

Royal Contract 621

Chapter 621: Spreading like wildfire

"I think Samson is on the same page with us," Mike reported to his boss as he joined him for an early dinner in one of his boss's favorite restaurants.

He could see several eyes wandering in their direction, but he still did not see any reason to be alarmed. As far as everyone knew, they were just two old friends trying to catch up.

He continued with his meal, enjoying the delicious taste of his medium-rare steak, watching his boss process what he had just told him.

"Did he tell you anything about what the couple knew about our group?" Gerald asked, wanting to be sure that they covered all their tracks.

He could not take any risk that someone else knew about his identity, not until he had fully gained the trust of his entire organization.

While there were still some doubts about his leadership, he could not afford a hiccup that could complicate his situation. More would possibly question his leadership and cost him his position if he made a wrong move at this point.

"He said that the couple had no idea of our existence." Mike confidently stated, believing Samson to be telling him the truth. "I think he is not lying about this."

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He was a good judge of character since he was trained by the best. Based on his assessment, Samson had no reason to lie to them. But he had more reason to protect himself and his family by admitting everything he knew.

"Then, all he had to do now will be to point in the right direction." Gerald reminded Mike about the plan as he chewed on his steak, appreciating what money and power could buy. "What about Nick?"

He needed someone to take the fall for this. If Nick agreed to be the fall guy, the case would be quickly closed. Then, further investigation would not be necessary.

With Samson as the state witness, it would solidify the case against Nick, making solving the crime easy to get a verdict. With that, Nick would rot in jail. While he would be scot-free.

Mike placed down his cutlery and drank his wine. "I think he will be our biggest problem." Shaking his head disappointedly. He was doubtful that Nick would agree to the plan. "He is still hesitating to accept our offer."

He looked around the place, checking if someone else might be interested in their conversation, secretly eavesdropping. But the other patrons seemed to be minding their own business.

"What do you think are Nick's plans?" He could already see that it would be a problem in the long run if Nick decided to save his own skin.

His mind began calculating the different scenarios that might happen if Nick decided to betray their organization. He had to determine the implication of such action against his reign.

At the moment, it did not look good from his standpoint. If that was the case, he believed he might have no choice but to implement his plan B.

"He is still counting on his army of lawyers to get him out of the bind through some technicality. But do not worry, I am working on sabotaging his plans." Mike assured his boss that he had it under control.

It paid that he had made many connections from the years he had worked in this business. It had been valuable that many owed him a favor. That included most of the lawyers working for Nick.

"Well, I know I can count on you." Gerald picked up his wine and sipped almost half of it, using the time to devise a plan against Nick that might be able to help Mike speed up the process.

Not that he did not trust Mike to do his job well, he just needed an assurance that if he failed, there was always a backup to finish the job.

"What about the job that your colleague offered to you?" Mike raised his brow, believing there was more to this than meets the eye. "Are you planning on taking it?"

Legally, there was nothing that should stop him from taking the case. It was a good case, and the Hamilton and Blackstone families would surely pay a handsome fee.

He could not see any issues with that. Besides, it was a perfect opportunity for him to be on top of the situation. Unless, of course, his boss was hiding something.

"I am still thinking about it?" Gerald simply replied, not elaborating on his answer.

He had no reason to explain his position on the issue to his man, even if he was his friend or former colleague. Still, he was his boss, and he should respect his privacy.

"But rumors are circulating about your obsession with the princess." Mike had to tell him about the current talks he had heard on the grapevine. It was his obligation as his subordinate and as his friend.

He heard that the other leaders were concerned about the possible implication if he kept pursuing this interest in the Hamilton heiress.

"Where did you hear that?" Now, his curiosity increased by this new revelation. But his face remained expressionless as he waited for him to answer.

He might be his friend, but he was still a part of his secret organization. Still, he was cautious when he revealed his secrets to anyone, even him.

Besides, he had been careful not to show his intentions to anyone. Yes, he had been friendly with Dani in public, but nothing that would indicate he was interested in her.

Therefore, he wondered how the rumors came to life. Someone close to him might have noticed something, but who would betray him and spread such information.

