

Royal Contract 591

Chapter 591: Caught red-handed

"I want you to watch him. Report to me whatever you will learn about his actions." He answered when asked about Samson.

He would deal with him personally. If he proved his loyalty to him and the group. He would reward him with a higher position in his rank.

Otherwise, Samson would end up at the bottom of the sea, where he would rot for eternity. No one would even know he existed in this world, and no one would miss him either in this lifetime.

"What about the couple?" Mike asked, still concerned about what they might know of the organization.

Although current reports still indicated that the couple had not shown knowledge or interest in pursuing a case against them, he still believed he had to dig deeper.

He could not allow any hidden surprises to catch them unaware. Cases like this could be tricky. Last-minute evidence and witnesses could be crucial in winning the case and convicting the criminal.

In this case, all blame should point to one person alone. The unlucky beneficiary of the accusation was no other than Nickolas Travis. He concocted this entire crime as far as they were concerned.

.....

"As long as the two remained clueless or shut their mouths if they knew anything, they could keep their heads on their shoulders." He told his old partner.

At the moment, he would like his people to lie low. He only gave tasks to those he could trust. The situation was very delicate and should be handled discreetly and efficiently.

He would avoid any confrontation with the couple in the meantime. Not when the situation with the authorities was hot. If there was no reason for him to intervene and take matters into his hands, he would gladly stay quiet on the side.

He did not want the authorities snooping around his backyard if they suspected his involvement in the case. He needed to distance himself from the couple but make sure Nick took all the blame for everything.

"As you wish." Mike also agreed with his plan. He also would not stir any trouble when it was not necessary, but he still advised him to take some precautions.

He discussed a few more things with his former partner regarding a few legal matters and concerns with the underground organization.

Although they gathered a few glances and greetings from the other diners, they did not see any problems so far. They appeared like they were just having a casual lunch between two friends.

"Anyway, I will not keep you anymore. I know you still have a lot to do." He told Mike, glad that he finally had his partner back to support him.

In his current position, he needed people he could count on. Men that he could trust with his life. Mike was one of them. He would willingly put his life for him, just like Mike would sacrifice his life for him.

"It was nice to be back," Mike said to him, happy that he was once again serving the man he owed a lot of his success today. "Then, I will see you around."

He dropped his napkin on the table as he shook his friend's hand as he bade goodbye. A show for the others to watch, an ending to a reunion of old friends. But to them, it was just the beginning of a long partnership.

"You go ahead. I will just need to make a phone call." He told his pal, letting him leave before him.

He grabbed his phone, pressing a number. He still needed to deal with a few loose ends in this case. He could not allow anything to jeopardize his position.

Just a few tables away from his location, another commotion was happening at the exact moment. The owner was showing her new guests to their table.

"I hope you will enjoy our specials." She personally accommodated them, knowing that they were Haley's guests.

Since Haley helped her renovate her place, customers started coming and noticing her restaurant. The restaurant was almost on the brink of bankruptcy, but with her help, she was able to recover.

Haley swore she loved her food. So, she helped her with the renovation. She insisted on paying her for the expenses, but Haley only allowed her to cover the materials through a loan.

"Haley, speak only of good things about your food," Dani stated as she settled on her seat with Alex's assistance.

Dani told the owner how Haley was bragging about the quality of food that the restaurant served. She learned that this restaurant was one of the first establishments Haley had helped, which inspired her to create her foundation.

"Well, I can't wait to dig in." Alex also joined in the conversation, sitting next to his wife. While Haley sat across from the two of them.

He would have loved to talk more about the current topic, but his stomach growling indicated it was time for something else. He needed sustenance soon.

"I think this young man can't wait any longer." The owner teased him, making everyone laugh on the table, including Alex.

After ordering the specials, the owner finally left them on their table to proceed to the kitchen to have their food prepared. The three continued talking about the foundation and their plans.

"I will check the place this week. If you can give me the blueprints of the previous plans, it would be helpful." Haley explained to them.

She told them about her intent to convert their original plan of building a house for a family to something that would be more fitting for a foster home.

But to save on materials, labor, and time, she would need to see what was already done with the place. Then, she could work on redesigning it to work according to the standard required by the law in this case.

She did not want to waste time and money if she had to demolish and start over again. It was better to adjust to what was currently done and work from there.

"I agree. Let me have my team call you for everything you will need." Alex offered, so they could facilitate the construction of the new project.

He did not believe in delaying it any longer than necessary when everything was set. He would help in any way he could as long as it would make her wife happy.

Seeing the passion in her eyes, the happiness this new endeavor had brought to her face, the smile that seemed to brighten up the room. It was all worth it.

"What is wrong?" Alex noticed that his wife was silent, and her smile faded as her eyes fixed on someone on their other side.

He followed his gaze and recognized the man on the other table. He had met him several times before but never did get a chance to have a meaningful conversation with him.

"Is it ok if I greet him and ask him to join us if he is dining alone?" She remembered the kindness he showed her when she went back to work. She only wished to return the same gesture.

When Alex nodded in agreement, seeing nothing wrong with it, she stood up and walked toward the man who had been a mentor to her.

"Excuse me, Gerald." She approached and greeted him when she noticed that he was done with his phone conversation.

She waved his hand to him, trying to catch his attention. When he finally looked up, he seemed surprised to see her, standing on his other side.

She could not blame him when he seemed preoccupied with his thoughts. Although she did not plan to sneak up, he just did not notice her coming over to his table.

But, she could not help but feel bad for what she did, seeing the reaction on his face. His eyes bulged a bit, and his expression changed. It appeared like he was suddenly afraid or guilty of something.

"Dani, I am sorry. I did not see you." Gerald immediately responded, quickly recovering from his shock.

"How long have you been standing there?" He quickly straightened up and greeted her back.

He was left wondering if she had heard anything from his conversation. He was not expecting to see her in this restaurant at this time. He believed that she never frequented this place.

Now, he could only wonder if his secret had been discovered.

Did she hear any of his conversations?

Was he caught red-handed?

Chapter 592: No one would be the wiser

She felt slightly guilty for surprising him. It was not her intention. She only stood on the side as not to disturb him or eavesdrop on his conversation.

“Not long,” Dani assured him, moving from his side to the front of the table.

Gerald quickly stood from his seat to offer her one. “Will you join me for lunch?” Pulling a chair for her beside him.

