

Royal Contract 611

Chapter 611: Walking into a trap

“David wanted to see you in his office.” Jacky had informed her earlier.

She guessed it had something to do with a case they were working on together. David volunteered to help her in one of her cases.

She knew that they were still handling her with kid gloves as if she was a delicate flower that would wither away if put under pressure.

“It is a good case. I think the chance of us taking the lead in this one is high.” Dani said after a few minutes of discussing her latest case with David in his office.

She could see him nodding with some portions that she pointed out. So far, he had not said anything to make her think that she had made a mistake. Anyway, it was what she wanted to show him.

She only wanted to establish that she was more resilient than they thought. She hoped to prove to her boss and the rest of her colleagues that she was ready to get back to her routine.

“I think so, too,” David responded, agreeing with her assessment.

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He had always known how strong her personality was. Admittedly, recently, he had been concerned about her condition after the ordeal she had gone through.

But seeing her today, doing what she did best, he could not deny that he was impressed at how well she had bounced back to her responsibilities.

“I know you mean well. But trust me with this. I know I can handle this without you checking on me every minute.” Dani said calmly, finally confronting the elephant in the room.

She was done asking everybody to stop treating her like she was a victim. Because she was not. But she considered herself a survivor. What happened to her was not easy, but she would fight it all the way through.

“Then, don’t let me keep you from your work,” David stated, finally conceding to her. After all, he was satisfied with her work and the courage she displayed.

He was convinced that she could manage it on her own. At least, he would like to give her a chance to prove to everyone that she was a fighter and not a quitter.

“Thanks.” She felt a sense of relief that David finally understood her. “I promise you that you will not get disappointed.”

She soon left his office to go back to her office when she noticed another room that she was thinking of visiting. She could come by later after she called for an appointment or just pop in to see if he was not busy.

After a few seconds of deliberation, she decided that she might, as well, drop by and see if he was available since she was already in the vicinity.

When she reached his door, she did not find his secretary around, so she decided to try her luck that he was not busy. Then, she found him alone in his room.

She did not see him since he faced the window away from her. She also did not hear anything since he had already ended the call when she arrived by the door, but she saw the chair move as he shifted on his seat.

"I hope I am not catching you in terrible timing." Dani apologized again for coming to his office without any appointments, occupying the seat he offered her when he finally noticed her presence.

She just thought that she might as well take her chances that he was not swamped with work. However, she could always come back if he was. Luckily, it seemed that he had a few minutes to spare for her.

"I have a meeting in thirty minutes, but until then, I am all ears. So, what can I do for you?" He closed the files on his desk and set them aside, putting his whole attention on her.

He decided to deal with his cases later after she left. At the moment, he was more interested to know her intentions for coming to see him without prior notice.

"Well, Alex and I have discussed our case, and we both decided that it might be better if we find a lawyer that we can trust to help us with our situation." She said, placing her hands on the top of her lap, trying to find a more relaxed position.

She could see from his eyes that her mentor was already analyzing what she was implying in her words. Well, she wanted the idea to register with him before she eventually spilled the rest of her statement.

She had met several good lawyers she could count on handling what they needed. But she just did not feel that they were a good fit.

"Ok," Gerald did not want to assume anything, but he could guess what she was trying to say. "Tell me what you have in mind."

He pushed himself away from the table and stood from his position, walking towards her. He would like to show her that he was a friend she could trust with whatever was bothering her.

His mind debated if she was about to hire him for a case or ask for some recommendations. Still, he waited, not wanting to make a conclusion.

"Well, I think you are the best to handle our lawsuit against Nick. Even Alex thinks so." She finally said, turning in her seat to face him.

She looked up to him, observing his reaction to her unusual request. "You see..." She continued, hoping that she could convince him to accept it. "I believe that you are the best to litigate our case against Nick."

She could not think of anyone else that she could trust to do the job as well as he would. He had an almost perfect record of bringing criminals to justice.

His records were impeccable. Besides that, his advocacy against crime made him the best candidate for the position. That was if he would take on the challenge.

Although the District Attorney's office was taking the lead in persecuting Nick for his crimes. She still wanted an outside counsel that she could use to solidify their case against Nick.

"I will say I am surprised with your decision." Gerald rubbed his chin, feeling the small stubbles of beard growing on his skin.

He was not expecting that she would consider him as their lawyer. He believed that Ethan had enough great counselors under his belt that could easily win their case.

"I know this is a big ask." She could see that her boss was thinking about her offer. "I know money is not what motivates you in taking a case. But I hope that you will try to think about it first before giving me a decision."

Based on her observation since she started working for him. Gerald was not the kind of lawyer that accepted cases based on the value of the client.

She believed that he valued more the merit of each case, not how much money would go into his pocket. A quality that she had learned to admire about him.

"As much as I want to say yes to your request, you will have to give me a moment to evaluate the situation." He hated seeing the slight disappointment on her face upon hearing his response.

However, he had to tread lightly since one wrong step could lead to his downfall. He had to consider all aspects of the case and how they could affect his situation.

He could not deny he was tempted to take a chance. However, he still had no idea what the couple knew about the organization. For all he knew, he could be walking into a trap.

Chapter 612: A brother, a subservient, and a father

"How is Edward?" Katherine asked, seeing his husband walk through their bedroom door.

He looked a bit exhausted, but it was expected since he had been out the entire day since he left for the palace to visit his brother, who had been taken ill.

She already knew the news that the King was currently out of danger. But he still had to go through some examinations and further observation.

"He will live if he would stop being stubborn," Fred answered his wife as he moved further into the room, removing the tie on his neck. "But he is the King." So, he had the right to be, he thought.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, rotating his neck and shoulders to relieve himself from the tiredness and stiffness of his body. It had been a long day.

He had to deal with the King and his condition. Then, he also had to take over some of the responsibilities of the King while he was recovering. It was a burden he had to take while his brother was trying to regain his strength.

Katherine sighed, sensing the tension that his husband was feeling. She quickly shifted into a sitting position, moving closer to his husband.

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Then, she knelt behind him, putting her fingers on his shoulders as she started massaging the stiff flesh underneath her fingertips.

“Well, what do you expect? He is your brother.” She responded with a little bit of teasing as she continued to work on the tense muscles on his shoulders. “If I am right, you share the same blood.”