"Well, one person might have whispered it to my ears, but it may also mean that it is already known among our peers," Mike revealed.

It meant it might have already gone viral in the entire organization. People who had a vested interest in ruining their boss might already have capitalized on this.

Well, rumors did have a way of spreading like wildfire.

Chapter 622: If things go south

He was surprised to hear that his private affair had been a source of entertainment in their organization. But he was not expecting anyone knew about his secret.

"So, you think everyone already heard about this." It was stated more as a fact rather than a question.

Somehow he was glad that his friend had notified him of this fact. Many of his men might not mention it to him for fear of the consequences.

But unlike most of his men, Mike always had the balls to tell him what he needed to hear. One thing he had liked about him when he first met him.

"Yes, I think so," Mike replied honestly. "If you want my opinion. I will say it. If you don't. I will still say it anyway because I am your friend." Mike paused for a few seconds, watching his expression change. Clearly, his boss was thinking deeply.

But before he could say more, he noticed a couple walking towards them. The man was quite familiar to him, but he did not have a chance to work with him yet, unlike his boss.

Quickly, he silently warned his boss of an impending company. He did not want their uninvited guest to accidentally hear their topic for tonight.

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"Gerald, nice to see you here." The man greeted, standing before their table with a woman in his arms. "By the way, this is my girlfriend, Rosella Sheldon."

Gerald looked up to the familiar voice and greeted him back, "David, nice to see you here. It is nice to meet you, Rosella." He stood from his seat to shake her hand, always a gentleman.

"This is Mike Carter from the DA's office." At the same time, using it to introduce his friend.

He felt that introducing them would reduce his wondering about seeing the two of them together, dining like they were concocting something up.

"Oh, yes. I have heard about you. Your reputation has already proceeded you. It is nice to finally meet you, Mike." David said, saying good things that he heard about the new staff of the District Attorney's Office.

It was always great to be updated with the changes happening around them. It will somehow be beneficial in their line of work when the time comes.

"We used to work together before I have joined your firm," Gerald informed his current partner. Appearing like it was not such a big deal.

Working for the firm that David built had been a good move for him since it served as a good cover while he prepared himself for his position in his father's underground empire.

While working for him, he managed to increase his influence and connection in the legal world. At the same time, create a good persona in the public's eyes.

Now, he was a public figure that many admired. A man who had been advocating for equal rights, freedom, and several worldly causes. Who would believe that he could run an illegal underground empire?

"Yeah, I think I heard that you two might know each other." He explained why he was not surprised to see them together.

He usually asked someone to do some background checks on new lawyers, especially Mike Carter, since he was involved in handling the case against Nick.

Still, he could not help check on them and make his introduction, seeing that Gerald seemed so relaxed with the company of his friend.

"We did have great times together." Mike interrupted the interaction, feeling that he should say something to support his friend. "Anyway, where are our manners? Would you like to join us?"

It was a common courtesy to invite them, even if he already knew they had no intention of joining them. But it was also another tactic of reminding the other guests that they had overstayed their welcome.

"Oh, we do not want to impose on the two of you. But it was nice seeing you, Gerald, here and meeting you, Mike." David said, finally giving their excuses and farewell.

Finally, leaving the two alone to finish their conversation while he proceeded with his date towards their reserved table. Then, he glimpsed at the two again before focusing his eyes on his date.

He could not help sense something off from the looks the two exchanged in the latter part of their conversation. He could not shake off the feeling that Mike was trying to get rid of them.

"Shall we order?" He asked Rosella, who had been quite patient with him. She had not complained about his work but had always been supportive.

He eventually ignored his instinct and diverted his full attention to his girlfriend, who he had ignored since they had arrived. He decided to dismiss his suspicion as nothing of importance.

"Do you think he suspected anything?" Mike asked, watching the back of his boss's current managing partner in the law firm.

But he agreed with his method of keeping their friendship high profile so no one would suspect anything when they see them together occasionally.

"I don't think so," Gerald responded, studying the other people at the other table. He could sense that his boss knew nothing about his covert life. He planned to keep it that way.