He quickly set aside his musing as he attended to her. He would not mind eating another meal if she joined him. He could not let an opportunity like this pass by.

However, his mind still would not stop thinking if she had seen him dining with his friend, Mike. But if she had just arrived a few minutes ago, she might not have seen him.

“Actually, I am here to invite you to join us.” She pointed at the table not far away from where she stood. “I am having lunch with my husband and a friend when I notice that you are alone.”

She tried to explain why she had come over to his table. She appreciated his offer. But it was her turn this time to do a good deed.

.....

She assumed that he had not eaten anything yet. But the slight smudge of watermark on a recently cleaned table indicated that he must be done having his lunch.

“Oh!” He remarked, turning his head in the direction of his hand. He quickly acknowledged her husband, not wanting to appear anything but friendly.

As much as he wanted to avoid the couple as he originally planned. He contemplated if it was a better idea to join them instead.

As the saying went, keep your friends close and your enemies closer. Were they friends or enemies? That remained to be seen after his careful assessment of the situation.

He could certainly use this opportunity to get near the couple. He could exploit this growing friendship to his advantage. If he wanted things done better, he should do it himself. That was what his father always told him.

“But if you are finished, I don’t want to keep you from your busy schedule.” She felt slightly awkward, seeing that she might be interrupting his busy schedule. “I am sure you have more important things to do than join us for lunch.”

Judging from his table, he must have an early lunch date with a client. Now, he must be in a hurry from the call she observed earlier. It felt like she just interrupted him from an important matter.

“No, not at all.” Gerald quickly replied to her. “I will love to join you and your companion.” He added, finally deciding what course to take.

He loved to take on the challenge of spending time with them. It would be interesting to see what would happen during the meal. He would like to know what he would learn from the couple during their conversations.

"Then, we are delighted to welcome you to our table," Dani responded with a friendly smile, glad that he accepted her invitation.

She gestured for him to follow her, but he excused himself for a second to make another phone call. He promised to join them in a minute or two.

Dani returned to her table with a smile at her husband. She was happy that she could return the favor he had shown her. Then, an idea also occurred to her as she neared their table.

"I just convinced him to join us," Dani told Alex, who assisted Dani back on her seat. "I really want you to meet him. He is my boss and good friend." She directed her attention to Haley.

She would like to introduce her friend, Haley, to her other friend and boss, Gerald. She was not playing matchmaker. It was not her initial intention, but who knew, maybe they were indeed a match.

Both of them were single and available as far as she knew. Haley was not in a relationship, and so thus Gerald. They could both use an introduction.

"If he is a potential client or donor. Then I might be interested." Haley jokingly responded, knowing that she was not looking for anything else in the meantime.

But, she could not offend her friend and her husband by declining to meet their friend. It would be rude and uncharacteristic of her. She had always been a friendly person.

"He could be a potential donor since he loved to do some pro bono cases with me," Dani explained to her friend.

She had seen how many people he had tried to help with his cases. Winning them one by one, without waiting for anything return. To her, he was a magnificent lawyer.

Gerald had truly inspired her to continue with her mission. To change the justice system and help the oppressed people who did not have a voice in the rules of the law.

"I am sure that anyone who will hear your pitch will never hesitate to donate to your cause." He told her, assuring her that meeting Gerald would be fruitful for her foundation.

He was already donating to some other organizations, helping the different sectors of society. Still, he would never hesitate to give more to those who would badly need them.

"Here he comes," Dani warned the two who were still discussing the man in the suit on his way to their table.

Gerald stopped in front of them and greeted the group. Dani automatically introduced her husband, but they already knew each other from previous encounters.

Then, she introduced her friend, Haley, to her boss, Gerald. They shook hands, and Gerald helped Haley back to her seat like a true gentleman.

Now, Gerald sat across from Alex, sitting beside Haley on the table. He did not mind since he was here to observe Alex. But, he could use Haley as a cover for this little get-together.

"Haley is involved in many charitable foundations. Maybe you might be familiar with some of it. At the moment, we are talking about a new project." Dani told Gerald, letting him in the topic of conversation.

She believed that the more people who would want to get involved in the project, the better. It would provide more support and funding for the beneficiaries.

"You know me, Dani. I try as much as I can to help in any way possible. If you need my help in this. You can count on me." Gerald offered, appearing genuinely interested in the subject matter.

He had hidden his real identity through his career and many charitable works. Who would think that he, a reputable lawyer who defended the masses and helped them in their needs, would be a criminal? No one.

Everybody praised his name in broad daylight for his accomplishment but cursed him at night for his illegal activities behind the shadows of the night.

"Really?" Haley could not contain her excitement that another one had just pledged his support to her cause.

She could not believe her luck today to have three prominent figures interested in helping her. She immediately shook the hand of the man who was sitting by her side, thankful for his help.

"Anything to help. If not for these people, I will be nothing." He did speak the truth.

He knew his underground businesses flourished because of most of the people he was helping. Some of them were involved in most crimes happening on the street.

Gerald observed the man sitting across from him, remaining a bit silent. He wished to see his reaction to his presence. He wanted them to be friends and had no wish to poke the bear.

He did not want any of them to suspect anything suspicious about him. So, in this case, no one would be the wiser.

Chapter 593: A warrior princess

Eida had changed her clothes countless times, yet, she was still not contented with the result. She looked again in the mirror, checking the next dress she tried on.

She thought it was still lacking something, yet the others she already put on were too over the top. She needed something that screamed elegance but subtly emphasized her sexy curves.

"Here." Her assistant handed her another set of clothes to try on, placing them on her bed.

Then, she sat down on the edge of the bed, watching her boss sort through the pile. Her boss had many clothes to choose from, and most of them would be good enough to wear in her opinion.

She could not understand why her boss was fretting about this meeting. She had never seen her in this mood before. Usually, she would pick a dress without care then be done with it.

"I don't think so." She said to the first dress she picked from the pile. Then, disregarded almost half of it, leaving the rest to try on.

One by one, she put them on, looking at herself in the mirror. But nothing seemed to satisfy her fancy. She could not decide on any of them. Until she was down to the last one.

.....

It was the only piece left on her bed. A new dress she had bought out of impulse but had not worn yet. She put it on quickly, turning around to see how it fit her.

"Wow, you should definitely wear that." Her assistant uttered in amazement, admiring the new piece of clothing.

