

Royal Contract 501

[Chapter 501 - Lived For The Hunt And The Kill](#)

It was late, but the team still worked on finding the couple. Searching every possible place that Nick might have taken them.

But they were not discounting the possibility of other entities making a play in this.

"Do we have any leads yet?" Ethan asked when Marcus walked through his doors.

He had decided to transform his office at home as a headquarters for their own operation. Although they coordinated with the authorities, he still wanted his own investigation.

He still believed that he still had on his payroll the best in the business. Sooner or later, something would come up. They would catch the person responsible and save his daughter and her husband.

"Not concrete yet. Some evidence pointed to a mafia gang, but our team believed they were just a decoy to mislead the investigators." Marcus frustratedly said as he ran his hand through his hair and expelled a volume of air out of his lungs.

He had little experience in kidnapping, but mostly, kids being ransomed. It was easier. The parents just had to provide the money and make the exchange. It usually ended up with everyone satisfied with the transaction.

This case was different since he believed money was not the ultimate motive of the mastermind, which made it more complicated and dangerous. The outcome could not be a happy one.

"Yes, Fred also said that earlier." Remembering the call he received earlier from the duke.

He was also sharing information with his friend about what his intel had gathered. That also worked the other way around. Fred had shared their findings, not wanting to hide anything from him.

The duke informed him of a lead that may point to Nick since he implicated Prince Edward in the possible abduction. It was not enough evidence to link him directly to the crime. But it should be a start.

"What about Edward? Do you think he might be involved?" Marcus questioned, not wanting to discount all possibilities.

He had never liked the guy, but he was unsure if he was capable of hurting his cousin. Anyway, anything was possible since he did have a motive to want Alex out of the picture.

"Personally, anyone is a suspect until proven innocent." Ethan could care less if he was the prince of the universe. "But Fred thinks Edward was being framed for the crime."

He was not giving anyone a free pass because he was family. If he ever found out that Prince Edward had even small participation in the abduction of his family member, then he would never spare his life.

He would guarantee that this prince would suffer the same fate or even worse than what Dani and Alex had gone through. He would not give him an ounce of mercy.

"What about our other contacts?" Ethan asked Marcus who was handling the situation.

He was glad that his son-in-law had Marcus as a friend. He had been more a brother to him than someone with his own blood. He was referring to Edward, of course.

"They are still working on finding us some new leads," Marcus stated as he dropped some papers on his desk. "I think you should also have to look at this."

He showed him a report that a particular buyer under a guise of a shell company was trying to convince some of the investors to sell their shares.

"So, Nick is using our situation to gain access to my company," Ethan mumbled in anger, slamming his hands on the desk in front of him. "He really had no shame."

In a game of war, in business, Ethan still believed in fighting with a bit of honor. When his opponents were down, he never felt the need to trample on their dignity.

He sometimes showed mercy by offering them a bit of leeway to start over again. He never believed in supreme power. It is a bit lonely and boring to be the only one on the top.

"Excuse me, Sir. But..." His secretary never had the chance to finish her sentence when another man barged into the room without permission.

"Sorry, Sir Ethan, for dropping by your office like this." The man in a bandage limped toward the desk, stopping beside Marcus.

When Ethan saw who it was, he quickly dismissed his secretary and welcomed him, offering him a seat in front of him. The man took it, finding it difficult to stand for long periods due to his current condition.

"Shouldn't you be lying down in the hospital? What are you doing here, Tim?" Marcus asked, not knowing if he should admire the guy for his tenacity or pity him for stupidity.

Tim was in no condition to go around and meddle with the situation. He should be resting and attending to his wounds so he could heal better.

But, as far as Alex had told him about him, he was as stubborn as an ox. Nobody could tell him what to do as long as he believed he could help.

"My boss needs me here, so I will stay here where I can be of service." Tim adamantly said, not taking no for an answer.

He had checked himself out of the hospital despite the doctor's orders. He could not lie still in that hospital bed when he knew he would be more valuable in helping out with the situation.

He had been in worse condition than this during his time in the service. Yet, here he was still. It would take more than a bullet to put him down.

"If you are sure that you are up for the challenge, then welcome aboard." Ethan would not decline any help he could get.

Tim had proven himself as one of the best in his field. He could certainly use his expertise in their situation. As long as he could use his brain, then he was welcome to help.

"I sure am," Tim said, standing up, ready to take on his next order.

But before anybody could speak again, Tim's phone rang, breaking the silence. He took it out of his pocket and answered it immediately.

The other two looked at him with anticipation when they heard him say a particular name, Ben. But, he rarely talked but mostly listened to the person on the other line.

"I think we have a situation." He finally said when he hanged up the call. "I will need your help to get Ben."

He just received word of Ben's whereabouts. He needed a team to get him. Although he said he was ok, it would be better to be ready.

Their enemies might have eyes that would be watching their every move. Once they had learned that Ben had survived, his life might be in danger again.

"Then, let us all make this quick and as quietly as possible. Tim, prepare some of your men. Marcus, handle all the logistics." Ethan started barking orders, wanting the new situation handled delicately as possible. But the urgency of their plan also demanded quick action.

He was just glad that the press still had not had a whiff of the situation. Or else their plans would be compromised.

He thrived in taking high risks and excelled in the face of danger. If this operation did not involve two significant people in his life, he would have enjoyed the thrill of this chase.

He always had lived for the hunt and the kill.

[Chapter 502 - Not Leaving Without Answers](#)

She arrived at his building with a mission, riding up the elevator with a purpose. But when she walked along the corridor, nearing his apartment door, she froze.

She could not manage to take the next step. Minutes or was it more had passed, but all she did was stare at the door. Suddenly, she regretted not taking more than one drink.

She started having doubts about her plans to confront him. She even forgot the lines she had been memorizing while on her way over. She came to see him so they could talk, but what was there to talk about.

Maybe she was just making a big deal of something that did not mean anything to him. She did not even want it to be a big deal herself. Then, why was she here about to knock on his door.

"Because there is seriously something wrong with him." She told herself, building up the confidence again to confront him. "You are just here to speak your mind and tell him what you think of him and his inappropriate action."

After her pep talk, she squared her shoulders, stood tall, and decided to talk to him as planned. She was already outside his door anyway, might as well try. Besides, he was the one who started this. At least she could try to end it.