Then, he fell into silence, thinking of the things that they had discussed earlier. After finishing their meal, he finally decided to end their meeting.

"If you hear anything else, better tell me about it. But I appreciate the heads up." Gerald told his long-time friend. "Keep me posted." Reminding him of the other things he had to do.

Anyway, it was time for him to handle his other obligations. He had been laying low for a while, but he had to do something about the growing unrest in his people.

Mike decided to continue with what he said earlier before they finally separated ways. "Daniella Hamilton seems to be a great catch, but she is now married." Creating emphasis on the last part.

Then, Mike stood from his chair and leaned closer to his boss. "As much as you think you want her, I believe you should also think of what you will be losing if things go south." He whispered.

Chapter 623: Rookie mistake

As head of security, Tim knew that he should have accompanied Alex and Dani on this trip. However, he had his priorities to deal with. Instead, he had assigned his very best men to tackle the task of protecting them.

He believed he could still trust his men to do their jobs and risk their lives to save their bosses. However, he still hoped that it never had to come to that point again. He never liked losing any of his men.

"Sir, we have new intel on those pictures you gave us." One of his men assigned to investigate the matter entered his office with the new information. "We were hoping to show it to you in the briefing room."

It was indeed past office hours when he glanced at his watch, yet it did not stop his men from doing their duties. To him and his men, it was not a mere job anymore. It was also personal.

They wanted to catch the culprit responsible for the death of some of his men, their comrades. He would not stop until he had fulfilled his promise to the families they had left behind. To seek justice for their deaths.

It was different when his men died in the middle of the war between two different ideologisms. But to die because of betrayal for money or power, then that was unacceptable.

"That is good news," Tim answered, hopeful that they might finally have the answers they were looking for. The key to finding out who was really running the show in this elaborate scheme of things.

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He closed the files he had been working on and shut down the laptop he was using to accompany his men to the next room. But as soon as he stood up, a newcomer knocked on his door.

Looking up from his position, he saw a familiar face, a man he only wanted to see lying on a box, devoid of life. He quickly opened his drawer and pulled out a gun, swiftly unlocking the safety.

"What are you doing here, Joe?" Tim shouted, aiming his weapon directly into his heart.

If he pulled the trigger, he would surely kill him on the spot. However, he believed that his former colleague would not simply appear in his presence without a valid reason.

Joe was not a man with a death wish but a man who seemed to have a motive for showing his face before him. Out of curiosity, he would like to know what it was before he exacted his revenge against him for betraying his brothers in arms.

His other man, who faced him, noticed what was happening, sensing the danger, also quickly drew his gun and pointed it at the door. He did not ask questions but just followed his lead, willing to protect his boss from a possible threat.

“Easy now, boy.” The unwanted visitor said, directing his attention to the younger man, raising his arms in surrender. “I did not come here to make trouble, but I have a message for your boss if you are willing to listen.”

He moved a little closer, stepping inside the room where Tim would have a better angle at shooting him. But he was not afraid of him.

Because, for the longest time that he had worked with him, Tim would think first before he acted. He would not allow his emotions to cloud his judgment. It was why he was a good strategist and a great leader.

“You have the balls to show your face in here. What makes you think you can get out of this place alive?” Tim asked, seething with anger, seeing that Joe remained calm as ever, smiling as if he knew that they would not hurt him.

Then, his other men rushed to the room, probably upon hearing the commotion. But he did not need any of his men to deal with a man like Joe.

“As you can see, I came here not carrying a gun or any weapon. I am only here for the sole purpose of bringing a message.” Joe said, showing off the inside of his jacket.

He did have a plan that would surely keep him alive, but he had to play this right. Any wrong move might cost him his life, and everything else he planned would be a waste.

One of Tim’s men immediately moved to his side to check his body for any concealed weapon, patting every pocket, body, and both arms and legs.

“He is clean, Sir.” He reported after his thorough inspection. With a kick behind the knee, which was not necessary, Joe came down, kneeling before them.

He could not help himself after seeing the man responsible for the death of one of his closest friends. He would have done more, but Tim signaled him to stop. Then, he moved to the side and resumed his position.

