquiry. It would seem that the prince also had no idea of the source of the mysterious transaction.

"What is the meaning of this, Vince?" Edward asked his assistant, perplexed with the sudden influx in his personal account.

It was quite a considerable amount of money in his bank statement. He had no clue who would arrange a fund transfer and for what purpose since he did not make any personal arrangements lately.

"I have no idea yet, Sir. I decided to ask you first if you knew about this before I checked with our finance expert and the bank." Vince informed his boss.

It was not unusual for his boss to have large transactions. But he usually informed him about it beforehand or even arranged it for him. Therefore, he was surprised to see this without prior notice.

"There is more, Sir." Vince turned to the next page. He showed him several transactions that he had red-flagged. Anomalous numbers that did not make sense to him.

It was still large amounts of cash going out of his finances this time. Those figures were not familiar. At the same time, he did not remember his boss issuing payouts, especially that kind of amount.

He could only think of one possible answer to these suspicious dealings. Someone must have hacked the account of the prince and made those dubious entries.

"Are you sure you have no knowledge of who might be doing this?" He dropped the papers on the table, staring directly into the eyes of his assistant.

Although Edward had no reason to doubt his loyalty to him, in his experience, even the most loyal people could be bought for a price. Besides, he knew that Vince was as cunning as him.

If he was using him to do his bidding without questions asked, Vince was also only after the enormous payment he was giving him. He was not under any impression that he served for his pleasure without waiting for anything in return.

"Of course, your highness." Vince quickly denied any involvement in the anomaly. "Let me see what I can find out about this." He offered since it was the only thing he could do to clear his name.

He could see the doubt in his boss's eyes. He did have access to his many accounts, but he would not do this. It was too transparent and possibly traceable.

He quickly returned to his position outside of his office, leaving his boss in his own thoughts. He knew his boss had many enemies, especially since he was the future king.

"Where did you come from?" He mumbled to himself as he examined the papers again.

He had many enemies who would want a chance to take him down. One of them was his cousin, but he would not use this tactic. He was too honest for his own good to do this to him.

He doubted that Nick was responsible for this. He could not see why he would go to such trouble. Why would he send him money in his personal account when Nick just sent him an enormous return from his investment in his company.

"Excuse me, Sir." Vince mildly knocked on his door before entering again. "The Council representative is here to see you, Sir." He gestured to the visitor to enter the office chamber once the prince gave his signal.

"Your highness." The man greeted the prince and handed an envelope addressed to him with the seal of the Council head. Without another word, he bowed and left when dismissed by the prince.

He had no idea of what the content of the letter was. Only the prince could break the seal. He had never once seen the inside of those kinds of envelopes.

Once the prince had read its content, he quickly burned it into ashes, leaving no remnants of the written message from the Council. The same thing happened to all the letters from the king himself.

He always believed it was old school, but technology could easily be hacked. Only trusted people could touch the envelope and only deliver it into the hands of the intended recipient, no one else.

"Close the door on your way out," Edward told his assistant as he broke the seal and removed the paper out of the envelope.

He was being summoned to the Council Chambers immediately for an emergency session. An urgent incident had come to their attention and needed everyone's presence to resolve the matter.

His immediate attendance was required. There was no room for any excuses, which meant that the meeting was a serious matter. He could only wonder what the issue was.

However, he had not heard anything out of the ordinary from Vince. He would be the first to know if there was activity inside the palace or around the kingdom. Aside from spotting a few Council members, Vince had not said much.

"Vince, cancel all my meetings for this morning. I have to go somewhere." He held the paper in his hands, and with a lighter, he burned it to ashes on the ashtray on his table.

"Yes, Sir." Vince already knew that he was not going with him to this meeting. When it came to important matters involving the kingdom, no one else was invited to join.

"Continue checking on those documents." Reminding Vince of his assignment. He grabbed his phone and walked out of the room.

He walked to several guarded hallways towards the designated location written on the letter. Meeting at the Council Chambers reminded him that this meeting was being done in secrecy.

Therefore, it could only mean one thing, he thought. The subject matter was a sensitive issue. His father must be coming too if that was the case.

Finally, he arrived outside the said room with two uniformed men guarding the door. "Your highness, you may proceed inside." One of them opened the door for him, announcing his presence to the occupants of the room.

He could see that all the Council members were already in their respective places. His uncle sat on the other end of the table. The rest were situated on the sides of the long rectangular wooden surface.

"Edward, why don't you sit down." His father said once he saw him. He indicated the vacant chair at his side by the other end of the table.

"What is this all about?" He voiced out his curiosity, seeing the grave faces of the people around him.

It would not be the first time he would attend this meeting, but it appeared that this was different from his previous experience.. He just realized the gravity of the situation hence the secrecy behind the secret chambers.

#### [Chapter 492 - No Demand For Ransom](#)

He opened his eyes to the plain white ceiling and the irritating sound of a beeping machine. He automatically grabbed his side but felt the excruciating pain, like someone just punched him hard on his stomach or probably worse.

He rotated his eyes and head around the room, trying to figure out his whereabouts. He saw some kind of fluid being drifted into his bloodstream, then machines connected to his chest, monitoring his heartbeat.

He concluded that he was in a hospital, suddenly recalling the incident that put him there. He remembered the wedding and then the ambush.

"Anybody out there." He shouted, knowing quite well that someone would be standing by outside his door. One of his men would never leave his side.

He did not want to press the emergency button, not wanting to alert the nurse or a doctor that he was already awake. He had to talk to his men first in private.

He was sure that a detective would be standing by to take his statement. Once they were alerted of his condition, he would not have time to confer with his team.

He had to determine first that their mission was enacted and accomplished according to their plan. He did not mind being the casualty. He could take it, but he knew anyone of his men would also risk their lives for the couple.

"Sir, finally, you are awake." One of their youngest team members entered his room. He had told the young boy multiple times he should call him by his first name when not on a mission, the boy still insisted on formalities.

"How was the wedding?" He quickly asked him, dismissing the concern in his voice.

He felt fine.

He was alive.

That was all that mattered.

But right now, he had to know the status of their boss and his wife. It was his primary duty as the leader of his security team. It was not an excuse that he was lying down on this bed.

"I think you should concentrate on getting some rest and making yourself better." The boy answered, afraid to say more. "Everything went smoothly. It was a beautiful wedding." He did not lie, just omitted some details.

Why did it have to be him guarding the door when he woke up. He was not good at lying to him. He had too much respect for his boss to leave him in the dark.

But he had instructions to let him rest and avoid giving him anything that might stress him out. The current news would surely put his blood pressure to the roof if he ever found out.