"Come on, don't lose your nerves now." She talked to herself, positioning her hands up, fist poised on the wooden panel.

Forcing herself, she commanded the muscles on her arm to move her knuckle, but it barely made a sound. "You can do better than that." She mumbled to herself.

Closing her eyes temporarily, she pushed her hand harder until it made contact with the door again. Finally, it sounded like a more decent knock. She waited for a minute, peeking at the closed door, but nobody answered.

She was about to try again but changed her mind when he did not respond. She figured that either he was ignoring any visitor because he was tired, or maybe he was out.

But another thought came to her mind when his door remained closed. He might be entertaining a guest and did not want to be disturbed.

"What are you doing?" She asked herself frustratedly as she leaned her head gently on the cold hard surface. "He could be busy doing who knows what." Continuing to mutter quietly to herself.

She suddenly had no idea what she was thinking, barging into his place in the first place, almost in the middle of the night. She banged her head softly on the solid wood as she closed her eyes again.

Then, repeated a couple more times before resting her forehead again on the closed door, sighing in irritation, annoyed with herself. Because, in all honesty, she had no freaking idea of what she wanted from him.

"Same question." Someone suddenly spoke behind her. "What are you doing here, Jacky?" The voice sounded louder.

He was surprised to find her standing in his hallway. After the earlier incident, he swore she would never want to see him again. He even thought she might have condemned him to hell.

"Shit!" She hissed to herself, realizing that she was not alone in the corridor. She was preoccupied with her thoughts that she did not even notice his presence. "How long have you been standing there?"

She closed her eyes shut, suddenly feeling embarrassed to be caught standing outside his door, effortlessly recognizing the voice of the man who spoke behind her.

She took a deep breath and thought of an excuse, but her mind suddenly turned blank as she came up empty. All her thoughts of speaking her mind suddenly went out of the window.

She opened her eyes, straightened her body, and turned around until she faced him. But she lowered her eyes, avoiding any form of eye contact.

"Long enough." But he did not elaborate more as he stepped closer to his door. "Just came from work." Emphasizing the last word.

Somehow, his mind could tell where her mind was going when she made her last statement. It only stressed the reason why they could never be together.

She would never forgive and forget what he did to her. She would always associate him with the womanizer he was in the past. He had tried to step out of that shadow, but it still seemed to follow him wherever he went.

"I think I made a mistake of coming here." She immediately said, suddenly losing all her courage. "I am sorry, Marcus. I did not mean to disturb you, but I am leaving." Swiftly moving past him, not wanting to look into his face or for him to see hers, not giving him any further explanation of her presence.

Her cheeks must be like a rotten tomato from her earlier mortification. It certainly felt like it. She did not want to add more to her embarrassment.

She continued to walk toward the elevator, aware that he was still staring at her retreating back. But she was glad that he did not try to stop her.

But before she could reach the elevator doors, she slowly realized that she had nothing to apologize to him. On the contrary, it was he who should be apologizing to her.

"Wait." She shouted, fuming when she turned around and saw him opening his door. He did not even wait until she was gone before entering his apartment.

She was also enraged that he did not even feel the need to be sorry for his earlier action. She could remember, quite clearly, that it was him who initiated the first move.

He did kiss her on the plane. She only responded out of reflex. Then afterward, he abruptly pulled back as if he had been scorched by her touch.

Maybe he could not wait to get rid of her, she thought. She suddenly felt that what happened earlier was just a game to him..? She was here to find out because she was not leaving without answers.

[Chapter 503 - Jackass Son Of A Gun](#)

He halted on his track when he heard her shout. With his hand on the doorknob, he looked up to see what she was up to.

"What now, Jacky?" He asked, a bit exasperated with her.

He was glad to see her but at the same time relieved that she decided to leave. He was not up for another confrontation with her. Not tonight.

He was physically exhausted and needed much sleep. He could hardly keep his eyes open, much more discussed the merits of his action earlier.

He could already guess that her unexpected appearance in his apartment had something to do with the kiss. If he was not busy with other concerns, he might be thinking about it too.

"Actually, I am not sorry that I came here." She stormed closer to him, her eyes not wavering from his face.

Now, she knew she sounded like a lunatic but could not care less if she made a scene in the middle of the corridor for all his neighbors to hear. She would tell him what she thought of him and his stupid action.

"In fact, I think you should be the one saying your sorry for kissing me, then saying that it should not have happened." She rattled on, remembering too clearly what occurred on the plane earlier.

She continued to march in his direction while he stopped just outside the already opened door, not seemingly surprised by her outburst.

"Jacky, I already said I am sorry on the plane. But if you want to talk about this, maybe it would be better if we do it inside my apartment." He offered, not wanting the other three tenants on this floor scandalized.

Besides, he had a long day and a very tiring night. He volunteered to stay with the rescue operation tonight, but Ethan forced him to go home.

He did agree with him. Somebody had to show up tomorrow in the office and deal with the issues on that side of the fence. Ethan would handle the offense while he took charge of their defense.

But, he could not tell Jacky any of this without revealing to her the actual situation. For now, she would have to stay in the dark while he helped find their friends and catch the bad guys.

"Fine." She conceded, seeing the tired expression on his face.

She had never seen him with this look before. It was as if the world was on his shoulders. She always thought of him as the man who

She also admitted that it would be better to privately talk about their issues. Luckily, nobody from the floor witnessed her unladylike behavior.

She entered his apartment at his behest. Still, she showed him that she was not satisfied with his apology. Her face maintained a disgruntled expression as she walked to his living room.

She did remember his place. It looked exactly the same as when she was last came to visit. Well, except for a few pieces, here and there.

"Would you like to sit down? I am getting myself a drink. Maybe you would like one." He offered as he walked over to his minibar.

He was unsure if adding alcohol to his system would help, but he badly needed one, thinking that he might as well get the issue settled all at once.

He gestured for the seat and was glad that she finally had calmed down a bit as she settled on the middle of the couch. She never answered his question, so he opted to serve her one.

"I am sorry if I was caught in the moment earlier. I did not mean to kiss you." He said after taking a large gulp of his drink.

He walked toward the lone chair and sat on it, noticing that she had been silent since entering his apartment. He wished he could read her thoughts, but her expression was not giving him much.

"Did not mean to kiss me?" She looked at him incredulously, unable to believe what she was hearing. "Oh, I am sorry if I thought that it might have meant something." The words were rushing out of her mouth without her comprehending them.