She smiled at her husband when he turned around to look at her. She did enjoy the moment they were having. It had been a while since she could freely laugh at something she said.

Since the unfortunate incident, their lives had just been cruising from one problem to another. It was nice that their lives appeared to be getting back to normal.

Today, she was thankful that Edward’s unfortunate incident did not turn out for the worst. It was a great relief to hear that they had avoided another possible catastrophe.

“Unfortunately, that is true.” He released a deep breath, hoping that would ease the burden weighing heavily on him.

Well, he could not deny it. Being stubborn and headstrong did run in his family. Regrettably, it was one of the flaws he had passed down even to his son.

“Then, what is wrong?” She asked him, noticing that he was unusually more quiet than usual. “Is there a problem?” She suddenly grew concerned.

Typically, he could not wait to tell her about his day. Then, he would ask her about her activities while he was away. Somehow, she sensed that today was different.

His mind seemed to be elsewhere, appearing to be in deep thought. He barely even looked around the room as his eyes focused only on the empty space before him.

“No, nothing.” He quickly denied that anything out of the ordinary was happening when he realized she had asked him a question. But then immediately changed his mind. “Well, there is something.”

He could not keep a secret from his wife, not when it involved her, too. Not directly, but in a way, he believed that her opinion should matter in his decision.

After all, this was not purely about the kingdom and his obligation as the Council’s head. His decision might not only affect their nation but likely, also cause a problem with his family.

“What is it?” She could not wait for his answer as her anxiety increased by his silence. “Tell me.”

She could tell that whatever was bothering him was a burden he was carrying on his shoulders. She just hoped that he would share it with her, so she might be able to help.

She might not be the most intelligent person in the kingdom, but she still had a rational mind inside her brain that she could depend on.

She had helped her husband countless times before, proving that she was not just a pretty face. But someone who had ideas that could help him in many ways than one.

“Well, his condition made him realize that he is not invincible. We are mere mortals, borrowing time in this world,” Fred said to Katherine with his solemn look.

Edward was not the only one who thought of that. First, it was Ethan. Now, it was his brother. He wondered if it was his turn, would he survive the episode.

He could only think of the repercussion of such an event. A chill ran through his spine as his mind feared the inevitable. He was not afraid to die, but he was terrified to leave his wife alone.

“We all know that. But we make the most of our time and try to make it count. That is all we can do.” Katherine understood his concern.

Experiencing a traumatic event such as this could make anyone reevaluate their life. She had also been thinking about how she had been living her life.

“Well, in his epiphany, he told me that he would be announcing his next heir.” He ran his fingers through his hair, then he turned around to finally face her.

She had every right to hear this because he would need her valuable advice in this matter. It was not his future he would be dealing with but the future generation of his family.

“Who?” She looked at her husband in surprise. “Edward?” Questioning him, puzzled by what he told her.

At the moment, the only choices on the table for the next in line to the throne were her nephew, Prince Edward, and her son, Alexander.

However, due to the current circumstances, she heard that Edward might not be qualified to take the crown. That would leave his son to be the only obvious choice.

But that was very unlikely since his son had already refused to follow his heritage. He had already carved a path of his own and happily built a new life with his wife.

“No.” He said, staring at his wife as if he wanted her to understand the predicament that he was in.

One thing he loved about his wife was her ability to read him. She could sense if he needed her, especially in situations like this. But she never judged her, only supported her in the background.

“No.” She finally realized what he meant. She knew now that he was not talking about Edward.

Instead, the King wanted to name Alexander, to be the new heir to the throne. The King probably asked her husband to convince their son to accept his fate.

“He did not.” She finally voiced out her shock. She could not believe that Edward would force his brother’s hand in this matter. “I hope you are not seriously thinking about following his request.”

She believed that Alexander would not like being forced into the position. It had been an issue before, and now, she could already foresee the strain it would, once again, put on their family.

“It is not a request this time. It is an official royal command coming from our King.” Fred revealed to his wife the secret conversation they had that morning.

He had been sitting on this information all day, figuring out if he should follow his brother or ignore him. He was conflicted between his various roles as a brother, a subservient, and a father.

Chapter 613: Trip for the weekend

She slowly opened her eyes, squinting her eyelids for a bit from the sunshine glowing from her window. She did not want to wake up yet, sensing that it was still too early, despite the radiating sun already high up in the sky outside.

She was never a morning person, especially when it was a weekend. She would prefer to stay all morning in bed if she had the choice. But her bladder just would not cooperate this time.

“What the heck?” She gasped in shock, her ears picking up a slight sound coming from the other room.

Her eyes widened, suddenly fully awake, when she finally noticed a commotion inside her bathroom. She quickly stood up from her bed, scanning the rest of the room for any intruder.

Fortunately, she did not see anyone else. But the faint noise still persisted. She grabbed her robe at the foot of her bed and grabbed the nearest object she could get her hands on as her eyes focused on the source of the unusual noise.

“Where is my phone?” She silently mumbled to herself, not finding it on the table where she left it.

Finally giving up, she slowly moved to the other side of the room, debating whether she should check on the room or just run out of the apartment.

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But, her curiosity got the best of her as her feet led her to the door. Slowly, she moved closer to the door, finding it slightly ajar.

She gradually slid the door open just a tiny bit, peeking inside the small corner of the room. Raising her hand with the object in her grasp, ready to use it as a weapon, she tried to see if she could spot the intruder.

“I have a gun, and I am not afraid to use it.” She threatened whoever was inside the room once she confirmed that there was a movement through the shadows created by the light. She assumed he was a man, judging from the size of his shadow.

She raised her hand, aiming to throw the object at the intruder if he decided to attack her. Then, she noticed the sound disappeared, and the activity ceased.

But the shadow remained at the spot, motionless. After a few seconds of silence, whoever was inside continued as if she had said nothing.

“Dammit.” She hissed to herself. She realized that she might have whispered her threat to herself.

It was not as if she was thrilled to find someone else in her apartment, going through her personal stuff. She better come up with a better idea soon. But she did notice her hands trembled in fright.

Eventually, she decided to catch him unaware. Attack while he did not notice her. An element of surprise in her favor would be better, she decided. Feeling a bit braver.