“What makes you think I want to hear your lies?” Tim moved closer to him, pointing the gun at his temple, warning him that he should only tell him the truth.

His fingers were inching to pull the trigger and end this traitor’s life, but his gut told him to wait until he had said his justification for seeking him. Not that he would believe anything he would say.

“Because I am still alive until now.” Joe looked up at him, staring into his eyes. He remained in his kneeling position, defiantly daring Tim to kill him. “If you wanted to shoot me, you have done it as soon as I was at your sight.”

He stood up and faced his former leader. Without batting an eyelash, he stared at the barrel of the gun. "But of course, you want answers." He taunted Tim.

"Don't worry. I am ready to answer some of your questions. In return, I need to talk to Prince Alexander." He continued when Tim just studied him without responding.

"Leave us," Tim shouted to his men, assuring them that he could handle him. "Don't think I will not execute you if you make the wrong move." He warned Joe, gesturing for him to sit on the available chair.

He knew his men would be waiting just outside the door. Some of them did not agree that he should trust a man like him. But he had to hear what Joe had to say without an entire audience.

Joe followed him into the seat and made himself comfortable, watching his former colleagues leave the room until they were finally alone.

"By the way, you really had to tighten your security. Anybody could just waltz in here and kill you all." He mockingly stated, indicating the incompetency of his safety protocol.

In fairness, he still had the keycard that gave him access to the facility. And he had known the weak points of their system since he had helped design it before he had left.

"It was a temporary lapse in our judgment that would never happen again," Tim answered, knowing that Joe was right. "So, why did you come here?"

If Joe came with guns blazing then, they would have been caught in surprise and probably be dead by now. He should have known better never to underestimate his opponent.

His focus had been on protecting the Prince and his wife. He had forgotten the security of their headquarters. It was a rookie mistake that might have cost them their lives.

Chapter 624: Turned over a new leaf

Tim went back to his chair as he watched his unwanted guest make himself comfortable in his chair. He would prefer to tie him in the other room and interrogate him, but a man like Joe would not easily break into such methods.

He had to be patient with him and get as much information from him by simply asking questions without intimidation. Some tactics were better this way. He only hoped that he was here to cooperate with him.

At the end of the day, it would be up to him if he would believe his words. To analyze if there was a hint of truth in his revelation. If not, it would be a decision to kill him on the spot or keep him for further interrogation.

"How is Ben, by the way? I did not see him anywhere in the building." Joe asked, turning his head from right to left.

Usually, Ben would be standing by his side as his right hand in his operations. So, for the young man to be absent from his side would mean that he was out on a mission.

He remembered hearing the rumor that the royal couple might be going on a trip. But he was not part of that operation. He was not privy to the rest of the information on that matter.

“He is alive, thanks to you.” It was a sarcastic answer, making his blood boil a little more.

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Ben had told him what Joe had planned to do with him if his men did not arrive on time to rescue him. He could never forgive Joe for almost murdering Ben in his weakest state.

He never believed in striking a man when he was down. It was a cowardly way of fighting a battle. But he just learned that his former comrade had never been fighting fair in the first place.

“Well, it was a job, nothing personal.” Joe gave him a tightlipped smile as if he still regretted failing to finish the job. “But I am sure you are glad that I screwed up.”

Joe adjusted his coat, still confidently sitting on the chair with his legs cross-legged and his arms comfortably resting on the armrest.

He still would have liked it if he had gotten rid of that young man who thought of himself as better than him. But that ship had sailed, and he could not do anything about it unless they would cross paths again.

“Well, to me, it is personal.” Tim narrowed his eyes on the enemy that he once called a brother. “You will answer for your crimes when the time comes.”

Joe did not even show any sign of remorse for what he had done against his former team. He was a pompous ass who believed that he deserved better than the team gave him.

But Tim was not done with him yet. He would make sure that he would wipe his grin from the face of the planet with his bare hands. He would not let him get away with his betrayal.

“As much as I want to be your next victim, I am afraid that you have to wait. I still have a few cards to play here, and I think you will still want me alive.” Joe negotiated with his life, knowing that he had poked the bear too much, and he was now ready to strike.