Here she was beating herself up with that kiss when he just admitted that it did not mean anything to him. It was just a spur-of-the-moment response to an incident that she had caused.

"I meant I wanted it, but I knew I should not have." He interrupted her, surprised by the way she was acting.

He did remember seeing the way she acted around Lance. The way Lance had been attentive to all her needs. He was sure that they looked great together, even happy. He could not stand in her happiness.

"You have no business kissing me if you were just playing with my feelings." She continued, not comprehending what he had just said.

Marcus finally placed his glass down on the coffee table and focused his eyes on her. "I was not playing with you. I said I wanted to kiss you."

He swiftly moved toward her side and placed his hands on her shoulders. This forced her to stop and tilt her head to his until their eyes met.

"I want to kiss you." He was not talking about the kiss on the plane anymore as he stared into her eyes. He could clearly see the desire in them. Something that he thought he would never see in them again.

He could also feel the shallow breath that she quickly released from her lungs. If he placed his palm over her chest, he could guarantee that he would be able to feel the quick heartbeat underneath his skin.

"What?" Suddenly, it all made nonsense. She stared at him as if he was talking jibberish. "You wanted to kiss me." She misinterpreted that they were still talking about the last kiss they shared.

"Yes, Jacky, I did." He finally admitted, not caring if it was not she had come here to hear. In truth, he had no idea why she was here in the first place. "...and I also want to kiss you now."

He placed his hand on her cheeks, running his hand along her skin, stopping his fingers just beneath her chin. Then, with the palm of his thumb, he touched the softness of her red lips.

She had always been too good for a man like him. He never felt he deserved someone like her.. She was an angel while he was a jackass son of a gun.

[Chapter 504 - Coming Home](#)

She stared at him with hooded eyes as if she could not look away. She could hear his words, but her mind failed to comprehend them. One thing was running through her mind, wanting his lips on hers.

She longed to feel his arms around her once again. She had missed his body against hers. She wanted him to take her just like he did before.

"I am not sorry for kissing you." He continued. "I wanted to do it again."

He badly wished to lean over and touch her lips with his. To feel again what it was like to have her in his arms again. But he knew wishful thinking was far from reality.

"But I know I should not do it again. I should not have done it in the first place." Marcus defeatedly smiled at her while she remained silent.

From the way he was looking at her, he knew he could take her. He had her hypnotized by his charms, and she would willingly allow him to do whatever he wished.

However, once the spell was gone, she would eventually regret it. She would find herself in an awkward situation, blaming herself for being weak.

"Why?" She asked as if she was in a trance. It felt like it was just a dream. That nothing about what was happening was real. But she did not care. She wanted him. "What is stopping you?"

She had been denying her feelings for him for a long time, believing that she could move. She honestly tried. She almost thought she would succeed, with Sebastian, then with Lance.

Nonetheless, she still ended up alone. Not one of them came close to what she felt for Marcus. He was the only one who could drive her mad to the point that she was losing her mind.

"Because you are clearly with Lance now." He began, remembering seeing them together. "Then, you might regret this later on and hate me even more."

He had talked himself out of coming after her again, thinking that she would be better with someone like Lance. But how could he deny the strong pull he still felt for her.

"You think that I am with Lance." Something about what he said suddenly woke her up from her daze. It was like a cold pail of water was just dumped on her head, snapping her back to reality.

She swatted his hand away from his face and moved back away from him by a couple of feet. But her eyes never left his face as she watched his reaction.

"Yes, I saw you two at the party." He explained, then it dawned on him that he might have misinterpreted the situation. Based on her incredulous expression, she did not appreciate his assumption.

He ran his hand through his hair, feeling frustrated again. Maybe he was not thinking straight. His mind was, after all, deprived of rest and food. He just realized that he had forgotten all about dinner.

But he still kept his face focused on her.

"You saw me dance with Lance, smiled at his joke, then what, you add two and two, and you came up with ten." Her sassiness was back with a vengeance.

"Well, aren't you?" He was confused, but he believed he had jumped the gun. He probably screwed it up again with her without waiting for his response.

"Do you really think I will kiss you if I am involved with someone else?" She uttered in disbelief. "What do you think of me? I will never ever cheat on someone. I am not..."

She stopped before saying what she was about to say, suddenly feeling she had said enough. She did not intend to bring up the past. It had never been her intention.

"... like me." He finished the sentence for her. "I already said I am sorry about that. I was a dumbass for treating you that way. I regretted every day that I hurt you."

He dropped his head down, suddenly unable to look her in the eyes. This precisely was what he was talking about. His past actions would continuously hunt and bite him in the ass.

"But, it is not only me who was jumping to a conclusion. Just earlier, you were thinking that I might be in bed with another woman." He stated his conclusion to the statement she said when he found her at the door.

"No, I was..." She was about to deny it but swiftly changed her mind. "Fine. I am sorry, but can you blame me." She felt ashamed of her action, but she had a valid reason.

But then again, it was like a pot calling a kettle black, she thought. She also made her assumption without checking her facts. Now, she was more confused about her situation.

"No, I can't." He could only agree with her. She had a right to feel that way, anyway. "Anyway, if all you came here for was about the kiss. Then, I already answered your question."

He grabbed his glass and drank the remaining content, feeling the warmth of the liquid soothing his nerves. He believed the more he talked, the more his situation worsened.

It would seem like he was digging himself an early grave. It was time to end it while he had not reached the point of no return. He could do nothing more to remedy the situation.

"I guess I am done here. I am sorry for barging on you like this." She stood from her seat, not even touching the drink he offered.

Not that she was expecting anything would happen between the two of them. She had no plan of going back and reminiscing the past. She was done and had decided to move on.

At least, she had made it clear to him that he should not be kissing her whenever he felt like to. He already lost that right. Now, that should clarify things between them and end whatever she thought was still there.

"Jacky, for what it is worth. I am sorry for what I did. I only wish for you to be happy." He told her before she reached the door.

He could not keep fighting with her. It had to end sometime. He was hoping that they could finally move on after this. He was ready to let her go.

"I think I finally understand." She turned around before she could open the door. She smiled at him, finally ready to make peace with him.

When she learned she assumed wrong about him, she felt ashamed of her actions. She had been judging him ever since that night.