She certainly thought that her boss looked great in the dress. It was a gorgeous dress that could make a man take a second look at her and drool over her.

"You think?" She looked at her assistant, raising her brow in question.

If she was going to be on time, she had better decide soon what to wear. She could not go through all those clothes again to pick another one. And, there was no more time to buy a new one.

She looked at herself again on her reflection, musing at what stared back at her. As she scrutinized more closely, she began to see the appeal of the clothes that wrapped around her body.

"Yeah, I think you are right." She said to her assistant, turning around to give it a final look.

She finally agreed that it was indeed perfect to what she was aiming for tonight. It was classy but just a bit slutty. Finally, feeling pleased with her choice.

"Wait a minute. Are you going out with the prince as a reporter on the job or as his date?" Her assistant teasingly asked, curious about the way her boss was acting.

She took the discarded clothes off the floor and dumped them back in her closet, not bothering to sort them out. She was her assistant in the office, not her maid.

"Why are you here again?" Eida turned to her assistant, diverting the topic, not wanting to answer her question.

She had her reason for trying to look her best in this meeting. She knew this was not a date, but she still liked to look her best tonight. But she did not plan to share her plans with her assistant.

She moved out of her length-size mirror and sat down in front of her vanity table, picking out the shades she would use for her makeup.

"Yeah, about that." She quickly returned to pick up the bag that she left at the side of the bed when she entered her room.

She was supposed to hand the files to her earlier, but she ended up helping her boss with her clothes. She quickly took a thick envelope out of her bag and placed them in front of her.

"What is this?" Eida asked, curious about the stack of papers inserted in the unmarked envelope.

She dropped her lipstick on the table, wondering if those were the data she needed for her story. She started shuffling through the files, scanning the contents for information.

"Those are the researches gathered by our team last night." Her assistant told her as she walked back to the bed and grabbed her bag, ready to leave.

"I think your exact words were. I want them in my hands by tomorrow." She said as she walked out of her room, saying goodbye to her boss.

She loved working with her boss, but she could be demanding most of the time. But she was not complaining. Her boss worked very hard, which might be more than any of them.

"Thanks," Eida shouted over the closing door.

She did ask for it, she thought as she scanned swiftly on the files before closing it again and setting it aside. She had no time to read the comprehensive report, but it looked interesting.

She continued to finish the application of her makeup, putting on the final touches. Then, she grabbed her phone and made a last-minute check on any messages and the time before inserting it inside her purse.

If she left now, she would be just in time for the meeting with the prince, counting a few minutes with the traffic. She preferred to arrive first than to make him wait.

"Shall we make the prince drool?" She whispered to herself, inspecting her final appearance in her mirror, remembering what her assistant told her about the dress.

She arrived at the club earlier than she thought. Luckily, the traffic was light, and she did not have a problem with the parking.

She made her way to the bar, but not without eyes following her every step. She knew she had made the right choice with the dress.

"Can I get you a drink?" A man automatically stood beside her on the bar as soon as she sat on a stool.

She was about to order herself a glass while waiting for the prince. But the man already beat her to it. He signaled for the bartender without even waiting for her reply.

"That won't be necessary." Another male voice answered the cocky man, coming from her back. "The lady is with me."

The other man looked at the newcomer and smiled. Then, said his apologies before backing away. On the other hand, she never looked behind her, already knowing who it was.

"I believed I owe you three bottles of beer." He stated, sitting on the other stool beside her.

He called the man on the other side of the bar and immediately ordered for the two of them. Then, he turned around to finally look at her.

It was no surprise that he found her attractive, especially in the dress that she was wearing. He wondered if she usually went out on interviews with those clothes or just when she went on bars.

He could not presume that she went to all that trouble of dressing up for him. That would be ridiculous. In their past encounters, she did not show any hint that she was interested in him. Other than to get information.

“Don’t expect that I will thank you for saving me from that man. I can very well ward him off on my own.” She turned slightly to face him, showing him that she was no damsel in distress.

She was tired of men who thought they could bully their way to her pants or men treating her like she could not defend herself. She was an independent woman who knew what she wanted and worked hard to get it.

“I don’t think you did need saving, but I think he does.” He answered her as he took the two glasses of beer and handed one to her. “You would have eaten him alive if I did not save him from you.” He wittily answered her, putting on his charming smile.

He met a lot of women who were capable of taking care of themselves. Most of them believed that they did not need a man.

And just like those women, he classified her as a warrior princess, capable of saving the world.

Chapter 594: Simply not interested

Somehow, her earlier statement about him being anything like Nick seemed wrong. Lance might be different, after all, from most of the men she had met.

She did meet a handful of men that she respected and admired. Now, this man suddenly became more attractive to her than before.

“I am glad that we understand each other.” Eida raised her glass to him, liking how he reacted to her statement.

She admitted that she still needed a man, but only under her condition and not the other way around. She was a feminist, not a man-hater. There was a big difference.

She still desired things that only men could provide for her. However, she would not be subjected to their demands or expectations. It had to be mutual and on equal terms.

“I assure you, we are on the same page.” Lance clinked his glass with hers, agreeing with her, believing they thought of the same thing.

He enjoyed the companies of independent women. He had nothing against those who knew what they wanted and were not afraid to get it.

.....

Actually, he commended such characteristics, making them on the top of his list. He suddenly remembered Jacky as another example of someone strong enough to fight for what she believed in.

“Good.” She took a sip of her beer and looked around the place, scanning the entire room from the decorations to the guests.

It was her first time visiting the establishment, and she wondered why she never knew its existence. It was probably new from its appearance, she concluded.

She had been preoccupied with her stories that she had not gone out with anyone since Nick. She could not blame herself when it was an opportunity that she would be a fool to let slip her fingers.

"They serve one of the best beer in the city," Lance commented, taking his glass and taking a sip of his drink.

He had been a frequent customer of this club since it had opened. He liked that it was not overcrowded, and people seemed to mind their own business.

"Yeah, it does taste different." She liked that they were casually talking, easing the conversation through her goal.

Initially, she only wanted the interview he promised. But as she kept thinking about him, she knew her attraction to him was already affecting her ability to focus on her work.

Presently, she wished to change that. She believed she needed a break from her obsession with her story. At the same time, deal with her growing fixation with the prince.

She had a perfect way to resolve that if he would agree with her proposition. That was if he would see her proposal as nothing more than an agreement and nothing more.