"Tell me, boy, what is going on, or else I will beat it out of you," Tim warned him, seeing the telltale sign that he was keeping something from him.

The boy was agitated for a reason. The tiny beads of sweat forming on the top of his head were an indication that he was lying. The slight stuttering was a dead giveaway.

"I am not lying, Sir. I am telling the truth." He insisted, but he knew he was only burying himself in an early grave.

He considered him lucky when Tim accepted him to join the group despite his age and lack of experience compared to his other team members.

He knew he could be a valuable part of the team because of his capability with new technologies. However, in terms of physical combat and handling a gun, he was still working on it.

Luckily, the door opening interrupted the interrogation of his boss. He knew if he kept asking, he would have no choice but to tell him the truth.

"Stop harassing the boy." A loud, authoritative voice came booming inside the room. It was starting to become a familiar sound ever since his boss worked with him.

"You can go back to your position." A younger voice said to the boy, dismissing him as they proceeded inside the room, taking the space earlier occupied by the boy beside the bed.

"Sir Ethan, Marcus. What are you doing here?" Acknowledging the newcomer who stood before him. "There is no need for a visit. As you can see, I am very much alive and kicking. Well, soon enough anyway." He corrected with a smirk on his face.

He was not expecting that they would be visiting today. They might have more important things to do than check on him. Now that his boss was indisposed at the moment. He was sure that they had a company to run.

He attempted to push himself into a sitting position, but the pain was still too much for small movements. He ended up back lying on the bed, holding his wounds.

"Hey, Tim. Try not to force yourself." Marcus warned him. "Your wound might not be fatal, but it did penetrate deep into your side." He told him, remembering what the doctor told him of his condition. "You might still bleed to death if you are not careful."

Tim had been a friend to him. An old buddy who had taught him a thing or two about self-defense and life itself. He did not want anything to happen to him.

"I guess you are right," Tim finally conceded, feeling the pain increase the more he stubbornly forced himself to move.

"We are here to check on you, but more than that, we also need your help." Ethan finally spoke up, knowing the urgency of the matter.

He did not want to bother the man in his recovery. But he needed his expertise and knowledge about his boss and his enemies. Time was of the essence. He could not wait until he had recovered from his injury.

"What is it?" Now, he knew he was right in his instinct earlier. The boy knew something that he was not sharing. Judging from the look exchanged by the two, it was something serious. "Tell me." He commanded, not caring who he was talking to.

He could be facing the president of the free world, but he did not care. He had to hear what they had to say, especially if it had something to do with the prince and his wife.

"They were taken." Ethan finally voiced out what he had learned a few minutes ago from the report he had received from his investigative team.

The black box was found but not the plane. Based on the investigation, the entire cabin crew was replaced by another set without anyone knowing. The original flight crew was found in the hanger tied down, unconscious.

"Who took them?" Tim asked, hoping they might, at least, have a lead on this case.

He wondered if it was for ransom, a business rival, or a personal enemy. He could already list down several names, and a few were already topping the chart.

"It is the reason why we are here. We still have no concrete proof of who took Alex and Dani. Nobody had claimed responsibility yet." Marcus was the one who answered him. "We might need your help." He informed him.

"What about Ben?" Tim asked since he was already as good as him. He was grooming him to take over his position once he finally decided to retire.

"He is also missing," Ethan said, feeling a bit desperate every minute that passed.

It would have been simple if they contacted them and gave them their demands. They could have a chance to track them and find wherever they had taken them.

The silence of the abductors meant they wanted something else.. Meaning there would be no demand for ransom.

#### [Chapter 493 - Priceless Masterpiece](#)

She was going live in a few minutes, but she wanted the editing of the wedding coverage to be perfect. She planned to show some clips of it in her live show.

Her program would definitely hit the ratings with this one. A real live royal wedding that many young and old fantasized about. A prince and a princess united in a magical fairytale-like ceremony.

"This is what showbusiness is all about." One of her production assistants said as they watched a short clip of the wedding ritual.

Many would definitely speculate that this was just another publicity stunt of the royal family to strengthen their monarchy. While for the rich, well power and wealth were the motivation.

"No, I don't think so," Harlowe disagreed with her as she examined the video clip. "This couple is legit. They are marrying for love and not just as an arrangement."

She could sense it in her interview with the couple a few days back. She had tried to twist and turn her questions, hoping to catch them with a lie. But both passed with flying colors.

In addition, nobody could fake the passion and love she had seen in their eyes. The way they moved and touched one another with affection. It was something she had longed for but regretfully lost the chance because she chose her career.

"Really. Wow." Another one of her staff expressed her disbelief. "I never thought I would still see a modern-day fairytale in this lifetime."

Everybody agreed that the couple was perfect on the screen. Men and women alike would adore the steaming love team of the newlywed. However, there would be haters too.

"Well, feast your eyes on our new celebrity couple. They are the real deal." Harlowe could not blame people for being cynical. Most wealthy people only marry to increase their business portfolio, celebrities to gain more fame, politician to strengthen their political ties. Only a few got married for love.

Some thought it was love, but it was usually some twisted perversion of love. It was a factor in the increasing rate of divorce around the world.

"What about the case I ask you to look at?" She turned her attention to two of her best investigative reporters.

They used to be two of the best detectives in the force until they retired. They might be bulging in the front side and could hardly run a mile. But their deductive skills and uncanny ability to dig up information were still at par with the best.

She had hired the two as outside sources for most of her stories. So far, they had not yet disappointed her with their outcomes. Most of them were beneficial and were a great help in building her background story.

"Interesting fellow. He has quite a colorful life." The elder one spoke up with a little too much sarcasm, grabbing a file he had compiled for her.

"A very well respected businessman in the industry. Successful at that too." The other man answered her. But his tone suggested there was more to his report.

"What are you two saying?" She grabbed the paperwork, excited to see the juicy details the two had dug up for her.

If that man was as sleazy as she had expected, then these two would discover quite a handful of stories about him. She could be bet that he was not as legitimate as he seemed.

She checked the first page, but it was nothing she had not seen on the internet when she searched about him. Basic things about him and his past relationship with Ms. Daniella Hamilton.

"Read up. You will surely enjoy that compilation with a nice bottle of wine." The older chap told her, not wanting to reveal the suspense. "I better go because I still have a few leads that I want to check."

"I am coming with you." The other man also said as they both stood up and bade their farewell. They had done their job for the day, but it did not mean that the job was complete.

"Thanks. I hope there are more of this from where it came from." She jokingly yelled at them, wishing they could produce more materials for her project.