“Agghhh!” She shouted loudly, hoping to scare the trespasser as she charged inside the room with the object in her hand.

She planned to hit the man with whatever she held in her hand. At this rate, clearly, she was not thinking straight and acting irrationally.

She blindly pounced at the man, hoping to inflict the most damage on his head, but he was quicker, tightly gripping her hands even before it hit his head.

“Hey, what are you doing?” A familiar voice resounded in the room. “Have you gone mad?” He pulled her off him and held her by the shoulders. “Jacky, it is me.”

Finally, she stopped struggling against him. Then, she eventually looked up at him, recognizing his voice. She released a sigh of relief, seeing his familiar face.

“Marcus, I thought you were an intruder, trying to rob me.” She quickly explained her uncharacteristic behavior.

She lowered her hand, feeling a bit calmer after realizing she was not in danger. However, she also lost her grip on the object in her hand as it swiftly fell to the floor with a loud thud, losing the adrenaline flowing in her system.

When she looked down, it was the only time she realized that the object in her hand was the phone she had been looking for earlier. She might have been more scared than she realized.

“I am sorry if I scared you, Jacky.” Marcus apologized, pulling her in a firm hug. “I was just trying to be quiet, so I would not wake you.”

He felt terrible that instead of surprising her. He managed to scare her to death. He could still feel her body mildly trembling as he enveloped her closer to his body.

Earlier, when he entered her apartment, he had already suspected that she might still be fast asleep. He decided not to wake her up and deal with her stuff by himself.

“That is ok. Just never do that to me again.” Jacky reprimanded him as her hands held him tightly by his shirt, looking directly into his eyes, using his strength for support.

She was glad that it was him and not some random dude about to rob her. But at the same time, she wanted to inflict harm on him for scaring her out of her wits.

She finally let go of him, kneeling down on the floor to pick up her phone, now split into different parts. She hoped that it was not busted.

“Sorry again.” He knelt down with her, helping her pick up the pieces of her broken phone. “I will just replace this with a new one.”

He took the pieces out of her hand, knowing that it was entirely his fault. He had a great plan scheduled for today. He just hoped that the rest of the day would be much better than this one.

“What are you doing here at this early anyway?” Jacky suddenly remembered that he was not supposed to be here. “And what are you planning to do with my stuff?”

She stood up, noticing her bag on the top of the sink with some of her things already inside. She wondered what Marcus was doing with her things, moving closer to check it out.

“It was supposed to be a surprise.” He told her as he stood beside her. He was not expecting that she would wake up at this time. Well, at least, until he was finished fixing her things. “Anyway, I am taking you on a trip for the weekend.”

Chapter 614: Running out of time

“Can you just tell me where we are going?” She glared at him when he kept packing up her things without giving her a concrete answer.

She stood by the bathroom door, watching him go through her things. In all honesty, she was thrilled at the prospect of going away with him on a trip, but she still preferred to know where.

She refused to do anything unless she would tell him anything, but he was as stubborn as ever as he continued to pick things he believed she would need on this trip.

“It is a surprise.” He said, continuing to throw her things into the overnight bag he took from her cabinet.

He was hoping that he would be through before she would open her eyes. He had tried to be more careful not to make unnecessary noises.

He was not expecting that she would suddenly wake up, catch him rummaging through her things and placing them inside the bag.

“As much as I would love to indulge your whim, I need the bathroom. So, can you please wait outside?” She tapped on her feet, crossing her arms across her chest, impatiently waiting for him to leave the room.

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She was debating if she should be mad at him for his intrusion into her place. But she did give him a key so he could freely come and go without asking for her permission.

However, that did not give him the right to meddle with her things. Then, plan for her weekend without consulting her. But then again, she also found it sweet that he would go to all that trouble for her.

“Hurry up! I don’t want us to be late.” Marcus ordered as if she had already agreed to the arrangement.

He carried the small bag, walked towards her, and leaned over. Then, planting a chaste kiss on her lips before moving out of the room. He could tell that she expected more.

He knew that Jacky could be a bit hard-headed just like him. One way he could get his way with her was to outsmart her. Surprising her was also another method of distracting her.

“Don’t think that we are through talking about this,” Jacky shouted behind him, making sure that he heard every word she said before he could close the door behind him.

She did not like that she had fallen into his trap that easily. She thought that he would continue kissing her, but instead, he left her craving for more.

She looked at herself in the mirror and was shocked by her appearance. Her hair was all disarray, then her face looked like it was just hit by a sack of potatoes.

Her cheeks were still missing some colors. She quickly splashed some water on her face and patted it with her fingers to make her blood flow again.

After a few more minutes, she was done in the bathroom. With a towel wrapped around her body, all she had to do was get some clothes inside her cabinet.

“Do you have any specific clothing I should wear for this trip?” She asked as she strutted into the bedroom with the flimsy towel covering her.

She could see his eyes following her every step, and a plan suddenly came to her mind. It was time for payback. If he could keep teasing her, she could also do the same.

“Wear what you feel like it.” He answered as he lay on her bed with arms behind his neck, back, and legs stretched on the covers. “But if you don’t hurry. You might suddenly find yourself wearing nothing at all.”

He warned her with a naughty glint in his eyes, staring at her from head to foot. He would like to get out of the apartment soon, but if she kept prancing in front of him with her barely concealed body, they might not leave the room, any time, soon.

“Then, stop looking.” She answered him as she turned around and faced the cabinet doors.

When she had finally chosen what she would like to wear, she let the towel drop intentionally to the floor, leaving her back exposed to his view.

She could tell that he had been watching intently, hearing him draw in a sharp breath. If he could make her combust like a fire, she could also fight fire with fire.

“You really know how to punish me.” He whispered behind her, taking over on zipping her up. “But I will certainly enjoy every minute of it.”

He slowly glided the metallic tab up the zipper chain, grazing it gently on her skin. He could tell that she could feel every sensation of the cold metal as it passed through her spine.

He could see it was working when she closed her eyes and slightly opened her mouth, allowing a gasp to escape her lips. He wanted her to imagine it was his fingers caressing her skin.

“No, I wasn’t.” She pretended innocently, but she knew she had been playing with fire.