"You certainly look gorgeous tonight." The compliment slipped off his tongue before he could filter it.

He saluted his glass to her before taking a gulp of the beer in his hand, covering up his blunder. He already said it. There was no more reason to deny it, so might as well own up to it.

He wished to turn the other way, but his eyes were glued to her face. He seemed to be in a trance as he watched the tip of her tongue touch the top surface of her lips, slightly tasting the glistening alcohol on her red flesh.

If she was planning to seduce him, it was actually working. But he quickly scrubbed the idea out of his consciousness, treating this meeting as a professional interview and not remotely close to a date.

"Thanks," Eida responded with an alluring smile. She shifted in her stool until she was totally facing him, with her long legs in full display before him. "I am glad that you like it. You look dashing yourself."

She was clearly flirting with him this time, and she did not want any confusion. He was a man who had been around many women. She could tell that he could read the signs.

She could sense that he was attracted to her from their last encounter. She had mulled over this idea the entire night and decided to check her theory.

So far, her suspicion seemed to be on the mark. From his reaction to her dress and how his eyes flickered when it landed briefly a little below her neckline, she knew he was thinking of only one thing.

"I think most men in this room liked your outfit." He stated it as a fact. He had seen how the men had followed her as she entered the room.

She did not see him, sitting on the other side of the room, waiting for her. In fairness, he was slightly hidden from view at the entrance. But he noticed her, just like the rest of the men in the place.

He was already on his way to greet her when another man offered to buy her a drink. Something in him did not feel right. His possessive nature came out, claiming her to be his.

“Well, I did not wear this for them.” She said, looking at him directly in the eye.

If he did not receive the signal before, she hoped that this would be clearer this time. She believed that men and women were equal. She was attracted to him, so why should she wait for him to make the first move.

She had done this one time before, and she was not disappointed with the result. She thought she should try it again, hoping for a better response.

“Anyway, I think we should start with our meeting.” Lance quickly changed the subject, snapping out of her enchanting spell.

He was not naive at the signals she was throwing at him. He could decipher them quite clearly. Although he was very attracted to her, he was not letting his libido control any of his actions.

He quickly turned away from her to get himself under control. He focused on the reflection of his face at the mirror on the other side of the counter, not wanting to give in to temptation.

He wondered if he had given her any signal, suggesting that he was interested in her. If he did, then he would like to correct that misunderstanding.

He was simply not interested in pursuing any relationship with her, not now or ever.

Chapter 595: Strictly professional

She was slightly stunned by his reaction to her seduction. She was absolutely sure that he was attracted to her too. But after he subtly rejected her advances, she felt slightly embarrassed by her actions.

But if she failed with her other mission with him, she still had one more she needed to focus on. Maybe he was not the man for her at this point. She decided to put her full attention instead to her work.

“Oh, right?” Eida returned to her previous position in the bar and took another sip of her beer, trying to get a grip of herself.

She pretended to be clueless that he had just rejected her. She had never been in this kind of situation before. Usually, she was the one turning her back on an offer, not the other way around.

She suddenly felt awkward, thinking that she had misread his earlier actions. It would seem that she was the only one attracted to him. Or otherwise, he was better at controlling his urges than she was.

“I am sorry, but if you want a story, I suggest we get this interview going.” Lance pointed out, trying hard to divert his mind anywhere else than from where his thoughts were going.

Many had flaunted their body to get close to him, wanting a chance to be part of the royal family. But he had stayed clear of them, not letting them use him for their selfish reasons.

.....

He had no idea what she was trying to accomplish, but getting under his pants would not make him spill any information about the case. If that was what she intended by trying to seduce him.

“You said that you have something to say, off the record.” She finally recovered from her situation and went back to business, realizing that she had made an error of judgment.

When she thought about their last encounter, she was convinced that he felt the same way as her. She could tell that the attraction was mutual.

But the way he was acting now, it appeared that he was immuned with her charms. She was wrong to make the first move. Well, everybody made mistakes. She was not an exception.

“I will trust you with this information, but I don’t want any of this to end up in the next news cycle.” He played with his glass for a few seconds, thinking if he was doing the right thing.

As experienced taught him, reporters could not be trusted, but his gut told him that she might be different from the rest of them.

He should trust her with this information. Maybe she had information about this that could help them in their investigation. She had already helped them before. She might do it again.

“When I give my word, you can trust that I will keep it. Whatever you will tell me will be off the record as long as the investigation was ongoing, but give me something that I can write at least.” She reasoned with him.

She was a reporter. Telling a story was her life. If she could not tell anything about the case, then this man better give her something that would be interesting enough for the time being.

He was silent for a while, contemplating his thoughts while she waited for his answer. He emptied his glass before turning again to face her.

With the tip of his thumb, he wiped the foamy white substance that stuck on the side of his lips. He finally made a decision. Hopefully, he would not regret it in the end.

“The couple suffered just like any kidnap victims had under the hands of the perpetrators.” He began to narrate to her. “But they had survived the ordeal and would like to tell the entire traumatic experience in their day in court.”

The couple did not want the press to meddle with the issue, not wanting to sensationalize the criminal act and worsen their experience.

Although the issue was already out with the media, the couple still would like to keep a tight lid on the situation. They avoided talking to the press and having their pictures taken.

Many speculations circulated about the arrest of Nick, but nobody from their camp conducted interviews aside from the official statement released.

"I assure you that I understand what they were going through. I am not here to make matters worse. I am just here to offer my assistance to get their words out to people who might want to hear their experience." She explained her side to him.

She started asking questions, but he only answered some of them, avoiding the complicated ones. He kept telling her that he could not divulge matters that would compromise the investigation.

He shared more knowledge about the couple, but she felt it was already old news. She wanted something fresh that the other reporters had not yet covered. She needed a new story.

"In a way, maybe it would help them if they would talk about it and air their side. We can only hear the side of the accused, who clearly denies any involvement in the abduction." She continued.

She would do anything to convince this man that she was here to help and not make matters worse for the royal couple. She had no harmful intention against their case.

"You can't blame Alex and Dani for keeping their silence. But eventually, they will talk, and you will be the first one on the scene." He guaranteed. As of now, that was all he could give her.

He did not have the power to divulge more information, but he had something that could be worth her while instead. A deal that might at least give her something to do while waiting for her big story.

Finally, they had settled on a more comfortable conversation after a couple of glasses of beer. The earlier awkwardness was gone.