In truth, she had not seen him go out with another girl since then. She heard that he went on a date, but he never went beyond dinner. The date always ended without finishing in bed.

She knew this because Dani had told her things about him even when she was not asking. She believed it was an unconscious act on her part because Marcus was Alex's bestfriend. Marcus' name and life were bound to come up in their conversations.

Subconsciously, she might have forgiven him for what he did to her a long time ago, but her pride had prevented her from realizing it until now.

"What?" He asked, finally looking at her again. He had no idea what she was talking about.

"This." She walked back into the room.

Without another word, she sat on his lap and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. Then, her lips landed on where it was supposed to be all this time.. It was like coming home.

[Chapter 505 - Newsworthy Or Trash](#)

Her phone buzzed familiar tone, alerting her of an incoming call. She had barely shut her eyes since she had been working all night on a new story.

This royal romance piece was selling like a hotcake. A blazing story and a hot sensation the entire world was going crazy about.

Now, she wanted to strike while the iron was hot. She had to set up another interview with the couple and make most of their story. While the masses were craving a modern-day fairy tale.

"Who could be calling you in the break of dawn?" The man at her side mumbled in his sleep, clearly not happy to be disturbed.

He opened his eyes to see the view outside the window of the mild hue created by the sun as it overpowered the darkness. It was always a beautiful site in this location, but he still would like to return to his dreamless sleep.

He slumped back on the table with all the papers scattered around him while his laptop was precariously placed on the side. He had been used to this position since he started working for his boss as one of her researchers.

"Just go back to sleep. I will need you to work your magic later." Eida instructed as she grabbed her phone from the table and walked back to her office, leaving her team in the conference room.

The others just mumbled incoherently, sleeping all over the table, not wanting to ruin their sleep. Not one seemed to stay awake all night, except for her.

She could not blame them. They had been working hard on her stories since they had started covering the wedding of the century.

"All of you, go back to sleep." She would allow them some time to rest for now. She needed them with fresh ideas later when she finally had a full grasp of her situation.

She had requested her researchers to work overtime with this new story that she was developing. But so far, there were still a lot of issues she had to address.

Maybe this phone call would provide her with the answer that she needed. She still had to run this idea with the network and hoped for their support for her new program segment.

"Harlowe here. Yes, what do you have for me?" She answered her call once she was sitting on her desk, laying her back on her chair, finally feeling the fatigue of working all night without sleep.

She was looking forward to his report, hoping that it would give her something to work on with this new project she had come up with.

Then, she also had the other story she was working on. Her personal favorite, but she still needed more information about that one.

"I am sorry, boss, but I am afraid I came up empty." The man on the other line told her.

He could feel the tension on the other line as it remained quiet. In a few seconds, he knew that his boss would lose her temper. He was used to her outburst. It was more bark but no bite.

But he deserved it since he came up with nothing to show. He promised his boss results, but his hands were empty.

"What do you mean? Is the estate heavily guarded that you could not even come up with a single picture." She shrieked at the man, unable to believe what she was hearing.

She had him on her payroll because he was one of the best paparazzi in the industry. He knew where to look for a story and what angle to take.

He always provided not just pictures but beautiful photos that tell a tale. But he also gave newsworthy stories that would sell to people.

"The place was heavily guarded. Nobody could get in or out of that place." He explained to her.

He had tried to sneak in using all the tricks he knew, but he could not find a way. The place was tightly packed. The security was on high alert.

It was the first time he had experienced following a story in such a tight situation. It was as if something was seriously wrong. Alarm bells were ringing in his ears. His intuition was telling him that there was more to this story.

"Don't they even go out of the estate?" She continued, questioning his report, sounding a bit skeptical about the information he shared.

It was a honeymoon, not a prison, she thought. The couple was bound to be seen in public. They could not stay inside their bubble for the entire time they were in there.

"So far, the only going in and out of that place were the staff. But that is not all. I think they are hiding something." The man stated his findings. "My instinct is telling me that I should keep digging."

Well, it was still speculation but something that had spiked his interest. He had been snooping around the town, trying to get some info about the couple, but the funny thing was nobody could provide him one.

"Well, that is a bit unusual." She agreed, finding the entire situation odd. "I think you should stay on and find out if there is a better story behind this."

Newlyweds usually wanted to be alone, but it could not be this silent. It was as if everyone was working hard to keep it that way.

She agreed with his colleague. She could feel a larger story brewing in this small fire. If his instinct was correct, then she could expect a blazing story on the horizon.

"Give me a few more days. Maybe then, I will have something juicy for you." He promised. But this time, he would make sure that his word would be worth something.

He had been going around the small town, trying to sniff a story. It had been frustrating at first when he always came up with nothing.

Until he finally had a break. He heard one of the men working inside the estate bragging about seeing the royal couple inside the mansion.

But, it was still not enough for him to tell his boss. Until he had seen the couple with his two eyes, then he still had no story. He just had to meet up with this guy again to get more information.

"Come back to me as soon as you have something." She was a bit disappointed that she still had come short with a good lead.

She had set up an appointment for an interview with the couple once they came back from their honeymoon, but it was still yet to be approved.

She placed her phone back on the table and turned to look at her window. The view outside of her office was spectacular. She loved this small city.

She had been offered to work abroad, in bigger cities, but she just could not leave her home. She did not need to be in the big city to find her story. Her hometown already provided more than enough.

Another phone call interrupted her reverie, turning around to answer the buzz. Looking at the screen, she was glad that another one of her associates was calling. Maybe this time, he might have better news.

"Yes, what do you have for me?" She answered without the formalities. She needed a story, not pleasantries.

She had hired a man known to be the best in this job to track down one of her targets. She had strict instructions to follow all leads that might give her a story.

She had given him a nice leeway to work on, budgeting his research with a good amount of funding. She was not expecting this story to be as sensational as her other project.

But she was hoping it would give her some personal satisfaction. She wanted a piece of the man that humiliated her. Give him a taste of his bitter medicine.

"I did what you asked me to do. Even hired several people to help me out. And I had some news." He replied to her question with a bit of excitement in his voice. "I am sending it to you now."

He had been tailing his subject for several days now. So far, he found his questionable actions quite intriguing. He did not know the person of interest personally, but he was well known in his community.

He had gathered enough files for her to review and a breaking story.. Whether it was newsworthy or trash, then it would be up to her.