Shortly, she realized that her action had backfired on her as she began to crave his touch. She leaned more to his hands, wanting to feel his skin against hers.

“I think you are all done.” He announced just under her ears, allowing his breath to skim through her delicate skin.

He pulled his hand abruptly away from her skin, not believing she did not expose her backside to him on purpose. He would admit that it was hard for him to control himself, but he would not let her win. Not yet.

“Oh!” She responded disappointedly, immediately opening her eyes, only to realize that she had been outwitted again. However, it was just the beginning, she thought. She had the entire weekend to get back at him. She was not giving up yet on her plans.

If he had a surprise for her, she might as well create one for him. But this one, she would make sure both of them would enjoy. What could that be? That was the question. She still had no idea where they were going.

“Come on. I don’t want us to be late.” He moved away from her and waited by the door.

He could always get her the other things she might need once they were there. He had no more time to sort out her stuff because they were already running out of time.

Chapter 615: In two minds

“Are you really going to go through this?” It was the question that kept ringing in his ears until that moment. Yet, he still had no answer to it.

He was walking in the hallways of the palace on his way to the private meeting. But his wife’s words still bothered him. She had asked him that question a million times before, but this time, he could not ignore her voice as it went on and on in his head.

Soon, the guards opened the door for him, revealing the inside of the room already occupied by the other Council members. He could see that the chairs were almost complete, except for the one on the other end and his.

“What is this all about?” The Duke immediately asked the other members the moment he stood by his chair and looked at each one of the Council.

Compared to most of the meetings they were conducting, this was more private. Only the original Counsels were invited to take part in the discussion.

Although the purpose was not stated in the invitation, he still believed that he might already have an idea of what could be the subject matter.

It must have something to do with the vacant seat at his other end. His brother’s illness must have reached everyone’s ears. It might have raised alarm bells among the Council members and their people.

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“We all heard of King Edward’s health condition. As the Council head and his brother, we would like to know your opinion about the situation.” Count Edinburgh was the first to voice out his growing concern.

He had always supported the King and his reign. He believed that he had done his best to be a good leader in their nation. However, his loyalty would always lie in their kingdom and what would be best for their people.

He could not stand idly by and wait for something to happen when he could do something about it now. At the moment, there was a particular matter that he felt should be addressed.

“I guess it is a matter of concern for everyone around here and our people.” Duke Frederick could not deny the severity of their situation. He took his seat and contemplated the issue at hand.

It might seem like a small matter coming from the point of view of an outsider, but within their law, a King should always be in solid mind and be in good, healthy shape to serve as their supreme leader.

The King might have been diagnosed with a mild illness. It was not a terminal case, treatable with long-term maintenance. If managed well, the King could survive for a long time.

However, heart attacks were known to be traitors. It could strike without any warning. At any time, his condition could also cause paralysis and other side effects. Worse, he could end up dead.

“Don’t get us wrong. We have nothing against the King continuing his rule over us. But can you guarantee that he is still capable of performing his obligations?” Count Asthorne also spoke about his apprehension about the current situation.

He had always been against the Duke stepping down from his right to the throne. He thought that the Duke would have brought the kingdom to its former glory if he had been the King.

But now, he could see that with Edward out of the picture, Alexander, the Duke’s son, should take over as the next heir.

“The King only suffered a minor attack which the doctors are now thoroughly examining. We will know more about his condition once the results are out.” Duke Frederick released his official statement about the health condition of the King.

Regarding the other matters that he and his brother had talked about. He was still debating if he should even mention it to the entire Council or wait until he had discussed the matter with the person concerned.

“We understand his situation, but you also have to consider our fear that something might happen to him. Until now, we have no concrete update about an heir.” Count Wellington also aired his sentiment.

He had considered Prince Edward before since he was the rightful heir. But after his terrible behavior, he believed that Alexander should take the throne.

Because of Prince Edward’s involvement with a criminal and his activities, they had no more choice but to rule him out of running for the position.

However, Lance told him that Alexander still refused to accept his rightful place in their kingdom. If that was the case, they would be facing a problem if something happened to the King without an heir.

“What about your son, Prince Alexander?” Lord Bailey asked as he turned his face towards the Duke.

“You know he is a perfect alternative as a replacement for Prince Edward.”

“I agree.” Count Asthorne quickly interjected. “I think Alexander is the best choice to be our next King.” He confidently stated, nodding his head in agreement.

If he had the power to convince Alexander to be his new King, he would have used it already. But Alex was still stubborn and refused his plea to accept his legacy.

He could only think of one more prince who could qualify for the position, but it would not be easy since Alexander was still alive. Under their law, as long as an heir was qualified for the throne. They could not replace him with another heir since he was not a direct descendent of the Royal family.

"I hear what you are saying, but my son had refused the throne before. And if it is up to me, I will not force this position on him." The Duke finally spoke, expressing his true feelings about the matter.

He loved his son and would not wish for a life that he had refused to accept himself. He had grown and lived in the palace his entire life.

He had seen what the crown had done to his father and mother. He had first-hand experience of the life of being in the constant spotlight. He would not want that for his son or his sons if that was not what he wanted for himself.

"But you know we have no choice. You have to find a way to convince your son to reconsider his position about being our next leader." Lord Fordshire, the youngest in the Council, interrupted the conversation going around the table.

He believed that Alex should take over as the new leader of their kingdom. Although he understood the Duke's sentiment. He was a father too, and he would also do what he thought was best for his son.

Still, he could not see any other option because if they failed to have an heir if the King suddenly died. They might end up in chaos. As a member of the Council, he believed he also had an obligation to the kingdom.

"Here is what I can promise you for now." The Duke stood up from his chair and looked at his colleagues. "I will discuss all of this with Alexander. I will tell him about our current situation."

He respected them all for all their contributions to their kingdom. They had been tremendously cooperative and supportive during his reign as their head.

He believed that the least he could do for them was talked to his son again about the situation. "But I will let him decide." He concluded his statement.

As a father, he believed that he should regard his son's happiness and future. But as the Council of Elders' leader, he should also consider the welfare of their people and the kingdom.

Eventually, the Duke was left in two minds about whether to convince his son to accept his heritage or continue with his current path and never look back.