"Come on, you must have something else that you can give me." Her earlier attempt to seduce him had been forgotten as her story again took precedence in her priority. "Anything, like if the princess is already pregnant or something."

It was still a story that the masses would certainly like to know. A piece of story newsworthy of the front page and the top of the hour as far as she was concerned.

"I am sorry, but I have nothing else to tell you about the couple. But if you want another story, why not talk about me." He offered instead.

He did not usually allow reporters to interview him. He only conducted a few photoshoots and entertained a question or two. That was at most his interaction with the press.

"You will give me an exclusive about your life." She could not help but register the shock on her face.

From the recent investigation she did with him, she had learned about his refusal to be questioned by the press. A caption even said that he hated reporters.

She was surprised that he was willing to give her the chance to interview him. Well, it was a rare opportunity that she believed she should grab.

She was absolutely sure her producers would love the idea of her talking one-on-one with the prince. Many women would definitely be interested in watching her show.

"Yes, why not?" He looked at her questioningly. "Can I trust you with my story?" He asked her.

He started shouting inside his head, doing a self monologue, questioning his sanity. He just suggested exposing his life to her and to the entire world. He must be going crazy, he thought to himself.

"Of course. You can." Eida felt honored that he would give her the chance to tell his life story. "Why are you doing this now?" She asked, curious to his reason.

"You need a story, and I have one." Lance just offered her an exclusive of his life, something he had refused to do for as long as he could remember.

He believed it was the only way to keep her off the back of the couple by diverting her attention to him. He would be the willing victim in the meantime for the sake of the good of everyone.

Still, he did not trust her enough to get involved with her in a relationship, whether friendship or more. This would be strictly professional, despite his physical attraction to her.

Chapter 596: Crusade to seek justice and peace

The room was lively as light music delicately played in the background. People gathered in groups around the spacious living room, chatting and laughing about various topics, either current events, business, or the likes.

"How is she?" Ethan asked his son-in-law, drinking a glass of bubbly wine, observing her daughter in the distance. He stood not far from the rest of the group, with Alex on his side.

He asked Alex to bring his daughter home since Laura hosted a dinner party for them as a thanksgiving for their safe return. It was just a few family members and friends who attended the event.

He watched her daughter interact with the other guest in the living room like she was perfectly alright. However, she could be good at hiding what she truly felt through the cloak of her smile.

"I think she is getting better every day," Alex responded to his question. "I think her new project is helping her with her recovery." Alex followed the direction of his eyes, landing at his wife, who was laughing at something they must be talking about.

Physically, she would seem fine. She was not hurt or abused during the abduction. Except for the minor scratches and bruises, she had no visible injuries from the unfortunate incident.

However, he believed that emotionally, she was broken. He could only assume that she was frequently dreaming about their horrific experience, judging from the nightmares she was having.

.....

"The building of the foster home. How is that coming?" Ethan asked, glad that she had something preoccupying her mind besides her ordeal.

He also donated materials for the project as soon as he heard about his daughter's interest in the foundation. It was for a good cause, but moreover, he wanted to show his support to what she was doing.

It was the only way he could help her daughter with whatever she was going through. If that could alleviate the suffering that she was feeling, then he would donate more houses for her cause.

"Aside from a few more paper works and a slight delay in the shipment of materials, everything else seems to be on track." He assured Ethan.

He had been coordinating with Haley in expediting the processing of the project. He wanted the construction to begin soon so that they could finish it on time.

"Good. If you need anything else, just tell me." Ethan nodded his head, approving his plans, even offering more help. The sooner the project started, the better.

His gaze once again landed on his daughter and wife, talking to some of their relatives. He would do anything to keep his family happy and safe.

He had sworn he would not let anyone threaten his family's future, not until he was alive. And he had not broken any of his promises yet, and he was not about to do it now.

"What are you intending to do with Nick?" Alex asked, curious about his plans.

He had heard from his team that Ethan was secretly making a move. But they were not entirely sure yet of his plans. Whatever it was, he wanted to know.

He wanted to be part of anything that would put Nick out of their lives. As much as he wanted to believe in their justice system, he could not trust that it would stop Nick from his insanity.

"What do you mean?" Ethan answered him, questioning his inquiry. "Of course, I am doing everything, in my power, to put him in jail." He answered, hoping that is what he meant.

Although he had a vague idea of what Alex might be asking, still, he pretended to be clueless about what he was asking. He was not about to divulge to him what his actual plans were.

"I meant I want to know what you are planning to do with him," Alex whispered, not wanting anybody around to hear their conversation. He was not persuaded that Ethan was letting the justice system deal with Nick.

He could see the old man's eyes narrowing at him, probably thinking about his words. He believed that Ethan was trying to concoct a lie, not wanting to involve him in what he had been doing.

However, he was convinced that Ethan had something brewing under their noses. A plan to take down Nick permanently. And he wanted to be included in the plans.

"I have no idea of what you are talking about." Ethan looked at him, acting innocent about what he was implying.

He wondered if Alex had any idea of his plans. If he did, how much of his plans did he know. Then, he pondered if he was willing to include him with the rest of it.

"Do not bother to deny it. Do not give me that bullshit that you don't know what I am talking about." Alex added, using a tone that meant he was serious.

He could see that Ethan was reluctant to tell him anything. But he would convince him that he was not going away. If Ethan would not let him in, he might as well plan something on his own.

He wanted Nick eliminated permanently. He believed that as long as he was alive, he would never stop from causing havoc in their lives, especially Dani.

Ethan was silent for a few seconds, contemplating if he should involve Ethan with his plan against Nick. If he had any choice, he would prefer to keep them in the dark.

He wanted to avoid including his daughter and even his son-in-law in his idea of going after Nick. He did not want to stain their hands with blood.

“Let us not talk about that in here,” Ethan said, looking around the room, indicating that it was not the right place.

He finally realized that there was no more sense to deny it to him. Alex seemed determined to involve himself in his plan. Whether he would like it or not.

However, he would still try to convince him to turn a blind eye to his plans. He believed it would be better if Alex would just support his daughter and remained on her side.

It was better if he stayed clear and focused on making his wife happy instead of joining him in his crusade to seek justice and peace for his family.

Chapter 597: Taking the law into one's hands

Alex understood that it was hard for all of them. There was no one to be blamed for the unfortunate incident. But he could not sit and wait for what else would happen when he could do something about it now.