She was about to read more, but the line producer was already signaling to prepare herself for the live show. She dropped the papers inside her bag, planning to review them later, once at home with a bottle of wine as the two suggested.

Her thoughts momentarily went to the other night when he saw him at the party. It was late when he arrived, but he certainly knew how to make an entrance.

Several women followed him around with their gazes as he searched for someone inside the ballroom. Finally, she watched him, careful not to be noticed by him. He met up with the prince.

From the way they were talking, they seemed to be well acquainted. She surmised that Prince Edward must be his contact inside the palace. She doubted the newlywed would invite him to their wedding.

"Ms. Harlowe, are you ready?" Someone caught her attention, snapping her from her reverie.

She smiled at him and walked over to her position, preparing herself for the live telecast of her weekly report. People loved her show because she was not afraid to discuss anything under the sun.

Whether it be famous people and their dirty laundries or politicians who made scandalous decisions. It could be anything that created headlines.

"Tonight, we are not talking about a disastrous affair or the end of the world as we know it. Instead, we are about to see hope and love. A fairytale love story of two people born to be together in our modern times." She began her spiel as the camera rolled.

A series of cheering and applause ensued in her statement, signifying the beginning of her program. She talked about the couple, showing the edited version of her interview with them.

As expected, the ranking quickly increased, and not even half the show, they were already on the top of the chart, rating number one.

"Your stories are always top ranking." Her producer congratulated her once the show was over. Her director praised her tremendous work.

"Expect more from me." She assured them, knowing that she was not done yet with her career.

She loved what she did with her life. Although it could be lonesome at times, she would never exchange it for something else. She sometimes regretted not having a family. But it was a necessary sacrifice for her goal.

As soon as she reached her home, she changed into comfortable clothes and sat on her reliable armchair in the middle of her living room.

She grabbed the bottle of wine she took from the fridge and poured herself a glass. Then, she took the thick file that the two had given her. It would be an interesting read, she thought as she sipped her wine.

"What do we have here?" She continued flipping to the page until she reached the portion that did not seem familiar to her.

It was a new story she had not read about him.

Suddenly, she remembered that Ryan still had to report to her. He was a young investigative journalist who was training under her. Compared to the two detectives, Ryan was more aggressive in his ways and more hands-on. But, she just had to wait for his report tomorrow.

She poured herself another glass, amazed at what she was reading so far. "Interesting was not the word for this." She corrected her friend.

"This story is a priceless masterpiece in the making," Harlowe uttered excitedly, tapping her fingernails on the file.

#### [Chapter 494 - In Good Hands](#)

He could hardly move as he twisted in agony. It was either he was still alive since he was experiencing so much pain. Otherwise, he could be in hell, being tortured for his sins.

But he would prefer the former as he tried to open his eyes, fighting the pain, fatigue, and dizziness he felt. He tried to recall where he was and what happened as confusion still enveloped his fuzzy memory.



"Oooohhhh." He moaned in anguish as he moved his left arm, dropping it back in its previous position. He was not sure if it was broken or something.

He laid quietly for a second, trying to regain his strength. At the same time, he tried to establish his current situation. Then, all his memories came rushing like a gushing waterfall, bombarding him with all the information.

He could hear a steady hum of an engine and feel the bumpy movement of the floor he was lying on. He concluded that he must be in a moving vehicle, running at moderate speed on a rough road.

He forced his other hand over his face, covering his eyes from the rays of the sun as he tried to peek at his surrounding. It would at least give him a better view of what he was up against.

"Hey, mister, you are finally awake." A little voice of a young boy spoke up beside him, startling him and causing him to make a quick sudden movement.

He suddenly realized that his hands were free to move. Still, dragging his body was a difficult task to handle as he tried to shift to a different position.

"Damn! Aaaahhhh!" The incident made him move his injured arm, worsening his pain condition.

He directed his sight toward the source of the voice. And then, he found a child with him in what seemed to be the back of a pickup truck. He quickly moved back to the corner, away from him.

He was not expecting company and a child at that. He was not frightened by him, but he was wary of his situation. After what happened earlier, he could not trust anyone, not even a seemingly innocent child.

"Don't move too much, or you might bleed again." The boy informed him while pointing at his bandaged body and arm with blood seeping through the white cloth. "I am glad that you are not dead." He added as an afterthought.

He finally saw the extent of his injury. Well, at least most of it. He was glad that he was not dead, too, apparently. He roamed his eyes to his body, at least the part he could see in his current position.

It would seem that he was hit in his arm and around the side of his ribcage. Other than that, it might be just some bruising and mild broken bones from his fall. Hopefully, the bullet went through and did not hit any major organs.

It would seem that somebody tried to patch him up, applying first aid. He doubted that the boy was able to manage that. He assumed he probably had some help.

It could not be the abductors, but it would not make sense. They were, after all, ordered to dispose of his body. Then, who was helping the boy, and what were they planning to do with him.

"Who are you? Who did this?" Pointing to his wounds. "Where are you taking me?" He rambled on with his questions, wanting answers quickly as his eyes started to shut down again.

He fought to stay conscious despite his mind and body conspiring against him. He did not trust the boy beside him. He could be an illusion playing tricks on him, he suddenly thought.

In his experience during the war, injuries like this, especially when losing a lot of blood, could cause some delusions. The mind could suddenly create an illusion and distort reality.

"I am Billy." The boy waved to him but did not try to come near him. "My mom tried to do the best she could to clean your wounds, but she only knew how to treat dogs." He pointed to the front of the seat. "What is your name?" It was his turn to ask the question.

"Ben." He simply said as he covered his eyes again from the bright light, waiting for the answers from the little boy.

"There is no room in the front seat, so Mom had to put you back here. You see, we only have a small pickup truck. You would not have fit in there." He pointed to the front of the vehicle, laughing a bit.

"Mom is taking you to the hospital where you can be treated properly. She is with my little sister in the front." Billy continued without waiting for a response from him.

The boy looked at him with fascination as if he was some form of experiment. Actually, he seemed to be as curious as him. He was probably dying to ask him a hundred questions about his identity.

"Don't I frighten you, boy?" He asked with curiosity, spooking him a bit while watching the boy for any sign of fear or a reaction. "I might be a bad man."

He wondered what kind of mother would put his son in danger. Putting him together with a stranger who was just shot twice or thrice. He might be a killer, a criminal who was intent to kill anyone in his path.

"You can't hurt me. I know that." He said with confidence as he stayed in his position, just watching him. "I love helping my mom when she is treating some dogs who are sick." He stated as if that should answer his question.

The boy's answer did not make sense, but he could not respond as he tried his best to focus on staying awake. He breathed deeply, wanting to supply enough air to his brain and body.