Chapter 616: Time to get the show on the road

"Are you sure they are coming?" She asked as she sat on her seat with her hands feeling ice-cold despite the slight sweat she could feel building up at the back of her neck.

She gazed out of the window on her side and waited for her friend to arrive. But every minute that ticked on her watch was more tension pulling on her nerves.

She knew nothing terrible would happen to them. But still, her body reacted negatively to the scene before her despite the day being uneventful thus far. She was simply sitting down and waiting, but her mind was already mildly panicking.

He pulled her hand and covered it with his, feeling the fear that gripped her. "Hey, Dani, they are coming. Marcus said that they were already on their way."

He had everything checked by his team thoroughly. Nothing would get passed them this time. The horrible experience they endured would remain an isolated case. It would never happen again.

He looked out the window and only saw his team scattered around the area. Tim had assigned his very best men to tackle the task of protecting them. And he trusted Tim to know what he was doing.

"Oh, ok." She expressed with a deep breath. "It is just that we are already waiting for ten minutes, and there is still no sign of them." She clasped her hand tightly on his, absorbing his warmth.

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Then, she looked away from the window to stare into his eyes. Those beautiful orbs that mesmerized her until now. It always had a way of calming her down.

Eventually, his eyes locked with her, communicating his desire to protect her. To keep her safe at all times. She knew at that point that she had nothing to fear.

"Have I told you that you look lovely today?" Alex knew that dwelling on her fear would not do them any good.

He took her hands and planted a few tender kisses on her knuckles. Somehow, it made the slight tremors stop. Then, her breathing slowly evened out.

He placed his fingers on her chin, guiding her face until his lips touched hers. With his little gesture, her heart sped up. But he knew, this time, it meant something else.

"Hey, honeymoon starts after the plane lands." A voice by the entrance shouted at them. "Not on the plane." She continued, walking in the aisle towards the couple.

Jacky was surprised to see a plane waiting for them at a private hangar. But she was more shocked to see her best friend and her husband making out inside.

"You are truly full of surprises today." She mumbled to Marcus as she gazed at the couple.

She would cover her eyes for decency purposes, but it was just too interesting not to see the scene in front of them. Eventually, she did stop staring and stopped on her path.

She turned around and smiled at the man walking close behind her. She held her hand on Marcus' eyes, preventing them from seeing what she already had seen.

"I told you, you will like it," Marcus mischievously answered, grinning from ear to ear as they waited not too far away from the other couple.

The last thing he saw was the two scrambling to make themselves appear more decent. He did not mind catching them in such a situation.

“Why are you grinning like that?” Jacky narrowed her eyes at her partner, seeing the evil glim in its depth. “You and your naughty thoughts.” She reprimanded him when he winked at her, sliding his hands down her arms.

She could feel the excitement running through her veins at his suggestion. Igniting her blood to a boiling point, but it was not the time and place. He just had to wait.

“Jacky, finally, you are here.” Dani greeted her best friend, abruptly standing up from her position after buttoning up her blouse. Then, out of the arms of her husband. “What took you so long?”

She grabbed her friend by the shoulders, pulling her in a warm hug. Her earlier apprehension seemed to have vanished, distracted by being in the company of the people she cared about. Or was it by her earlier activity?

“From the way, I saw it, we were just in time.” Jacky teased her friend, gesturing to Alex, who was now busy talking to Marcus.

This earned her a pinch in the ribs, but it did not hurt, but more like tickled. In turn, both burst into laughter, finding the indecent show entertaining.

It was not what she wanted, but she was glad that her friend arrived in the nick of time. A minute later would have turned into a bigger disaster.

“Anyway, any idea where these two clowns are taking us?” Jacky asked as they sat comfortably beside each other to talk while waiting for the captain to declare their departure.

She had been bugging Marcus to reveal it to her during their car ride, but he was tough like a solid rock. She could not squeeze any information from him.

“No idea,” Dani replied, shrugging her shoulders, still clueless about the plan.

She only knew that Jacky was coming because she refused at first to join him on this trip. She claimed to be busy with her work and other stuff. But she would admit, flying still gave her the creeps.

However, Alex was right as usual. She could only overcome her fear by facing it. She could not keep hiding behind her work. Because eventually, it would catch up with her.

“At least we are going on this trip together.” Jacky voiced out her excitement, giggling like a schoolgirl.

She grabbed her friend’s hand and shook it with her as she jumped up and down, already thinking of the fun ways they could enjoy this trip.

She finally gave up on trying to guess where they were going. She just had to trust the boys to know what they were doing. But, she believed it was time to get the show on the road.

Chapter 617: The primal instincts of man

Alex had asked Marcus to bring Jacky along on the trip he had set up for Dani. It would be like hitting two birds with one stone. Marcus had a surprise for Jacky on this trip that he would like to share with them.

Then, Alex thought that having their two best friends on the trip might make things more comfortable for Dani. He still believed that she avoided taking on trips because of her traumatic experience.

Besides, he still owed her a honeymoon vacation. This trip could partially serve as an opportunity to continue what they had missed.

“This place is incredible.” Jacky expressed with her red lips curving into a big O, showing her appreciation of the unique beauty of the place.

She was fascinated with the new scenery since she had never visited places like this before. Her experience in traveling would be close to negligible compared to her three companies.

She gazed from her left to the right, getting the feeling of relaxation in the air. With the cool breeze on her skin, she could finally say that this was the break she was looking for.

“Absolutely.” Dani also liked the view, joining her friend in admiring her surroundings as she stepped out of the vehicle with Alex’s assistance.

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She could feel the crisp air as it touched her skin. It was a welcome change from the increasing cold in the city where they just came from.

“Do you girls like it?” Alex joined them, alongside Marcus. “Marcus, you can take this cabin while we would take that one.” He pointed to the other structure just a few meters away from theirs.

His bodyguards already knew where they would be staying since they had been here before on some occasions. In addition, they had to establish a strategic position to guard the place against possible intruders.

He was not saying that their enemies might attack them again. But paparazzi also lurked in the shadows, waiting to get a juicy story about them.

“Wait till you see the inside of the house,” Marcus whispered in her ears, breaking the spell she was in as he dragged her towards the front door. “We will see you in a while.” He shouted over his shoulder.