Chapter 506 - Motivation To Live

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

A series of loud noises came outside her window, jolting her awake. She never realized that she had fallen deep into sleep. She had been waking and turning all night as the scene she witnessed last night kept repeating in her head.

But maybe, her body had finally had enough as she eventually succumbed to exhaustion, rendering her unconscious. However, she was shaken by the gunshots being fired outside. Her tiredness was replaced with a renewed fear.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" Another set ensued, followed by a series of laughter. She turned to the window, trying to search for the source.

She could see that it must still be early, judging by the color of the sky. The sun must just have risen in the east. There was not much sunlight that could be seen reflecting on the trees.

She ran into the window, wondering what the raucous was all about. With fear running through her system, she looked out the glass partition, hoping that Nick had not done the unthinkable.

"Please." She pleaded to whoever might be listening to her prayers to keep Alex alive. She hoped that Nick stayed true to his word. To have a physician check on her husband.

She did not know until how long Alex could take a beating he just had yesterday. Any more of it might be fatal. She was not a doctor, but she knew a bit about some medical conditions.

When she finally saw the men on the other side of the building playing with their guns, she was slightly relieved. She did not see Alex anywhere near their location.

Alex might still be in the barn where they had left him last night or somewhere being treated. The last part, she hoped. It was the only thing that was keeping her sane at the moment.

She was still wearing the clothes she had last night, but she was in a different room. The men who took her back to the house did not take her back to the previous room she occupied.

"Come on, there must be something I can do." She moved away from the window and turned to the massive room.

She started checking the room, finally seeing it for the first time. It was an improvement since it had furniture besides the bed. But she noticed that there were no decorations around.

At least it had a beautiful functioning bathroom, a walk-in closet, a table, and a couch on the side. It must be a room that was frequently used by the old occupants.

He must have all the decorations removed, not wanting her to use them as weapons against him. As if that would stop her from inflicting pain on him.

She did her business in the bathroom and then prepared herself for the morning. She still felt sleep-deprived, but she had to prepare for anything that could happen.

"Where are you, Nick?" She mumbled in front of the mirror, not wanting any surprise coming from him.

Thankfully, Nick was a no-show last night. She was half expecting him to walk through the door and claimed that this was his room.

Fortunately, she did not see any of his things lying around. He must have slept somewhere else. But she wondered what happened to him.

After the call he took in the barn, he immediately left, just instructing his men to send her back to the house. She had not seen him again since then.

Whoever called him must have spooked him, she thought. She did see him tensed when he returned to the barn. His eyes seemed to be bothered, distracted by something else.

"Come in." She answered when a knock came on her door, watching it gradually open.

She was not scared because she knew it was not Nick. If it was him, he would not bother to knock. But she was still on guard. Fortunately, it was the security that was courteous to her last night.

"Your highness, I brought you breakfast." He smiled at her, placing the tray on the table on the other side of the room. Then, he quickly moved away, about to exit the room.

If only she could convince him to turn against his boss, maybe there was still hope for them. She could tell that he was different from the other guys he worked with.

He seemed to still have a soft spot in his heart for kindness. A little humanity left in his conscience. She could use that to her advantage if only she could talk to him alone.

"Excuse me, but if you don't mind, can I know your name." She asked him before he could leave. "At least a name I can call you."

She knew it was not likely he would give her his real name, but talking to a person using a name should establish a bond between them, a form of respect.

That stopped him from his track, turning around to face her. He looked at her as if he was seriously contemplating her question. Luckily, the other guy outside did not seem to care about what was going on inside.

"Samson. That is what they call me around here." He finally answered, giving her a friendly smile that was missing a tooth on the right side of his mouth.

She also smiled at him, satisfied that he responded. It was at least a start on her plan. But she agreed with his name since he did look like a Samson. He was a big man with long hair.

He could probably carry her without any effort at all, she thought, remembering the man that held her yesterday in the barn. He seemed to be a lot bigger than him.

"That is a nice name. Thank you, Samson, for the food." She returned a friendly smile at him, hoping that she could somehow get through to him.

He would use him to get her and Alex out of here. He was the only one she could think of capable of helping her escape, especially with Alex's condition.

If she could make him cooperate with her, she would promise to help him with his case. He would be given a decent judgment. A lesser punishment for his crime.

But first, she had to gain his trust. It would not be easy and should be handled delicately. She could not alert his colleagues about her plan to use him, especially Nick.

"Just doing my job." He answered before turning around and leaving her inside the room, locking the door behind him as he exited. He remained clueless about her intentions.

Now what, she thought as she sat at the table and began to eat her breakfast. Then, her thoughts went back to last night. She began to worry again about Alex and his condition.

But for now, she had to eat. She forced the food inside her mouth, chewing it even if her appetite had abandoned her. She let the food glided down her throat into her stomach without tasting it.

"I am going to get you out of here, Alex.." She kept repeating it in her mind, using it as her motivation to live.

[Chapter 507 - A Promise Not Meant To Be Broken](#)

"Are your team in place?" Ethan asked Tim, who had set up his own operation in one of the rooms in his mansion.

Ethan had given Tim the reins in handling the extraction of Ben in possible enemy territories. He was the expert, after all. Despite his injuries, he was still the best man for the job, although he had to work with his team behind the scene this time.

He needed Ben rescued because he was the last one to see his children alive. Moreover, Ben might be carrying valuable information to help them with their current situation.

"My team had already landed at the airport. They are now en route to the hospital where they had tracked the phone Ben had used." Tim reported to his current boss.

He did not mind taking orders from Ethan. He had high respect for the man for what he stood for. He was no different from his boss, and he would serve him just like he did with Alex.

He stayed tuned to the reports of his team through their secured communication. Every minute counted in a mission like this. So far, nothing much had happened, but he could not be too sure.

"Update me if you have more news." Ethan requested as he left Tim to deal with his job.

He also had to attend to his own problems, which were starting to pile up. Luckily, he had Marcus to deal with the company. He could focus on the other things that needed his attention.

He walked away from the room and away from his office too. He strode towards the long hallway and up to the winding stairs. Finally, he stopped outside a door, taking a deep breath.

He had to calm his nerves, appear strong, and think of the right words to say to her. He could not let her see him with an ounce of weakness or doubt.

"Laura, they said that you did not touch your breakfast." He looked at his wife with so much concern. She still laid on their bed, unmoving.