"When the dogs would not cooperate with my mom, she let me help put some medicine on them to calm them down." He explained to him, not minding if he was listening or not.

Ben still did not understand the story and what it had to do with him. He wished he could stand up and make the boy stop talking nonsense.

But the pull of darkness was getting stronger as it became harder for him to keep awake. He finally looked at the boy when he called his name several times.

"Ben." He repeated.

"Look, Ben. I had to give you some of this to help you sleep." The boy showed him the syringe in his hand. "Mom said that it will help you heal faster." The boy proudly smiled at him as if he had done a good deed.

Well, he would pat him on the head if he could for being a good boy, Ben thought. He would even praise his mom for her quick thinking. But for now, he could only close his eyes.

"Go take a good rest. I hope you will live. You don't look like a bad man to me." It was the last words he heard.

As his time ran out, he started to doze off, unable to ward off the drug that overtook his body.. He remembered smiling before losing consciousness, finally convinced that he was in good hands.

#### [Chapter 495 - By Hook Or By Crook](#)

She fell asleep on the bed, waiting for what would happen next. But it was a restless one as she kept opening her eyes when she heard a noise either outside her door or the window.

She still had not come up with a plan, but she was not giving up yet as she opened her eyes to a slowly darkening room. She wondered where her husband could be and how he was doing.

"Hang in there, Alex. We will find a way out of this." Dani could only hope and pray that Nick had not harmed him.

But, Nick was a vengeful man. He probably had inflicted pain on Alex in more ways than one. She could never rely on his humanity because Nick had none.

However, the footsteps had stopped just outside her door, alerting her of their presence. She quickly stood from the bed and grabbed the blanket, preparing herself for her unwanted visitors.

She had to stop thinking of Alex for now. Because she had to save herself first, she thought, as the door was unlocked from the outside.

"Move your ass, my lady. Get dressed." He mockingly curtsied by the door while his companion shook his head behind him. "Our boss wants you to dine with him."

"What are you doing, man?" The other man knocked him with the palm of his hand behind his head.

"Hey, stop that." The man faced his partner, ready to retaliate. "She is a princess." He referred to her. "That is how you address a princess, you dum dum." The man proudly said to his partner, feeling a bit smarter than the other.

He stepped inside the room and dropped some clothes and a pair of shoes on the bed. Then, hurried to get out of the room. "Hurry up." He shouted behind the closed door.

She did not know what to feel about what she witnessed. But she was relieved, confirming that at least some of the guards watching her were a bit dumb while taking note of their faces.

She quickly changed into the clothes given to her and wore the shoes with three-inch heels. The dress was a little too provocative for her taste, remembering that it was the sort of clothes Cassie loved to wear.

"Just a few more minutes." She yelled back when a knock came through the door. She was expecting them to barge in without regard if she was ready or not, but she was glad that they did not.

She tried to fix the dress, but there was no use. It was too short. Well, she guessed it was designed to be that way, and her cleavage was way too exposed for her liking.

She did not like what she was wearing, but she had no choice. At least it was covering more parts of her body and more comfortable than just parading in her nightwear.

"Ready," Dani knocked on the door to signal to the man outside. Then the door was opened for her.

She was not sure if she was actually ready to see Nick again. But the sooner she figured out his plans, the better she could devise a way out of here. She could only hope that the odds were in her favor.

"Right this way, my lady." The man guided her on the long hallway of what would seem to be an old manor. Judging from the texture of the wood and the old paintings on the wall, this must be an ancestral home.

Then, she remembered Nick mentioning before about some acres of farmland that his mother owned. She shuffled her mind for the location, but it eluded her at the moment.

Nick hated going to this place for vacation when he was young. He said that it was too quiet, smelly, and old. He did grow up in the city, so she understood his concern back then.

"You definitely look gorgeous in that dress." Nick complemented her as soon as he saw her walk into the dining room.

He stood from his chair, beckoning her to join him, gesturing for her to take the seat next to him. He had his chef prepare a sumptuous meal because he wanted to celebrate.

He knew it was too early to declare victory, but he could not help it. He could already feel it in his blood as excitement rushed into his veins. There was nothing more that could ruin this moment. Tonight, he would fulfill their destiny.

"I think your taste in clothing needs to be improved." She answered back, hating the way his words crept her out. She could feel her body cringe at the sound of his voice.

However, she had to injure his company while working her way out of this situation. Although she would have preferred to stay away from him or even give him another kick in the balls.

"Now, now. Calm down. We are here to enjoy a nice dinner." He pulled the chair and waited for her to take her seat. "If you cooperate, I might even let you see your husband or rather a soon-to-be ex-husband."

He could see he had caught her attention as she moved towards him and took her seat quietly. He smiled at her, knowing that he had won that round.

But, the game was far from over, he thought, seeing the defiance still lingering in her eyes. It would take more than an idle threat to make her submit to his demands.

"Where is Alex?" She demanded, watching the despicable man sitting right next to her.

She could care less for the food that he was offering her. She was more interested to hear his answer to her question. The more time she spent away from him, the more she was afraid of his fate.

If only she could see that Alex was alright, then the more she could calm down and think straight. But knowing that his life was on the brink of danger, she could not help but worry for him.

"Have a taste of this, Dani? If I remember right, this is one of your favorites." He opened the stainless steel plate cover and revealed a delicious entree of roasted lamb.

He knew she must be starving by now. He purposely only gave her a small amount of food earlier. He was counting that she would enjoy the food tonight in his company.

He continued when she remained silent, only staring at the food before her. "If you eat with me, I will make sure that we visit him after we have our dessert," Nick promised her as if she was a child who refused to eat until she had her present.

He began to eat but occasionally looked at her, checking if she had touched her food. He smiled when he saw her take her utensils and cut the meat in front of her.

It was a small victory, but soon he would have her obeying all his commands. He already had everything working according to his plan.

"Ok." She finally conceded, answering him as calmly as she could muster. She needed him to think that she was willing to cooperate for her to see Alex again.

She kept telling herself that she could do this. For Alex, she encouraged herself to take the first bite and swallowed it, despite her instinct to spit the food into his face.

There was only one thing on her mind at the moment, to find Alex and escape this place that Nick called his new home, more like a prison for her.. She would find a way by hook or by crook.

#### [Chapter 496 - A Snake Would Always Be A Traitor](#)

"Find me that traitor." He shouted at his assistant as soon as he was back in his private office inside the palace.

He could not believe that Nick would stab him in the back. He had been a fool to think that Nick had every intention to help him. Instead, it would seem that he planned to put all the blame on him.