“Fine. But I will not stay on the sideline, knowing that Nick is still out there, planning again how to strike against us.” Alex would take this situation into his own hand if he had to, just to make sure that Nick would not bother them again.

He had sworn to protect Dani at all cost, and he intended to keep his promise. He was not about to break his oath for a man like him.

“I promise you that it will never happen again. Nick will never have that opportunity again.” Ethan said, unable to control his resentment against the man who caused too many troubles in his family.

He would stop him even if he had to make a deal with the devil. Because Nick did not deserve another chance to live in this world. He had already used up all his life. This was his last.

“Then, let me help you,” Alex said, confirming that Ethan was really up to something.

He would do anything to make Nick pay for his crime. Especially after what he did with Dani. He did not care if he suffered under his hands, but what Dani had gone through was unforgivable.

.....

He still had no idea what happened to Dani during their abduction. She only kept telling him that she was not harmed in any way. However, he could feel it in his heart that she was affected by it more than she wanted to admit.

And for that, he wanted Nick to pay. Not by rotting behind bars. It would not be enough punishment for a man like him. Besides, he believed that would not stop him from his evil schemes.

If he had it his way, Nick would die first before he could get his filthy hands on Dani ever again. Nick had not shown them any mercy, then he did not deserve one either from him.

"Anyway, Dani's birthday is coming soon. Do you already have any plans to surprise her?" Ethan quickly shifted their conversation to another topic.

He could see the effect of Nick on his son-in-law. He could not blame him for feeling the way he did. It could not have been easy for him.

However, he would continue their conversation later when they were in the privacy of his office. At the moment, it was not wise to continue talking about Nick, not in the company of other people.

He decided that discussing his daughter's special day was more appropriate at the moment. It had been a while since he last had a birthday party for his daughter, and somehow he had missed it.

She always opted to celebrate it with her friend or some other charitable organization, refusing to have a party prepared by them. He could not blame her at the time, but things had changed now.

"I was hoping that we can have the groundbreaking ceremony of the foster home at least on her birthday," Alex informed his father-in-law. "Use it to form a small gathering among friends and the people she had helped."

It was why he wanted to hurry the permits of the construction. He believed it would be the perfect gift he could give his wife. She never wanted a gift for herself. She would prefer others to receive it instead.

"Yeah. I think that will be perfect." Ethan agreed with his plans, knowing how much the surprise would mean to his daughter.

He never understood it before. The obsession of Dani to provide assistance to those who were less fortunate than them. He thought that it was enough that they were donating through charitable organizations.

But his daughter went beyond that. She did not simply give them financial help, but she provided them with hope. Helping them, at the same time, giving them a chance to stand up again and rebuild themselves.

"Hey, what are you two planning? I hope it has nothing to do with world domination." Dani suddenly appeared in front of them, surprising them both.

Dani entwined her arms around her husband as she waited for them to respond to her question. She was tired of smiling while talking to their guests. So, she decided to check on her husband.

On the other hand, the two men were so engrossed in their topic that they barely noticed Dani came over to their side. Thankfully, she did not seem to hear what they were talking about.

"I think that was part of the program. But the broader issue has something to do with the housing project," Alex told his wife, kissing her on her temples while wrapping his arms around her waist.

He was not about to confess to her that he and her father had just talked about Nick's impending doom. He knew that she would totally disagree with their plan.

She was against taking the matter into their own hands. She believed that the justice system would be enough to make Nick pay for his crime.

But she could not see the bigger picture. It might put Nick behind bars, but it would not stop him from continuing his plan. It would be just a matter of time before he was out again and scheming against them.

"Oh, you are meddling with my project again." She accused the two, but in truth, she did not mind.

She was glad for the first time, his father was actually taking a more significant role in the community. He was not just providing financial aid but helping rebuild their society.

She always believed it was the first step in making a better world not only for her but for the future generation. Somebody had to begin the change, or all would be lost.

"Just trying to help in any way we can." Ethan leaned to her side, giving his daughter a light peck on the cheeks.

It was just the same when she was a child. He believed that his obligation to her would never stop. Not probably until his last breath.

He would continue to protect her daughter from anyone who would do her harm. He was just glad that he was not alone anymore.

He finally had someone he could depend on to carry his obligation in the eventuality of his death. But he was not dying soon, not yet. But someone else would, soon.

"I am glad to hear that." But she did not buy their alibis.

She could tell from their faces that they were talking about something else. But she was too late. She did not hear much from their conversation.

She guessed it might have something to do with the case. But she knew they would never admit it to her. She still believed despite her plea, her father was still working secretly.

She could not blame her father or her husband. They had to deal with the situation in their own ways. But she still believed that taking the law into one's hands was not the way.

Chapter 598: Just opportunistic beings

Her head had been going around in circles around the room, but she could not spot Alex anywhere. He told her that he was just going to the restroom, but he had not returned after that.

She knew she had nothing to worry about every time he went out of her sight. It was not like he was actually missing or had been abducted. But she still felt uncomfortable.

"Would you excuse me?" She told her distant aunt from her mother's side. "I think my mom needs me."

But that was just a reason to get away from the repeated stories of her childhood. She did not want to be rude, but she had heard about those stories for years. Though she loved them, she would like to look for her husband even more.

She quickly made her way to her mother, who was busy talking to his uncle. But as she was walking, she realized that she had not seen his father, too, since the dinner had ended.

"Have you seen my dad?" She asked one of her cousins, who was closed by, but he only shrugged his shoulder, indicating he had no clue.

Then, she concluded that they might be hiding in his office, together with her husband. She suspected they were planning something but was unwilling to share it with her or anyone else.

.....

She quickly turned around the other way to check on them in her father's office, believing they were probably continuing with whatever they were talking about earlier.

However, before she could make a few more steps, his uncle stopped her in her tracks. "Dani, where are you going? I hope you still have time for me." He spoke behind her, trying to catch up with her.

She turned around again to find his uncle standing a meter away from her. It had been a long time since she saw him. Now, she felt guilty that she had seldom visited him. They were close, after all.

"Of course, Uncle Ben." She responded, stepping closer to him and giving him a hug. "You know I will always have time for you. How have you been?"

Her search would have to wait because she also would like to take this opportunity to talk to his uncle about her cases. Nobody else would be more qualified to guide her than his uncle regarding matters of the law.