He looked at her and then at the table, and the food appeared to have already turned cold. He walked back to her side and sat closer to her, hoping that he could get through to her.

He wished he could do more, even promise her the moon, only to see her smile again, but he could not. He could not even smile himself, not until he had found their daughter and made the culprit pay.

As of now, his concern was for her. All the life in her seemed to be sucked out of her. Her eyes only reflected the anguish she might be feeling caused by this incident.

"I am not hungry." She finally responded after he repeated his statement. She had finally realized that her husband was talking to her.

She could not think of food at a time like this. She could only imagine what her daughter was going through. If her abductors were even feeding her. Was she tied up? What were they doing to her?

That was not the worse she could think of at the moment. She tried very hard not to entertain those thoughts. But when she closed her eyes, she could see all the worse possibilities.

"You barely ate anything yesterday. You should at least eat something." He insisted as he walked towards the table. He could not help but feel like it was his fault. "Do you want something else?" He tried again.

He should have been paying more attention to her. Instead, he had ignored her yesterday. Last night, he was too tired to check on her. He had fallen asleep in his office, only waking up this morning with a cramp on his shoulders.

However, he also needed to prioritize finding their daughter. Still, he felt that it should not have been an excuse. All his life, Laura had been there for him. The only time she needed him, he was not there for her.

"I said I am not hungry," Laura once again replied, putting more emphasis on her words. She just wished to be left alone. "Go back to your office. I know you have more important things to do." She said bitterly, thinking of all the times he had to be somewhere else.

Although she realized that he was only doing his best to search for their daughter. Still, she could not understand why he could not find her with all the resources at his disposal.

"Please, Laura. You have to eat something." He tried to appeal to her sensibility. "You are now compromising your health." He was afraid that she might fall into a deep depression if she kept up with this act.

He had never seen her like this before. Not during the entire time of their marriage. She had always been the rock that held their family together. Not when Dani rebelled against him nor when he had his health problem.

He could handle any problem thrown his way, even the abduction of his daughter, as long as he would think of it logically. But in an emotional dilemma, he was at a loss.

"How can you ask me to eat? How can you even be bothered with my health when our daughter is missing? Held by those criminals who might be hurting her at this very minute." Each spoken question increased in its intensity.

She was tired of thinking of herself.

Of how comfortable and warm was her bed...

Of how delicious the food was on her table...

Of how beautiful and expensive was her clothes...

She could only think of her daughter, who was out there, with her life in danger. That was if she still had a life. The thought finally broke her down as she started sobbing uncontrollably.

"Laura, you have to be strong for our daughter." He quickly pulled her in his embrace, wanting to console her in any way he could. "... for me." He whispered as he cradled her head in his chest, kissing the top of her head.

He knew he would not survive if he lost her too. His life only revolved around his family. He only strived to be the best because he had wanted to give his wife and daughter only the best.

Without them, nothing that he had worked hard for would have meaning. All of these were just pieces of paper and junk that he had no more use for.

"I had been at your side through all this time. I had witnessed you perform so many impossible things in this lifetime." She said softly in between her sobs.

She looked up to him, gazing into those beautiful eyes that she had loved all her life. She pleaded with him to do this one last thing for her.

"I only ask you to bring our daughter back unharmed this one time. Please, that is all I ask of you." She begged him.

She had never asked anything from him. Never demanded his time, his money, or his love. She only waited for what he would give her and never asked for more.

But this time, she needed to hear him promise her that he would fulfill this one wish that she asked of him. To grant her the only thing that she wanted in her lifetime.

"I promise. I will." He swore to her. He was a man of his words. His honor was his pride.. This was a promise not meant to be broken.

[Chapter 508 - Numb The Pain](#)

Ben had to use a different surname when asked about his identity. He should not have given his name in the first place, but he was still dazed by the drugs at that time.

However, he had a contingency in cases as such. He had some backup plan in tight situations and moments like this. He always came prepared for any circumstances he might encounter when on a mission.

"Are you sure that is all the information you can provide for us?" The police who came to see him asked the question.

The two police officers stood at the edge of his bed, getting his statement about the incident that happened to him. It was a standard procedure in most countries for gunshot wounds to be reported.

They tandem kept looking at each other as they assessed his statement. Maybe they were trying to figure out whether he was indeed telling the truth. After all, he was a foreigner in their land.

"I think that is most of what I remember." He told the police officers who were handling his case.

He already knew that the incident would be investigated, so he had requested the police immediately. In that way, they would not suspect that he was hiding anything else, throwing them off from the truth.

He had concocted some story to mislead the police away from the actual scene. He had made up a lie about being robbed and dumped on the field where the boy found him.

It was a usual crime in this part, so his story was not out of the ordinary. The police would not suspect anything amiss from his narrative as long as he did not give them a reason to do so.

"Just to put your story straight. You are here for a vacation. You just arrived yesterday when some men took your things at gunpoint." The first police stated, repeating what he said for confirmation.

When he nodded in agreement, he continued. "When you tried to get your passport, one of the men shot you. It was the time that you tried to run away. Luckily, the boy found you."

When he verified that everything was correct, the officers started explaining the procedure of the case. They told him they would run his identification to the system.

Then, they would investigate the crime scene to find any evidence that would collaborate with his story. If everything checked out, then they would continue with the investigation.

"I hope that we can resolve this issue soon. Thank you, Officers, for helping me out." He confirmed the statement he had just given and thanked the officers who responded to his case.

He would offer his hand to shake theirs, but his body was still very sore. Moving was still an effort he could not afford. "I will shake your hands, but it is still painful." He smiled at them, gesturing to his wounds with his fingers.

"Then, we will let you rest now. We will come back as soon as we have a lead." The other police officer said. "In case you remember something, don't hesitate to call."

The police officer handed him a card with a name and a number. Then, they thanked him for his cooperation as they walked out of the door, leaving him alone in his room.

"Thank you again, Sir." He said before they were out of his sight. It would seem that they had not suspected anything amiss from his story. But he still needed to be prepared.

Fortunately, the small town he landed in was not equipped with high-tech equipment and facilities. The police still needed to manually check on his credentials.

That would at least give him enough duration to formulate a plan in case his extraction had not arrived yet by the time they returned.

He only hoped that his team would come soon enough before the officers came back with the result of their investigation. He had no problem if the police found his story bogus. They could lock him up in a cell.