With the way he saw the shreds of evidence before him, it would appear that he was behind the abduction. He did have the motive to want his cousin gone.

"Sir?" Vince looked at his boss with furrowed brows, unable to comprehend what he was ordering him to do. "Your highness, find who?"

He had no idea who he was asking him to find or contact. He could think of several people to who his boss might be referring. He did have many enemies he had a beef with.

He followed his boss into his private chambers and stood before him, waiting for his command. He did receive his orders, but he needed a few more details.

"I need you to find Nickolas Travis." Edward enunciated each word to his assistant, ensuring he understood what he wanted him to do. "Now." He barked once more, dismissing him immediately.

Alone in his room, he could feel his blood boiling from his anger toward the man who dared to betray him. He dropped to his seat to conjure a plan to avoid being pinned down in a crime he did not make.

He could still see the face of his father as the Council confronted him about the abduction. The duke suspected that Nick might have something to do with this, so it was only natural that they would question him about it.

His mind returned to the meeting earlier when he finally took his seat, just right next to his father. Everyone had been silent for a few seconds until his father opened the session for the most immediate concern.

It was actually the only concern discussed during the entire few hours they were stuck in that room. The abduction of the newlywed couple and the man responsible for it.

"We suspected that Nick was the one responsible for the ambush before the abduction." The duke narrated what the investigators speculated, so far, based on motives alone.

But, in terms of evidence, nothing was concrete yet. The men captured during the incident still had nothing to say to connect them to Nick.

There was also no physical evidence that would point back to him. No paper or money trails that would lead to Nick. "The only chance for us to catch him will be through your cooperation."

The duke directed his gaze to his nephew, who had been silent in his corner. He did not want to believe that Edward, the young one, would be capable of doing this to his cousin. His family.

But, greed could drive anyone to the edge of reason. The duke only hoped that Edward did not resort to such. He still wanted to believe that his nephew had nothing to do with this despite the evidence that might lead them there.

"As much as I want to help, I had no clue of what was going on with Nick. This is the first time I am also hearing about my cousin and his bride being kidnapped." Prince Edward told directly to his father, letting the entire Council members hear his explanation.

As far as he knew, the couple was on their way to their honeymoon. He also had avoided being associated with Nick in his underground activities. He was aware of it, but it did not mean he was a part of it.

"Any information that could help us find where Nick took them, this would be the time to tell us." Count Wellington said. It was as if he was trying to convince him to divulge everything he knew.

"As I said, I had no prior knowledge of his activities or plans. We are only legitimate business partners. I invested in his company. It was the extent of our business relationship." He stated with finality, not liking what the Count was implying.

He might be the father of Lance and a family relative, but he was still his prince. He should never question his honor, especially when he had no proof against him.

"Then, I hope you can explain all this." It was Lance this time who spoke.

He stood up from his chair on the other side of the table and walked toward the prince. He handed a folder containing several documents to the prince before returning to his previous position.

He was not a Council member yet. But his father was grooming him to take over his position once he retired. Just like the prince was included in this meeting and some of the qualified sons of the other members.

He had been sworn to secrecy about this place and the urgency and sensitivity of the matter at hand. He was here to help out in any way he could to find his cousin and bride.

"What is the meaning of this?" The prince flipped through the pages and read some of the reports.

His eyes almost bulged out of his socket at the implications of the written reports. He finally dropped the folder on the table after skimming through its contents.

There were pictures of him in Nick's club drinking and playing poker with some wealthy men. Based on the report, they were mafia leaders and their associates.

"Have you seen this?" He asked his father, looking into his eyes but seeing only sadness in their depth. "Surely, you did not believe any of this."

But he could see through him how much this had affected him. He might not believe it entirely, but it certainly created doubt in his mind. After all, he was not exactly an exemplary example of a son after the numerous mischiefs he had done.

"I swear. I had nothing to do with this." He wanted to scream. For the first time, he was innocent, and nobody seemed to care, not even his father.

He had no idea about this. He thought that he was legitimately doing business with these men. He even paid the best investigator to check on their backgrounds. Damn, then he remembered that Nick recommended him. He must have set him up all this time.

One of the captured drivers in the previous car accident had been discovered to be part of the mafia gang. It all became suddenly clear to him. He was being framed.

"Everyone, could you give us the room? I want to speak to my son alone." The King had finally spoken, gesturing for everyone to leave the room.

Once the room was empty except for him and the younger Edward, he stood up from his seat and paced the room. He had seen the evidence that the Council had gathered.

Although they were not accusing his son of wrongful doing, they might. If they gathered more proof that would point to him as the mastermind of the abduction, then they would have no choice.

"Dad, you must believe me. I had nothing to do with this." He begged him.

He had to try to convince his father of his innocence because if he could not, what chance did he have with the Council. He could still remember the solemn face of his father as if he had finally given up on him.

Now, he sat in his office, trying to figure out how to serve Nick on a silver platter and save himself from this dilemma. He remembered the money transfers that Vince had shown him.

If the Council learned about that, too, then it would seal his fate. He could already see that the paper trail would lead them back to the mafia organization.

"Nick, I will make sure that you will pay for this." He mumbled to himself as he stared into thin air.

His father was right. He should not have involved himself with a man like him. He should follow him when he said to cut his ties with Nick.

But he was a fool, thinking that he could handle a snake and tame it to do his bidding. It would bite when least expected. A snake might change its skin, but it would still be the same.. A snake would always be a traitor.

#### [Chapter 497 - The Royal Flush](#)

He had watched her force herself to consume all that food, hopefully, to please him. But that would be wishful thinking. It was more likely due to her desperation to see if her husband was still alive.

Presently, he was accompanying her outside the house, walking down the few steps to the massive lawn before them. He did promise to show her where he was keeping him.

"How do you like your new home, my princess?" He asked, filling in the silence, extending his hand to the view before them.

He knew how much she loved being one with nature. Something that they never agreed on when they were still together. She would always arrange for trips, but he would cancel them, pretending to have an emergency he had to attend to.

When she kept her mouth shut, he decided to continue talking about the history of the place. But if he had his way, he would rather be back in the city.

"I remember telling you that I hated this place. But who knew it would eventually come in handy." As he continued to recall a time that they were still together.

He moved closer to her then placed his hand on her elbow to stabilize her on the rocky surface, but she flinched away. He could sense that she was fighting him at every opportunity.

"I do remember. I also thought that you were a decent human being then, but I was proven wrong." She answered him, full of distaste for the man not far from her.

She would have loved to spend more time in a location like this. With the sky covered with a million sprinkles of stars with partial clouds covering some areas, she could stare at them all night.