Jacky was left to follow closely behind, trying to match his stride, leaving the other couple behind, still standing by the car the last time she looked.

“What about our things?” She questioned as she tried to catch her breath, remembering that they had left it still inside the trunk.

She snatched her hand away from his grip and stood her ground, not planning to move from her position. She refused to be dragged any further like an animal.

“It will have to wait because what I want to do with you can not wait any longer.” He said in frustration.

With a sudden movement, he scooped her up. She landed on his shoulders, shocked by his caveman behavior. “Put me down!” She ordered when she finally got over her initial shock.

But he never did as he continued to walk towards the first house until they both disappeared behind the door. He never once looked back at the other couple who was left gawking at them.

“Do you think Marcus will be alright?” Alex asked his wife after watching the scene that the two had displayed.

He saw how Jacky’s eyes bulged at Marcus’s stunt. Based on his experience with Jacky, she was the kind of person he did not want to mess with.

“Jacky is all bark but no bite.” She said, shaking her head at the hilariousness of their friends. “Marcus will surely be fine.” She assured him. “But, let us talk about you.”

She turned to him, pulling his arms until he was facing her. Then, she wrapped her hands on his shoulders. Finally, letting them slide down slowly on his body until her palms rested on his firm chest.

She could feel the steady rhythm of his heart drumming on the palm of her hands. She wished her heart could be as calm as his. As if nothing could faze him at all.

“What do you have in mind?” He asked, glad that she had overcome her fear of flying, breaking the sudden silence that surrounded the two of them.

He placed his hands on her waist, pulling her closer to him until there was barely enough space for air to separate them apart. When she finally looked up again to stare at his eyes, he used it as an opportunity to tease her lips.

Dani raised her hand and used her fingers to stop his lips. “Not here.” She reminded him, suddenly feeling her cheeks redden out of embarrassment.

She was not against public display of affection, but still, she did not condone more than kissing in public areas. At this point, even if this place was private, there were still many eyes watching their every move.

“Oh, right,” Alex said, remembering their earlier incident, too. “Come, let me show you the house.”

Unlike Marcus, he simply guided her towards the other house, situated in the slightly woody part of the lot. But it had a good view of the lake where they could do some fishing.

It was the cabin that he occupied when he would visit this place with his family. This place had a good hunting ground that his family loved to go to if they wished to go for a hunt.

“Do you also own this place?” She asked, mesmerized by the decorations that hung on the wall.

She let her eyes wander around the room, checking every piece of decoration that showed the history of the place. It appeared to be an old wooden house that was well-maintained.

Judging from the decors spread across the single floor room. It seemed to have a rich background. If the artifacts and displays were not bought in an expensive antique shop.

“No, but my family does.” He answered her, following close behind her as she inspected every piece of an object she could touch.

He enjoyed watching her move from one place to another. It was as if he saw the entire room for the first time. But, he had been in this place countless times.

“Did you kill any of these animals?” She asked, stopping by a head of a deer that had his soulful eyes staring back at her.

She was not repulsed by the stuffed head of dead animals that occupied the many corners of the house. As long as the hunting of these animals was done according to the law of nature.

“No, these were killed by my ancestors.” He answered, but he was unsure if the question was a trap.

“But, I joined the hunts before and killed my share of animals.” He admitted anyway.

He had no idea if she had something against killing animals. He had met many animal advocates that did not agree with their ways. But he was raised to survive in the woods. To kill if necessary to survive.

“Well, I am glad that you are the predator and not the prey.” She said as she moved along the room, finally reaching a door that could only lead to one thing.

Of course, she could not deny that early humans were raised to hunt, being on the top of the food chain. Actually, it had become an intuition of any specie to fight for survival.

It was indeed one of the primal instincts of man.

Chapter 618: A worthy prize

As soon as she entered the room, she never bothered looking at her surrounding. Her focus had been on one person alone, the man who stood just behind her.

She closed her eyes, imagining his eyes boring into her back. Her senses were heightened as she waited for his hands to touch her, for his body to capture her.

“You are the most alluring prey I have ever seen.” He whispered at her back, but still, he did not touch her.

He just stood close enough for her to feel his presence. But like a predator, he watched her. His eyes studied her, reading her every reaction. He moved around her until he stood before her.

With her eyes closed, he could not read her thoughts. But with a single touch, he could sense her desire. With the palm of his index finger, he touched her lower lips, opening them a bit to release the air she was holding inside.

“Then, what are you waiting for?” She dared him to touch her more. To claim his prize.

In truth, she could not wait for him anymore. She wanted him, even craved him. She wished to continue what was interrupted earlier. She longed for the long due honeymoon that was promised to her.

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“I want this to be meaningful.” He spoke gently near her ears, allowing the air from his lips to graze her skin. “I want this moment to be one of the best memories you will have of this place.”

His fingers pulled the pin holding her hair up in a bun on top of her head. But he still did not touch her. He just let her hair cascade down on her shoulders like a waterfall.

“What are you doing?” She asked as anxiety started to settle in. She opened her eyes to check on him as a different memory popped out of her mind.

Somehow, the trees around them, the breeze of the wind outside, the scent of the wood. Then, the creaking noise of the floorboards reminded her of a different time and place.

What started as sweet and lovely was becoming a nightmare before her very eyes. She just had to be assured that it was not real. She had to see the man in front of her.

"I am helping you." He spoke calmly, gazing into her enchanting eyes. He knew he could stare at them and be lost forever. "Do you trust me?" He asked.

Finally, he raised his hand to touch her face, giving her the guarantee that it was him. No one else. Because he could finally see in her eyes, not the desire he so hoped to see. But the fear that had been hiding just beneath the surface.

"Yes, I do. But..." She did trust him with all her heart, mind, and soul. However, she could not help the dread that kept pushing at the forefront of her mind.

"If you truly trust me, there should be no doubt." He gently said, not wanting to scare her but to ensure that she would trust her.

He could see the hesitation in her eyes and the slight quiver of her lips. But he was not giving up. He was set to help her get over whatever shadows were lurking around her, blinding her from the truth that she was finally free.

"I do. I trust you." Hearing his reassuring voice somehow uplifted her spirit. It slightly made her believe that she could be brave again. She could fight whatever fear gripped her heart and refused to release her.