But if the people who wanted him dead learned of his whereabouts, then it was a different story. The police station might be crawling with moles and rats that would sell his location for a price.

"Fuck!" He shouted when he tried to move his body and get out of bed. He twisted in pain and heavily breathed as he tried to recover.

The drug that the boy injected him was starting to wear off. He could feel his muscles move again, but likewise the excruciating pain of his injuries.

But he could not lie down and wait for rescue. He had to figure out what to do if his team did not arrive on time. He looked around for anything he could use as a weapon, just in case he would need one.

"Sir, you should not be moving." A female nurse came inside his room in a rush to stop him. "Your wounds are still fresh. It might bleed again if you keep forcing your body to move."

She helped him back into his position, leaning back again on the pillows. She checked the bandages, looking if his movements caused any bleeding. Thankfully, his wounds appeared to be intact.

"Can you give me some pain medication? It is starting to hurt like hell." He asked the nurse, hoping it would help him with his movement.

He could not stay like a sitting duck in this hospital, knowing that trouble was coming. He had no idea where his team was. Most importantly, he had no clue if his enemies were already outside looking for him.

"I'm sorry, Sir, but you already had some pain medication, and I can't give you more." The nurse informed him. She continued to check on his vitals before leaving the room again.

"By the way, your father called while you were sleeping. He wanted you to know that he is on his way with your family." She stopped on her way out, suddenly remembering the message.

"Did he say anything else?" He wished he was able to talk to him. It would give him a clear idea of their plan. Still, he was thankful that they were already coming.

"I don't know. That was all the doctor told me. She was in a hurry because of another surgery. Maybe I will ask her again once she comes by." The nurse smiled at him before leaving his room.

It gave him a little peace of mind that his team was on the way. But it did not mean that he should slack his guard. They still might be a few minutes away or hours.

There was still every possibility that those responsible for the abduction were still looking for him. He had to be prepared for them if they ever came to finish the job.

"Damn." He tried to turn on his side, but it took all his energy to accomplish this slight movement.

This would not have happened, he thought, if Tim was not injured. He should have been the one on the plane with the couple.

Tim would have known that there was something wrong with the crew. But he was not giving up. He would make up for his mistake.

He had been injured before, and he survived. He just needed a little push to pump up his adrenaline.. Then, it would help him numb the pain, and then he would be good to go again.

[Chapter 509 - Pawn In The Game](#)

As Ben waited, his mind went to the operation of their enemies. From what he observed, the mastermind behind this was not just anybody. Probably not some tiny fish, just looking for a big buck.

To pull through a job like this, they must have a wide connection and a web of resources. From how the men acted with precision and accuracy, he would say they were highly trained men.

He was just lucky that he got away. Fate still did him a favor by saving his life. Now, he had to be careful not to waste the opportunity to survive.

"I see that you are still alive." A voice came from the door, startling him awake. He quickly moved, causing him to agonize in pain, and dropped back on the bed in his previous position.

He did not realize that he had dozed off again. His efforts to move again must have exhausted his body, or the pain medication given to him made him drowsy, causing him to fall into a slumber.

Whatever it was, he had failed and lowered his guard down. Fortunately, the man standing in the doorway was a friend. His team had finally arrived to take him home.

"You had no idea how happy I am to see you, Joe." Ben smiled at his long-time friend and mate. "Where are the rest of the guys?" He asked, seeing that his teammate was alone.

Joe had joined the team before him after they had decided to leave the service. He was one of the people who convinced him that working for Alex would be better than trying his luck somewhere else.

So far, he believed he had made the right decision despite his present circumstance. Besides, whether he had worked for some security service or went back to the force, his life would always be in constant danger.

"They are checking the perimeter for any threats while we arranged your exit, out of here," Joe said as he entered the room and scouted the place as if he was looking for something.

He was not bothered by his movement since it was the standard procedure to secure any room.

"Glad to hear that," Ben said, feeling a bit relieved to see a familiar face.

A few minutes ago, he was a man drowning in shark-infested water. Now, he was being rescued with a lifeboat. He started to relax his stance a bit and slow down his breathing, knowing that he had some backup to protect him.

He never did like it when he was left vulnerable. He had always had taken care of himself. But in times like this, it was essential to have a partner he could trust.

"I thought you were on vacation." He asked, curious that he suddenly showed up with the team.

Then, his mind wondered what he was doing here. He was supposed to be on leave with his family. But then again, it was not unusual for them to be recalled when there was an urgent mission.

This incident was indeed a mission that would need all hands on deck, especially when Tim was down and he was missing in action. The team would need someone like him who had the most experience.

"You know, when I heard that you were shot, I knew I had to come and help rescue you," Joe said as he walked towards him. "I am glad that it did not seem that bad." He pointed to his wounds.

He stood by the side of his bed, the same spot as the two police officers occupied earlier. Then, his partner looked at the tube attached to his body.

"I did not know that you care that much about me." Ben jokingly said, but his mind was already working overtime. "I had been through worse." He told him, studying the man standing at his side.

His instincts were telling him that something was off with his partner. He had been on leave for almost a month, and he suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

He carefully observed his movement, hoping that his intuitions were wrong. Although most time, his hunches had saved him more times than he could count.

However, he could not afford to accuse a teammate of wrongdoing unless he had any proof. Gut feelings were not valid evidence, despite the warning bells going off in his head.

"Of course, buddy, I do care." Joe moved closer to him, sat on the edge of his bed, and stared into his face. "You always have been tough." He said with a bit of undertone of distaste.

He always liked the young man. He had seen a few of his youth in him. Even took him under his wings when paired together. Nonetheless, Ben had become a problem for him.

He had turned to be a thorn in his side that kept on stabbing him until he had been bleeding. He had taken what was supposed to be his, but he was not letting him anymore.

"You see, everybody thinks that you are the next big shot."

His hands extended in front of Ben, touching the hose that supplied the dextrose fluid into his veins. He smiled as if he was thinking of something funny.

"What are you talking about?" Ben asked, confused with his words. "Anyway, where are the others?" Alarmed at the way his partner was acting.

Joe seemed to be talking in riddles because he did not see anything funny in what he said. But he was starting to suspect that something was seriously wrong with this picture.

"Don't pretend that you are clueless to what I am talking about. Everybody knew that Tim was grooming you to replace him in the ranks." Joe said with bitterness in his voice. "Now, you think you are better than me." He finally laughed, but it was filled with hatred.