She could even see herself living in a place like this, but not with her present company. She could picture herself with a picnic blanket on those trees, with Alex on her lap as they see their kids running around them with smiles on their faces.

"We can try again. This time, I will be a better man. I will prove to you that we can be good together." Nick stopped her by grabbing her arm. He pulled her towards him until they were face to face.

He could see where he had made a mistake before, but he could try to amend that if only she would give him a chance. Then, they could be good together. She would be the perfect wife for him.



"Where are you taking me?" She asked, snapping out of her trance, realizing the reality of her situation. She quickly snatched her arm away from him and turned to move on.

She was not here for vacation. She was here to look for her husband, but she could hardly see any more structure in the close vicinity except the tall trees not far ahead.

She hoped he was keeping his word and taking her to see Alex. But, she could not disregard that this might be another of his tricks to make her cooperate, but instead, he had another thing planning against them.

"As promised, I am taking you to your loving husband." His voice was thick with irritation. Then, he saw her clenching her fist on her side as they continued walking.

He realized his mistake by losing his cool with her. He had been trying to be patient, but it took all his effort to put himself under control. He was not known for such traits.

"I am a man of my word." He softened his words, reminding himself that he was trying to win her over and not worsen their situation.

He would allow her to have her way this time. Soon enough, he would have her submitting to his will. Then, she would eventually learn that the only way she would survive this was by losing to him.

"If only that was true." She mumbled to herself, but loud enough to guarantee that he would hear her words.

Then, both fell into silence as he led her through the massive trees until they reached a clearing again. In the middle was an old building that looked like a barn.

It probably housed several horses and other farm animals in its old-good days. But at the moment, it was mostly some dilapidated roofs and walls that covered what remained of the structure.

"As I said. I am keeping to my word to let you see your husband." He proudly stated as they stood outside the wide sliding door. "Here we are."

He stopped in front of the building, where two men with high-powered guns stood guarding the door. But many of his men still roam around the perimeter, keeping watch of the place.

He had made sure that nobody could get in and out of this place alive without his permission. That included his hostages. Their lives were now at his mercy.

"Let me see, Alex." She demanded with fierceness, not wanting to show him any weakness.

However, she was fighting her every instinct to break down and cry. She already had a guess of what she might witness inside. She was not naive to believe that Nick would simply lock Alex up.

She had to show Alex that she was fighting for them, and she had a plan. She had been studying all the layouts of the area. She would figure out their way out of this.

"Not until you swear to do what I want." He said slyly, watching her face drop then turn into anger.

He could see her spirit still trying to rebel against him, but he could see that she knew she was running out of choices. One way or the other, she would give in to his demands.

"You know I will never do that." She kept her poker face, not wanting him to see her fear. She would not willingly do anything he wanted, not ever and not in this lifetime.

Despite her desperation, she was not insane enough to succumb to his threats. She would find a way to fight him and escape this hell he had put her through.

"But you will." He arrogantly answered her back with a wicked smile on his lips.

He finally gave the signal for his men to open the door, nodding for them to open it wide. If it was dark outside, it was way too dark inside the enclosed space.

"Where is he? Are you sure Alex is in there?" She questioned him, not trusting his word even for one little bit.

She could barely see anything inside the large room. Only a few strips of moonlight passing through the wooden slits illuminated the spacious room.

She had to strain her eyes to see the layout of the inside. But she still had to spot Alex on the spacious floor. She was not sure if he was even in there, and this was another trap designed by Nick for her.

"You simply had no options left." He spoke up as he spotted the shadow lurking behind the beam, hardly moving at its position. He finally gestured for one of his men to turn on the lights.

He knew that no matter how she tried to defy him, he would still get his way.. He would still win because he held the royal flush in this game.

#### [Chapter 498 - Leave No Man Behind](#)

"We found him at the side of the road unconscious." He heard a female say to a man asking her some questions.

He could hardly open his eyes. When he managed to, he was only blinded by the bright light. He had no choice but to close them again.

He could hear a lot of noises coming from different directions. He also felt the stiff mattress on his back as he felt his body being wheeled to another room.

"Did he manage to say his name?" The man questioned her again, trying to learn more information about him.

"I was not able to get his name. He was unconscious when my son found him. He also had no identification on his body. I already checked when I applied the first aid." The woman responded to his query.

He tried to recall his memories, checking if he even remembered his name. Fortunately, he did, and the rest of what happened slowly came back to his drug-induced brain.

He would have said Ben, but every part of his muscles seemed to fail him. "Fuck that kid." He would have shouted, but he could not move his lips, not even his fingers or his toes.

He was reminded of the boy who stuck a needle in him behind a pickup truck. Then, the boy mentioned his mother was bringing him to the hospital.

He dug deeper into his memory, trying to get a grasp of what else occurred before he ended up in their care. For now, all he saw were figments of his memories that were not making any sense yet.

"I kind of given him some dose of sedative." She finally confessed to the medical practitioner. "I think it might have been more than necessary."

She felt she miscalculated his weight and must have given him a bit more than necessary. But she only gave a minor sedative, so it might wear off a bit longer than she planned.

In her defense, she was just a veterinarian. She only knew how to treat animals, just the most common diseases of domesticated pets. Still, she felt responsible for him.

"What kind and how much? Maybe we should discuss this outside." The man suggested, guiding the woman out the door of the room.

She was only taking precautions when she asked his son to give it to him if he suddenly woke up. She was not even convinced he was an innocent man.

For all she knew, he might be a criminal. Although, she should not judge him based on his gunshot wound. It would be the role of the police to investigate and for the court to decide, definitely not hers.

"Hey, I also want to hear what she had to say." He protested in his mind, wanting to hear what they would discuss regarding his condition.

He kept his ears strained to the conversation around him as he tried to gather more information. It was the only thing he could do anyway until the drug finally wore off.

He could only surmise that he might be in a hospital, basing it on his observation so far. The one conversing beside him might be the one who saved him earlier and the other one, a health worker.

Finally, he succumbed again to dreamless sleep, allowing the drug to take over his body once more. He would worry about his situation when he woke up again.

"Sir, you are in a hospital being treated with a gunshot wound." A female voice spoke to him gently as if she did not want to spook him, but the tone was unfamiliar.

She was wearing a colored uniform and a face mask around her face. Her hair color was not the same as the woman who brought him to the hospital. At least in his recollection.

"Sir, how are you feeling?" The woman continued questioning him, seeing that he was now wide awake.

More or less, he could now open his eyes with little difficulty. He could see the woman who must be treating his wound. He finally remembered that he was shot earlier or probably yesterday.