He had been one of her mentors for almost half of her life. Whether it was about life in general or her career. She absolutely valued the wisdom that he imparted to her.

"I am good." He answered her but followed it with his own question. "How are you holding up?" He asked concernedly. Hearing about what happened to her was heartbreaking.

He was just glad that she had survived the ordeal because he knew that Laura would not take it easy if anything should happen to her only daughter.

He knew his sister. Laura loved her family and would do everything for them. Ethan and Dani were her worlds, and she would find it hard to survive if she had to lose one of them.

"I am good, Uncle Ben." She responded after the greetings. "I am sorry if I was unable to visit lately." She told him. "By the way, I meant to talk to you about some of my cases. Do you think you have some time?"

She could not dismiss his uncle since he had traveled far with his family, only to see her. She could not disappoint him by ignoring his presence. She could always look for Alex in a while.

They talked for almost an hour on the other side of the room as they sipped on their champagne. Just like in the old days, she remembered she could converse with him about anything for hours and would not get bored.

"I think I already monopolized more of your time. I am sure that many will still want to talk to you." Ben said after realizing the hour they almost spent talking about her cases, including about the abduction.

Under ordinary situations, an hour was too short when they discussed different scenarios of her cases. But tonight, it was supposed to be her night, mingling with her friends and family.

"I do not mind." She whispered to her uncle, then they both laughed, knowing what she meant by her words.

She had grown up with this crowd all her life. Some of them were respectable people. But there were quite a few too that only wanted their association with their family.

But they were blood-related, so she could not turn her back on them. Still, she avoided them if she could. She had better things to do than being used by them.

She would opt to help the poor who truly worked hard to reach their dreams than make those relatives of her rich without lifting a finger in their life.

"I know what you mean." Shamefully he had to admit that his wife and kids were included in that category.

He could not help but put the entire blame on him for working too hard. He did not have much time for his family. He was not able to guide his kids on the right path.

"Anyway, I think your husband is looking for you." He could see Alex scanning the place for her. When he spotted her, he quickly made his way towards them.

He was thankful that Dani married a good man. At least, she was lucky to have someone who would love her and care for her long after he and her parents were gone.

He would always love her like she was his daughter. She had been the female version of him and would always be proud of what she had accomplished with her life.

"Thanks, Uncle Ben, for taking the time to come here and visit me. I really miss this." She hugged her uncle, then slightly twisted her body to see her husband standing behind her.

The two greeted each other and made a few light conversations before his uncle excused himself to search for his wife and children.

Finally, she was alone again with him. She was still wondering where he had been, but before she could question him, her father also showed up, calling their attention.

"We would like to thank everyone for joining us again this evening." Ethan began telling his speech, pulling all eyes on him as he spoke.

He took it upon him to speak on behalf of the couple, knowing that they might still like to be left alone with their thoughts. He would not force them.

He could tell from the faces of their guests all night that many had questions, but their support was what was needed and not their inquiries.

“Are you ready to go home?” She asked Alex, tired of the entire night’s event.

She appreciated what her parents were trying to do for her. But it was time to go home and rest. She was exhausted from the long day and night.

In addition, she did not want to talk about the rest of the ordeals she had gone through. Although her family seemed to be more interested in her story than helping her recover.

Some of her family were only looking for the chance to gain fame or money. Unfortunately, it was at her expense. For her, not all of them were family, but just opportunistic human beings.

Chapter 599: A curse

“Marcus sent their apologies for not attending tonight,” Alex stated.

Alex ran his hand through hers, sitting alongside her at the backseat of the car.

They finally had said their goodbyes to her parents and guests and were on their way back to their apartment. He could sense that her wife was exhausted but not physically, more likely emotionally.

He pulled her into his arms, letting her back to rest on his chest. Then, he started rubbing the palm of his hands on her arms, then making his way to her shoulders.

“Yeah, Jacky also texted me about what happened to her.” She leaned closer to his body, enjoying the feel of his warmth enveloping her. “She assured me that it was nothing serious.”

It would have been better if her friend had been there to support her. Besides Alex, her parents, and a handful of others, Jacky was the only person she could count on to understand what she had been going through.

“We can check on them if you are worried.” He offered, knowing that she might be thinking of Jacky and her current condition.

.....

He knew how close the two were, just like he was with Marcus. He understood that she might want to be around her in a time like this.

“No, I think she is in good hands.” She smiled at him, appreciating what he was trying to do for her and her friend. But she knew she could trust Marcus this time to take good care of Jacky.

Then, she felt his fingers work their magic on the curve of her collarbones. She could feel her tension eased up, relaxing her muscles under his skillful ministrations.

She closed her eyes, letting all her worries disappear, even for a little while. For a moment, she thought everything seemed to be in the way it was supposed to be. She felt calm and relaxed.

After a few minutes of thinking about nothing, a thought went through her mind. She slightly opened her eyes and gazed at the view outside.

"Where have you been?" Dani uttered, still staring at the passing cars, buildings, and people on the sidewalk but not seeing anything as her mind reminded her of what happened earlier.

Finally, she turned to watch his expression with the bit of light coming from the window beside him.

"You and Dad disappeared for a long time." Staring at him questioningly when he had remained silent.

She had been looking for him after dinner, and he suddenly disappeared. So, was her father. She could only guess that they probably went to his office to discuss something in private.

They were both acting strange even before the dinner started, but she did not get the chance to confront him about it. Now, she was curious if he would tell her what they had talked about.

"Ethan." Then, abruptly he corrected himself, "I meant Dad, invited me to join him in his office. I have been away from the office for so long that he only wanted to update me with a few things he thought I should be aware of."

He could only hope that she would accept his alibi. But from her raised brow, he could tell that she had some doubts. However, he could not share what he and Ethan had discussed.

It was a secret that he had to carry to his grave. If anyone discovered their plans, especially their enemies, they might use them against them instead.

He did not want Dani anywhere near their plans. She should remain clueless about what was going on behind the scenes. That was what he and Ethan had agreed upon.

"Like what?" She questioned him, thinking that he was hiding something.

She could tell from the way his eyes avoided her gaze. She might be mistaken, but her instincts were rarely wrong. She hoped this was one of those times that she had been inaccurate with her assumption.

She did not want to think that he was keeping things from her. But if he was, she was afraid she might have an idea of what it could be. And she did not know if knowing was better than being kept in the dark.

"Just about the business." He told her casually as if it was not that important to discuss. "You probably heard of the buyer, who is secretly making deals with our investors."