He had been working his ass off for the team, only to be bypassed by this young candidate. He had taught him most of everything he knew, even saving him in one of their encounters.

"That is not true." Ben denied his accusation. Then, it finally clicked on his head. "Why?" He asked him. "Why would you betray us? Did they offer you more money?"

He figured it out. He was the mole in their lineup. He always thought that not one of them would ever be able to betray the other. They had considered themselves not just as a team but as family.

Even Alex never treated them as anything but a friend or a relative. Everything that they would ever need, Alex was there to provide.

Tim had been the father of the team. He had taken care of all of them. Giving them a job when they needed it. Providing support whenever they needed one.

"Money, power, recognition..." Joe said with a laugh. "Everything that working for the team would never give me." He spat out at him. "Do you think that I will be working for you? I made you, kid." He said, full of contempt for him.

He could enumerate several things that he had gained since he had turned to the other side of the fence. He was now in the good graces of the big boss. After this, he would be living like a king.

"How can you work for a man like Nick?" Ben voiced his disappointment to the man that had been his mentor.

He still could not believe that he would betray them. But, at this point, he should have known better than to give his entire trust to anyone.

He wanted to punch him. Teach the old man some lessons. Maybe it would bring back his sense to him. But he could hardly move his body, much alone defend himself against him.

"Nick?" Joe laughed louder upon hearing his name. "I am not working for that foolish man."

He grabbed his injured arm tightly. Ben screamed in pain, but he placed a cloth on his mouth to shut him up. He did not want to alert everyone on the floor of what he had planned for him.

"Who are you working for then?" He was surprised to hear him denied the mastermind in this entire plot.

However, if he was being paid by the man to keep his silence, then he would surely not tell him that he was working for him. But, he was not expecting that a man, who he had known most of his career life, would disgrace his honor by working for a criminal.

"If you think that you have become a knight, I am sorry to tell you. But, you are all just a pawn in the game, and it is just beginning.." Joe said in his low voice as he leaned closer into his body.

[Chapter 510 - Through The Grapevine](#)

He woke up, unable to open his eyes wide, with a slight headache and an aching back. He stretched his arms only to realize that he had fallen asleep on the couch.

He looked at the source of the noise that had woken him up and saw his phone buzzing. It was his alarm notifying him of an early meeting.

"Uhhmm." He sighed as his body still refused to cooperate with him. He could not blame him. He was indeed very exhausted.

He shook his head to clear his mind of the sleep and finally remembered what happened last night. He looked around, but he was alone in the room.

He began to wonder if it was just a dream, tapping his cheek to assure himself that he was wide awake. But when he inspected the room from his point of view, he did not see any sign of her.

"Jacky." He called as he stood, twisting his body from left to right, even his neck, down to his shoulders, to get rid of the stiffness of his muscles.

He noticed that he was still wearing his clothes minus the coat, tie, shoes, and socks. He only remembered loosening his tie and unbuttoning the top buttons of his shirt.

Maybe it was Jacky who helped him out of some of his clothes. But he wondered she could be because he could not find her anywhere.

He walked towards the kitchen and found a pot with hot coffee already prepared on the counter.

"Jacky." He tried again, but the place remained silent.

He just confirmed that she was in here. She was not just a figment of his imagination. Although where she went was the question.

He took a mug out of his cabinet and returned to the counter. When he lifted the coffee pot, he found a note underneath. Obviously, he knew where it came from.

Looking at her handwriting, he knew that she had left the note for him. He immediately lifted it up and read the content. He could not help but smile at the first and the last part.

Marc was written first before it was scratched off. Then, she changed it to his full name. He wondered what was wrong with her. But then again, he was thinking of Jacky.

Everything was wrong with her, he thought. The exact reason why he was... But he stopped his thought, contemplating if that was it. He was crazy about her. He finished his deliberation, returning to the message. Rereading it one more time.

I am glad that we had our talk.

I am sorry I had to leave early, but something came up in the office. I wanted to wake you up, but you look so tired. Can I just make it up to you with a coffee?

Then...

Can I take you to dinner tonight?

J

He folded the paper and placed it back on the table. He drank his coffee, still wearing a smile on his lips. Then, his phone rang again. He remembered that he also had to go to work.

It would be a long day. Then, the thought of dinner came to his mind. He would have loved to dine and wine her, but for now, it would have to wait.

He just hoped that she would understand that he would not make it to dinner tonight and not take it the wrong way. He suddenly wished to tell her the truth, but that would only complicate things. He just had to make a better lie.

"Can you give me an update on my appointments today?" Marcus said to Alona as soon as he stepped inside the office.

He had never dreamt of stepping in Alex's shoes before, but now he had no choice. Whether he liked it or not, he had to take over his position while Alex was indisposed.

As far as everyone else was concerned, Alex was on his honeymoon with his lovely wife, having the time of their lives. No one had to know the truth, or it might cause a series of problems for the family and the company.

More importantly, it might further endanger the lives of his friends. He had to use his best asset today and the following days until they had found them. His ability to wear a poker face.

"The board meeting is already set in thirty minutes." Alona, Alex's secretary, explained to him.

Then, she enumerated the next meetings he had to attend for the entire day. She even left at least three pages of his schedule for the rest of the week.

"Thanks, Alona. Please be patient with me because this would be a long week for the two of us." Marcus gave her a head up, apologizing in advance.

He could already see him banging his head on the wall at the end of the week. He was not cut out to be the CEO. He was contented to just follow Alex's lead. But for his friend, he would do this.

"I'm sure you will do just fine," Alona answered him with a reassuring smile.

She had seen him work with Alex. She was confident that he would manage this company just like her boss. She had no doubt about it.

"Thanks," Marcus replied to her before sitting down on his temporary chair. He still had to prepare for the meeting. Then, he remembered something.

"Alona, would you mind doing me a favor?" He stopped her before she could leave the office.

She turned around and looked at him. "Of course, anything." She answered back. "What is it?"

"Can you send flowers with an apology that I will not be able to make it to dinner tonight?" He shyly stated, knowing what his reputation was before.

He was not aware if she had been privy to his past, but the smile on her lips told him that she was. But he had no time to explain to her that this was different.

This was a regular recurrence in his office before.. He believed his secretary might have shared this small information about him through the grapevine.