She again closed her eyes without waiting to be told. Once the darkness set in, the memories came rushing back. But this time, she allowed them to flood her memories.

"Thank you. That is all I need to hear." His voice entered her ears. A familiar soothing voice invaded her mind. "Follow my voice. Trust me that I will never leave your side."

He watched her slightly struggle in her standing position as if she was fighting an inner battle. But he could not fight for her. This was one war that she should beat alone.

But he would make sure that he stood on the sidelines and cheered for her. He had to show his support so that she would be inspired to win.

"What do you mean?" She realized that she had to distinguish the different voices talking in her head to hear him.

Luckily, it was a sound that was very familiar to her. It was the only voice that could calm her down. After a while, she could already zone out the other sounds and concentrate only on his voice.

"I need you to trust me and follow me, using only your ears." He said carefully, making sure that she understood his instructions. "Follow my voice and follow me. And no peeking." He added the last part just as a reminder.

Slowly, he walked backward when he saw her nodding her head as an acknowledgment that she heard him loud and clear. Then, he gave her an instruction to step forward towards his voice.

It was just a few steps toward the bed, but he knew it would be a milestone if she could continue to do so without breaking down. He only wished to break the curse that she had placed on herself.

“Where are you taking me?” She asked, her hands slightly raised in the air, trying hard not to bump into anything. Still, his voice seemed so near, but yet so far.

She still could not feel him anywhere near her. It was as if he was constantly moving, avoiding being caught. But she knew he would never leave her, just like what he said earlier.

“Anywhere you want to go.” He finally stopped when the back of his legs finally hit the side of the bed.

Then, her hands finally landed on his arms. Touching him, feeling his skin against her fingers. Reminding herself that this was Alex and no one else.

The setting of the place might seem the same, but the man standing in front of her was not. He was the man that she loved and her protector.

“I only want to be with you.” She raised her hands, cradling his face, feeling every contour of his cheeks, nose, eyes, and chin. Even without sight, she could tell that he was perfection.

“And all I want is you.” He finally touched her, grazing his fingers along her cheeks, feeling its softness against his rough skin.

He was satisfied with the way she had trusted his voice. He only wanted to help her fight off her fears. The only way he knew how was to always face it head-on. To never allow it to get control of the mind and the body.

“I love you, Alex.” She finally opened her eyes, seeing the man that had completed every part of her being. Helped her during all those times of trouble. Never left her during her rough times.

Until now, he was not giving up on her. He still continued to stand by her side and support her. He was not only perfect physically, but he was a complete package.

“I love you more, Dani.” Alex stared into her eyes. This time, he was satisfied with what he saw. “You can make any house a place I can call home.”

Gone was the fear he witnessed in her eyes earlier. Deep into her soul, all he read now was love and the desire to be loved. He finally saw in their depths the reflection of what he felt for her.

He finally took her lips, claiming them as his reward. A worthy prize that both of them could enjoy.

Chapter 619: To go the extra mile

“That is not how you treat a lady,” Jacky profusely complained as he continued to carry her inside the house without speaking another word.

She might not have been born with a silver spoon in her mouth or worn the finest clothes growing up, but she still considered herself a woman, deserving some respect.

“You should know better...” She continued with her litany while he just kept his silence.

He unceremoniously set her down in the center of the living room. Just looking at her, waiting for her to stop her rambling. But he figured that she was not done yet.

He could think of only one way to shut her up effectively. But it did not involve talking at all. With a smirk on his face, he went to action.

"I deserve more than..." The remaining words were finally drowned out when he grabbed her by the waist, pulled her closer, and devoured her lips with his.

He had been dying like a starving man since they had left her apartment. Her teasing had him hard and almost out of control. Now, he planned to exact his revenge and satisfaction.

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He could not wait any longer because he felt like he was about to explode if she kept torturing him with her seductive smile. Now, he was more turned on by her sassiness. She was a temptation he could not resist.

"You were saying?" Marcus asked when he finally came up for air with her still melting in his arms.

His lips still lingered inches away from hers while his eyes waited for her consent to go full speed ahead. While his arms held her body close to his, supporting her from falling to the floor.

"Stop staring and kiss me." She breathily said as she tried to catch her breath. Demanding that he continue what he started.

She moved her hands from his arms, raising them to his neck. Then, she wrapped them around his nape, pulling him down until his lips were connected again with hers.

She knew that she had been playing with fire with him since that morning. But it was a game she loved to play because the outcome had always been more satisfying.

"Your wish is my command." He mumbled before sealing their lips. It was the only consent he needed to continue his onslaught on her lips and body.

He pulled her body closer to him. But this time, she jumped willingly into his arms, wrapping her legs around his torso. He took this as his signal to proceed to the next level.

Swiftly, he strode from the living room towards the bedroom with her cradled in his arms. Once he was standing on the edge of the bed, he laid her gently down on the soft, white blanket covering the bed.

"Are you not joining me?" She asked when he remained standing, just gazing at her.

She wondered what he thought of her as his eyes scanned her from her head to her toes. But his eyes expressed how much he was burning to have her.

"Give me a second to enjoy the view." He smiled at her, unbuttoning his shirt and pulling it off his body.

Since he got back together with her, things between them had been different. In this case, he believed that he had grown more fond of her each day.

She had weaved more intricately into his life that he was afraid of how he was losing control. Scared of the power she had over him. But in truth, he was more terrified of losing her again.

“Don’t take too long.” She said seductively, biting her lower lip to control herself from pouncing on him.

This time, she was the one ogling him, enjoying the show he was giving her. Honestly, she had seen this scene more times than she could count, but she would never get enough of it.

Finally, the long wait was over as he crawled to her side, pulling her closer to him. With his other hand, he started to caress her body. Starting with her shoulders, down to her arms.

“You don’t know how much I want you,” Marcus whispered in her ears as his lips grazed the skin around her neck.

She moaned in response, unable to create a coherent word at the moment as she savored the delicious sensation his lips produced, sending waves of electricity on her spine.

He suddenly stopped, then his face loomed on top of hers, gazing into her eyes. It was taking all his power to control his desire, but there was something that he wanted to say.