He had no idea since he was barely awake most of the time. But

he remembered the abduction and everything related to the incident.

"I am feeling much better." He finally answered, but it was still a croaky voice that was barely understandable.

He found his lips moving again and his voice muscles cooperating with him. He could even move his hand just a bit. He also tried his toes for good measure.

"Glad to hear that. You are lucky that the bullet went through and did not hit any major organs." The doctor explained his condition. "By the way, can you remember your name and who shot you?"

The doctor moved closer to check on his eyes. And then observed the screen on the machine beside him as she waited for him to answer.

"Ben." He said, but it came out more of a whisper. "Uhhmm." Clearing his voice, he tried again. "They call me Ben." It sounded better this time.

Several wires were attached to his body, some for fluid intake, while the others were for monitoring. But, it was the last of his concern. He was breathing and thinking that was all that mattered.

"It is a nice name, Ben." She said but noticed that he did not answer her other question. "We did not see any contact details in you. Do you want us to contact anybody?" The doctor offered instead.

"Please, can you get me in touch with the authorities right away?" He requested, needing to seek their assistance in the urgency of his situation.

He would have run out of here if he could, but that did not seem to be an option. He had tried to move, but the pain was just too much.

He would have to settle for the next best thing he could think of. He just hoped that the police he would be talking to would not be on their enemy's payroll.

"I am sure I can manage that." She was a bit relieved that the man was not running from the law. So, he might not be the bad guy after all. "Anything else?" She asked.

She remembered asking an intern earlier to place a report with the authorities about this situation. It was in their standard procedure for gunshot wound victims.

"Can I also borrow your phone? I just want to call my family." He asked for a favor, hoping that she would agree. "How long was I was out anyway?" He finally asked.

He still could not simply trust anybody after all that was happening to him. Besides, he had no idea of where he was until now.

"Just a few hours. The operation did not take long since we did not encounter any complications." The doctor answered his last question.

Then, she took out her phone from her pocket and asked. "What is the number?" She positioned her fingers on the screen as she waited for him.

"Thank you so much." He replied and then dictated the number that he had memorized to heart.

Once the phone rang, the doctor placed the unit into his uninjured hand and helped him hold it to his ears. Then, she left him to give him some privacy while asking one of the nurses to search for the authorities.

"This is Ben." He answered when he heard the familiar voice. "I need your help." Then the line was dead, not needing to say more.

He would be tracking him down and sending a team to get him out of there.. One thing great about his family, they would leave no man behind.

#### [Chapter 499 - Now Or Never](#)

She had been sulking alone in her apartment, feeling the emptiness of the place. The impact of her friend getting married was just kicking in as loneliness enveloped her with sadness.

She already had finished unpacking, cleaning the house, and making herself dinner for one. Now, she sat in front of her food, unable to take the first bite.

"I miss you, Dani." She muttered to herself, grabbing her phone and staring at the screen.

She had wanted to call her multiple times since she arrived home. Her fingers were inching to press the call button on the screen, but she stopped herself.

She wanted to talk to her, not just because she was unhappy, but because she needed a friend. However, she did not want to interrupt her honeymoon. She probably was having the time of her life.

She called another friend, but some were already on a date or busy with something. She tried calling Andy, but he was also swamped with school work.

"Are you sure you don't want to get a quick bite and a movie?" She knew she should not be inviting him on a school day, but she needed company.

"I'm sorry, Jacky. But I really have to finish a lot of things." Andy instead promised to go out with her on the weekends.

She could not blame her brother. She did insist that his studies were more important than anything else. She just had to wait for the weekend before she could see him.

After a few bites of her already cold meal, she finally gave up. She could not stare at the four corners of her apartment, gaping at the walls and at the ceilings. She needed to get out of the place before she suffocated herself.

"Time to get back on your feet." She told herself as she faced the mirror, looking hot and sexy in her new dress.

She bought it thinking that she could use it after the wedding. Lance promised to take her out, but she never got the chance. She was rushed back home.

After checking her face for the last time, she grabbed her bag, wore her shoes, and was out of her apartment in record time. She decided she was going to paint the town red.

"Can I get you anything?" A man sat on the empty stool beside her, offering to buy her a free drink.

She was waiting for the bartender to attend to her. She had just arrived at a bar she and Dani used to frequent. At least before her friend became committed to her boss, turned boyfriend, now her husband.

She was not expecting to find someone that fast, not that she was looking. Either she looked hot tonight, or the man was desperate for a companion. She was too, but she was not about to admit that.

"I was thinking of a cocktail drink. What do you recommend?" She flirted just a bit like she used to do before but was doubtful if she was doing it right. She thought she had become a bit rusty.

The man signaled for the man behind the counter and ordered their drinks. She finally had the nerve to look to her side and examine his physical features.

But, she had to admit that he had a manly voice that could make any woman fall in love. She was not disappointed when she finally saw his face. He did look the part of a lady's man.

Not too handsome, in a celebrity way, but quite attractive indeed. His build was more of a lean muscle than the bulky ones. In her opinion, he probably had no problem in the women's department with his looks.

"Why are you drinking alone?" The man remarked as he handed her the drink he had bought. "Are we celebrating or mourning?" It was either of the two, he thought.

"I guess it can be both." She answered his latter question, taking her first sip of alcohol tonight.

She was still debating in her mind why she had to leave the house or why she felt the urge to drink and come out tonight. Or it could be a combination of different reasons.

But one thing was for sure, she was confused about her feelings for one man in particular. She wanted to tell Dani about what had happened earlier. But she could not burden her with her troubles and insecurities.

"Ok. First, I am Mark." The man introduced himself. "Second, what are we celebrating?" He raised his glass to her, offering to lighten the mood.

"Mark?" Hearing his name was a dumper on her spirit, but she was not going to let him ruin her night. It was not exactly similar, but she had used that as a nickname for him maybe several times in the past.

She started laughing, an uncontrollable laugh, putting her drinks down on the counter before she spilled them all over the place. She held on to her stomach as she tried to control her flurry of emotion.

She did not go to the club to get drunk and hooked up with some random man. She was genuinely looking for someone to talk to, meet new people, make some new friends. But the irony.

"What is wrong with my name?" He asked, curious about her sudden outburst of laughter.

Either he said something wrong, which he could not figure out, his name reminded her of something, or she was just loose in the head. But the latter was not likely, he believed.

"Nothing. Nothing is wrong with you." She stammered while chuckling still.

She breathed deeply and straightened her body, hoping for her laughter to die down. She should not be laughing at another person's expense. That was just rude as she reprimanded herself.