He explained what he and her father had decided to do with the matter. It was an issue that needed to be addressed immediately, or it might go out of hand.

"Oh, I agree." She would like to believe, with all her heart, that Alex was telling her the truth. But something inside her was nagging that she should dig deeper.

However, she was afraid of what she might discover. Not only that. She was terrified of what she might feel about her father and husband.

She debated with herself if it was better if she just pretended to have no idea than to keep looking for answers that she might not like in the end.

"Anyway, are you tired?" Alex asked, trying to divert the conversation into something else.

He was done talking about his private conversation with Ethan. Hopefully, she was too. He would like to talk about something else, like their future.

“Why?” She asked, curious about his question, assessing her body of her condition.

She could feel a bit of tension on her leg muscles from all the standing and moving around she did. Other than that, she could tell that she was not that exhausted.

“I have something I want to show you if you are still up for it.” He could still present his other surprise at another time, but he could not contain his excitement.

After she had rejected the house that he planned to build for her, he thought of giving her another gift as a wedding present. It took him a while to figure this one out. He could not wait to see her reaction.

“I thought you might stop with your surprises after what I did with your last one.” She still felt slightly awful for declining his gift the last time. But it was better than to accept it and later on regret it.

“I will never stop surprising you. That I promise.” He grabbed her hand and placed small kisses on her fingers. “I love you.” He uttered in his sweet voice, whispering it into her ears.

He leaned his head closer to her cheeks, resting his body against her back as they stared at the view outside their window. He allowed her arms to snake around her waist, cradling her closer to the safety of his arms.

“I love you more.” She slightly turned her head to answer him back before returning her eyes to the road ahead.

She could only wish that their lives were as simple as this. She never thought of her status as a curse, but at the moment, she wondered if it was.

She had seen how ordinary folks lived their simple lives without caring much about the world. They were not rich, just getting by comfortably each day. But she had seen them happy.

She wished that for her and her family too. But she had to accept that her life would never be anything but complicated. It might be a curse that her kids would eventually inherit from them.

Chapter 600: An ideal home

She thought that his surprise would be waiting back at their place. She was confident he had arranged something romantic, and she could not wait to see it.

However, she was mistaken when she noticed the direction they were taking. Her assumption was once again proven wrong. She was once again left guessing what was awaiting her.

“Where are we going?” Dani was suddenly curious about their new route. Instead of turning right to their apartment, the cars turned left, which was odd if they were on their way back home.

Then again, that should not have surprised her anymore. When it came to Alex, he was unpredictable. She could guarantee that what he had under his magic hat would be different this time.

She could only wish that she had something to give him too. But she could not come up with a clever surprise that could match his. She always came up a little short, but he still made her feel good about it.

"It will not be a surprise anymore if I tell you." Alex was not about to tell her and ruined his plans for the rest of the night.

He had never been this creative or thoughtful before with his past relationship. Never made extra effort to make his former partners happy, not even on their birthdays. Not that he had many former relationships.

.....

Aside from Tyra, he had only a few minor short affairs, but those were only results of his childhood immaturity. Tyra was the only serious relationship he had before. But he was not as committed to her as he was now with Dani.

"Fine, but it better be good." She warned him, but she would not bet on herself because she knew Alex would win every time.

She usually did not like surprises. But being in a relationship with Alex had changed all of that. In truth, she looked forward every time he made a grand gesture to show how much he valued her.

"I hope so too." He could not guarantee the result because it would all depend on what she thought of his gift.

All he could do now was savor the moment of having her in his arms, pulling her tighter around his body. For him, every second of having her close to him was already a gift itself.

He never needed anything else from her except for her love. He always thought that this city was what made him call it home, but instead, he realized that it was her. She was his home.

"I know that whatever it is. I will love it." She assured him, relaxing in the warmth of his body, enjoying the sensation of having his strong arms wrapped around her small frame.

A few minutes later, they were parking in a new building that she had never visited before. Although she had noticed the structure in passing as she had crossed this road a few times, she never had the opportunity to enter the premises.

"This way." Alex ushered her in the lobby of the building toward a private elevator. Then, he used a special key card to open the metallic box, helping her get on it.

Once inside, he only had three floors to choose from on the panel. He automatically pushed for the top button, indicating their destination.

Slowly, he waited frantically for the floors to move up to the top floor. It felt like the box had been crawling up at a snail speed, but in reality, it was one of the fastest technology available in the market.

"What are you up to now?" She asked, narrowing her eyes at him through their reflection in the metal walls. Her lips turned into a thin line as she tried to guess his intentions.

She could tell that this was not his first time visiting this place. He was familiar with the staff as they greeted him like he frequented this building.

She could not help her curiosity from skyrocketing, making her anticipate more whatever was coming next. She could feel her heartbeat racing as her blood rushed through her system.

She eagerly watched the numbers of the rectangular panel go up, just like the intensity of her excitement. Until it finally stopped to wherever he was taking her.

"You will see soon enough." He promised as the elevator finally sounded its signal that they had arrived at their destination.

A few seconds later, the door opened, revealing to her a large foyer with nothing in it. It was sort of anti-climactic, she thought. She guessed she was expecting something more, comparing it to the extravagant lobby they had just passed.

It was an entire room with only a white background from the ceiling to the walls. While the flooring was still covered in cement, bare of carpeting or marble tiles.

"What is this place?" She asked, stunned by the view in front of her.

She was expecting to see something beautiful, even spectacular, as soon as the doors opened. But not a bare floor with no furniture or fixtures and void of any colors to brighten the place.

In fairness to the place, she saw a glimpse of a magnificent view of the city outside the massive windows located on the other end of the room. Other than that, it was a spacious room with no life whatsoever.

Before she could take another step outside the double doors, he quickly scooped her into his arms, bridal style. "It is my surprise, remember?" Alex winked at her, silencing her from saying anything more.

He quickly moved away from the elevator and into the open space, giving her a bigger view of the entire room. It was just like her initial observation.

"This?" She waved her hands to the space around her. She allowed her eyes to wander around every nook and corner of the room.

The apartment was still covered in fresh, white paint and nothing else. It was an austere, barren room. An unfriendly place.

Unless something would be done with the empty space. Then, add some colors to the walls. Put ceramic, marble, or even carpet on the floors. Some furniture. Then, maybe it could be an ideal home.