“But I know how much I want you.” She finally responded, staring into his eyes. “I...” But she knew she could not say it first. No matter how much she wanted to tell him.

Because if she did, he might feel like she was forcing him to say it back to her. That was not what she wanted. Because at the end of this all, he might take it back if he did not mean it.

At least, she had seen the effort he made to change. She had seen how their relationship had progressed to another level. She could wait until he was ready to tell her what he felt.

“I...” He was about to say something but stopped. He could tell from her eyes what she was supposed to say. He might not be well versed with love, but he had shied away from it long enough to know the signs.

He was expecting this to happen, but he was still unsure if he could say the words. He had never believed in them, seeing how his parents had never been a good example.

He knew to some it was just mere words. But he could not simply say it to Jacky, just to make her happy. He had to determine if he was actually capable of loving someone.

But in his defense, he truly admired Jacky. He was willing to try where their relationship would take them. This time, he was not running away. Instead, he planned to go the extra mile for her.

Chapter 620: Pandora’s box

“Stop stalling and kiss me.” Jacky broke the awkward silence. She could see that he was struggling with whatever he was supposed to say to her. Just like she was debating with herself.

Then, she leaned forward, planting her lips with his, wanting nothing else between them. For now, she was settling with what he could give her, satisfied with the effort he was making to make their relationship work.

“I promise to make this work,” Marcus continued what he was supposed to say earlier. But he knew it was not the words that sprung to mind before he stopped them.

He still believed he could not say love because it would be meaningless. But he swore to do his best to be a better lover and a boyfriend for as long as she would have him.

Quickly, he was on the same page with her as their bodies entwined in a battle of domination. But both were satisfied with what the other gave, and the other took.

After a while, he fell into exhaustion and deep sleep, but she remained staring at the ceiling with her wandering thoughts. She knew she promised not to settle for less, but she did not want to lose him.

She decided she should wait until he was ready to acknowledge that he loved her. She could see it in his eyes every time he looked at her. She heard it in his words, felt it in his touch, and sensed it with his presence.

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“I love you.” She mumbled to herself, just wanting to get it off her chest. She knew he would not hear her, judging from the snore coming from his lips. But she still wanted to say it out loud.

She believed he would eventually realize it through time. Through her help, she hoped he would learn the meaning of true love. Then he would learn to embrace and admit it to her.

After a few more minutes of doing nothing, she gave up trying to sleep. It was still early anyway, but she wondered about their clothes. They were still outside in the trunk of the car.

She guessed she should settle with the clothes she had on earlier. She went for a quick dash to the bathroom to do some business and then searched for something she could use.

But the bathroom seemed to be lacking some of their necessities as she opened the cabinets. “Where are the robes?” There was a towel, though, which she thought would have to do.

She wrapped her body around it after taking a quick shower. Then proceeded back to the room. She started picking up her blouse, then the rest of their clothes scattered on the floor where they might have thrown them.

Then, “Ouch!” She quickly lifted her right foot after a shooting pain went through her body. She felt something prick the bottom of her sole. She looked down, but it disappeared from her sight.

She bent her knees and crouched down on the floor, trying to check on the object she had stepped on. It appeared that it went under the bed when she accidentally kicked on it.

She figured it might be something that had fallen off his pants. Since it was lying next to his things. But whatever it was, she had to find it because it might be something valuable.

“Where are you?” She mumbled as she stretched her arms under the bed.

She spread her fingers, letting her hand search thoroughly in the dark space. It was partially dim inside the room since the curtains were down, but she could see that there was still a bright light outside, partially illuminating the room.

When her fingers finally felt the object, she immediately grabbed it, pulling it out from under the bed. But her eyes bulged when she saw what it was. It was a surprise that she was not expecting.

Could he? Could it be?

Questions plagued her mind upon gazing at the tiny black box in her hand. It could contain several things, but she could not help speculate about a specific item.

She wished to open it. At the same time, she feared seeing its content. She could feel her heart throbbing every second she held on to it, wondering what was inside.

“Jacky?” A voice suddenly resounded in the room, notifying her that he had awoken.

Quickly, she hid the box behind her back and stared at the partially naked man, still lying on the bed. At least most of his vital organ was still covered with the white blanket.

“Yes,” Jacky immediately answered, keeping the object out of his sight.

She kept her gaze at him, but her mind was trying to figure out how to return the box inside his pocket. She did not want him to know that she had seen his other surprise, although she still had to know what was inside.

“What are you doing up?” He questioned, stretching slightly on the bed and searching for her.

He just realized he must have dozed off after the strenuous activity they had shared. But when he woke up, he did not expect to find himself all alone in the bed.

“I was hungry and thinking of going out to check for food.” She immediately came up with an excuse.

She could not tell him she could not sleep because she wanted to declare her undying love for him. Then, she could not also admit that she had seen something she should not have.

“You and your stomach,” Marcus groaned as he jumped off the bed, letting the sheets fall on the floor. “Give me a minute to get ready.” He informed her, striding towards the bathroom in a hurry, completely naked.

He could not actually blame her for starving. He did wear her out. Even he could feel his stomach grumbling at the moment. Well, he admitted that sex could not fill this kind of void. This time, only food could feed his hunger.

“Ok. I’ll just wait here and get dressed.” She told him before he could disappear inside the other room. But her eyes followed his every step, admiring his physique. She could not help it.

She stayed in her position until he had partially closed the door. Making sure, she waited some more. When she heard the water splashing on the tiles, she picked up where she had left off before he interrupted her.

She stared at the box for a minute, debating if she should take a peek inside. She held the box close to her face and quickly opened it. Finally, making a decision before she could change her mind.

Damn, she thought as she stared at the object, lifting it with her fingers for closer scrutiny. Her suspicion was right on the mark. It was something she was not expecting to find in his things.

“Damn!” She repeated, louder this time, unable to believe her eyes. She could not help but wonder what he was planning to do with it.

Suddenly she regretted opening the box and looking at it. It would now keep nagging at her consciousness until she found some answers.

Well, she should really take heed that curiosity did kill a lot of cats. At the moment, she could not unsee what she had already seen.

There was no going back, and she hated that she could not ask questions about it but instead had to wait patiently for its grand reveal. Suddenly, she thought it was like opening Pandora's box.