"I am sorry. Something just suddenly came to my head." She quickly apologized for her unusual reaction to his name, seeing the perplexed expression on his face. "I am not crazy or anything." She also added.

She could not blame him if he suddenly took his drink and ran away as far away from her. Even she believed she acted a bit insane a while ago.

"Then, what is it? Can you enlighten my curiosity? You also have not answered any of my questions." He stated as he continued to drink his beer beside her, not planning to leave just yet.

"As much as I enjoyed the laugh, I can't stay." She told him, putting her hand in his as an apology.

"Thanks anyway for the drink. It was nice meeting you, Mark."

She grabbed her bag from the counter, and before he could talk her out of her plan, she dashed out of the club and back to the open air and night sky.

With her two fingers inserted in her lips, she whistled as high pitched as she could, then a cab stopped just in front of her. A practical trait that a New Yorker should know.

She gave the address and laid back on the cushion on her back while waiting to arrive at her new destination. As she stared at the busy street, her mind kept debating with herself.

It was getting late, and she questioned if she should not be doing this now. But she had to before she lost all the nerves to do it again.

"It was now or never.." She told herself.

#### [Chapter 500 - In The Afterlife](#)

Once the lights were turned on, the darkness that hid him from her earlier was flooded with bright light, finally revealing his position. She had easily spotted him sitting behind a beam.

She noticed that he was hardly moving. She could only see a partial portion of his face and body from where she was standing.

Maybe he was sleeping, or he might have been badly beaten, she could only guess. However, she had to find out as she moved toward him.

"Alex, are you ok?" Dani shouted, running in his direction, but one of the men stopped her, blocking her path and grabbing her by her arms.

She struggled against him, shouting, flailing her arms, and even kicking, but it had been no use. The man was big and strong compared to her. But she did not give up as she continued to defy him.

It would seem that all her efforts did not even hurt him a bit. He did not even flinch when her elbow connected to his ribs. He was all solid muscles while she was skin and bones.

"Not so fast, my princess." The man she despised the most spoke behind her. "You see, your prince over there is currently sleeping like a baby. He would not be able to hear you."

He had him sedated after he had taught him a lesson or two. Now, his enemy sat unconscious on the floor, leaning on the wooden beam in the middle of the old barn, unaware of his visitors.

He could not let him see her. That would only give him hope. At the same time, he could not allow her to think that they could escape together. He wanted to teach her a lesson too.

"Let me go, you dumbass." She yelled at the man holding her, referring to him as all muscles but no brain. "You are really are a bastard, aren't you, Nick?" Directing her ire to her oppressor.

She would love to beat his ass again if only she could get an opportunity. But with his men protecting him, it would seem to be an impossible task.

"Easy, my princess," Nick smirked at her, proudly showing her that he had the upper hand. He would not make the same mistake by lowering his guard down around her.

"I am sure we can arrange something if you will only cooperate with me." He added before she could make another outburst.

He grabbed her chin and tilted her head until she was staring into his eyes. He could see her defiance, the strength of her will to fight him. But soon enough, he would break that.

But instead of agreeing with him, she spat on his face, letting him know what she thought of his suggestion. "You are really not making this easy on all of us." He said, wiping her saliva on his face with the back of his hand.

He walked further inside the room, stopping before her husband. With just a wave of his hand, his men followed, dragging her along with them.

Her heart dropped from what her eyes witnessed. Her husband was unconscious, with his face bruised and battered, with blood splattered all over his shirt and pants.

"What did you do to him?" This time, she could not stop the tears from falling down her cheeks. "Let me go. I have to check on him." She shouted and fought against her captor, but he did not even slack his grasp.

She could only imagine what they did to his body. He could be covered with bruises under his clothes, even some broken bones. She focused on his chest, assuring herself that he was still breathing.

"Well, I just thought of giving him a warning." He said, kneeling before him, tapping her husband on the cheeks. "He was indeed a tough one." He complimented before returning back on his feet.

"If you want to keep him alive, you already know what to do." Nick turned around and faced her. "I can have my doctor checked on him right away. Give him all the medical attention he would need."

He walked towards her while she remained silent, probably thinking of his offer. "I am a reasonable man. I am sure we can come up with a compromise." But there was no compromise.

He only wanted her to believe that she had a say in his decision. Everything was a trick to make her do what he pleased, nothing more and nothing less.

"It is all up to you now." He put his hand along the side of her cheeks, letting his fingers graze her skin.

"Just let him go." She was supposed to add that she would do what he wanted, but the words were stuck on her lips.

Her mind and her heart battled deep inside her, wanting to save the man she loved against self-preservation. Could she give up her freedom for his life?



In her final attempt, out of desperation, she wriggled her body out of the man's grip. But she only managed to hurt herself as he tightened his grip even more.

She finally did the one thing she thought she would never do. "Please, let me go." She uttered, barely making a sound, begging him. "Please, please, please. Let me see him." She repeated as her voice cracked from her despair.

She could feel her body losing strength as fear and agony took hold of her. Her fight earlier had finally deserted her as she felt the uncertainty of their situation.

Hope was the only thing keeping her together, but even that was slowly dispersing in the wind. Doubt had finally crept into her mind as anguish started to reside in her heart.

"What?" He asked, wanting her to say it louder. Most importantly, he wanted to hear her say the words. It was the only way he could break her.

"Please let me hold him. Help him. I will do what you want." She finally said louder in her broken voice as a sob escaped her lips.

"That was not so hard, wasn't it?" He mockingly said before signaling his man to let her go. "All you have to say is please."

His phone vibrating inside his pocket interrupted the moment. He quickly pulled the phone out of his pocket and saw the caller on the screen. He figured it must be something urgent.

"Watch her closely." He ordered the two men guarding her. "I just had to take this call." Not wanting her to eavesdrop on his conversation. He immediately moved away from them.

The man finally released his grip on her, but the suddenness made her lose her balance. She ended up bending on the floor. On her knees and hands, she inched her way closer to her husband. Taking advantage that Nick was preoccupied.

"Alex, this is all my fault." She gently touched his bruised face with shaking hands, and then her fingers grazed his broken lips. She wanted him to open his eyes, so she could ask him how he felt, but that was simply impossible.

Then again, in his condition, maybe being unconscious was a blessing in disguise, she thought. At least he would be spared from the pain of all his injuries.

Her tears only intensified when she realized that she might never see him again. If that ever happened, then would her life even be worth living.

"Alex, stay with me. I do not want to live without you." With trembling lips, she kissed him, afraid to lose him.

Then, she concluded that if she ever ran out of options, she would probably have a higher odds of being happy with him in the afterlife than continue living without him.