He should really tone down on his taunting because it was not helping his case at the moment. He was here for a reason, but it suddenly went sidetracked because of his personal baggage.

“Well, I don’t have all night to wait for you. If you have anything to say, then spill it out.” Tim impatiently said as he continued to watch the man before him.

He remembered he still had to review the reports his men had prepared for him before they were rudely interrupted by this man. Time for him was a commodity he could not waste.

He watched him like a hawk, waiting to strike if he suddenly made a wrong move. He once trusted him, but it was a mistake that he was not willing to make again.

“First, I always believed in what we are fighting for...” Joe began his narration, but before he could say a few more words. Tim stopped him.

Tim slammed both his hands on the table before him, making the wood rattle in its place. Even his gun moved a few inches from where he had placed it from the impact.

"No," Tim shouted loudly at the other man across from him, stopping him effectively from saying anything further. "You don't get to make excuses for what you did to this group. You don't get any right to tell me why you did what you did."

He would not give him a chance to explain himself because what he did was unforgivable. No amount of justification would absolve him from his crimes.

He would sentence him to death now or later on. But it was the only punishment fit for his crime. Forgiveness or absolution would never be on the options.

"Just state your case and let me be the judge if I should still let you breathe out of here and wait to kill you the next time I see you." He stood up from his chair and menacingly stared at the other man.

He could not think of anything the man could say that could make him change his mind about him. He had forgiven men before for killing another man, but it had a valid reason.

The only thing stopping him now was the thought that he might be carrying valuable information that could expedite his search for the big boss.

"Or just kill you right now." He picked up his gun, not far from his right hand, and pointed it at the traitor.

He had always been calm and collected when dealing with issues, but Joe had totally driven him to his limits. He only had a few more threads left before he finally snapped and let his blood flood the floors.

"I hope you will choose the first one, but, at any rate..." Joe still never left his cool, even if his former boss was about to blow his brains out. "Do you want me to continue? Or do you want to pull that trigger?"

He was giving the option to his boss. At any rate, he was not afraid to die. He already got the money he needed for his family. A fat lump sum to make sure that they would have a comfortable life.

Still, he had to do one more thing for his current boss. It would guarantee his position within the organization. And also the safety of his family if he had accomplished his mission.

He had to make their enemies, meaning his former team, believe he regretted his past actions. That he was ready to divulge classified information about their enemies.

At least some fabricated stories and information he concocted, leading them away from the truth. He also had to convince them that he had turned over a new leaf.

Chapter 625: Hit a roadblock

Dani decided to invite them for dinner when she learned that they had no supplies in their cabin. While Alex volunteered to cook a delicious dinner for everyone.

It would seem that all the supplies were placed in their cabin by accident. But Alex had it rectified as soon as they had learned of the situation.

"What do you think of this place?" Jacky asked when they were finally sitting alone at the table on the patio after the sumptuous meal they had shared.

Their men went back inside to get them some more drinks and clear the mess they had made in the kitchen. While the two of them just sat down and enjoyed the view of the countryside.

She suddenly laughed, remembering watching Marcus in the kitchen as he tried to match Alex's speed. In the end, he only created more mayhem than actually helped in the cooking process.

"Well, I love it," Dani admitted this time, without a doubt, as she stared at the lovely trees illuminated by the moonlight looming above.

After the afternoon she shared with Alex, she realized that she had nothing to fear as long as Alex was around. She doubted that trauma could be cured overnight, but she believed it would be easier with the support of the people she loved.

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She sniffed the crisp air that blew in her direction, enjoying the feel of the soft, cold wind against her skin. It was so fresh compared to the polluted air in the city, something that she did not miss in her hometown.

"I love it, too." Jacky could not agree more. There was something magical in the place. A calmness that could make anything seem perfect.

Plus the fact, they were spending the entire weekend with their men. She could not think of anything more perfect than this moment.

Then, her smile turned into a frown as she remembered something about that afternoon. She could not stop thinking about the object that she found on the floor.

"Hey, what is wrong?" Dani noticed her shift in demeanor, confused by the scowl on her face.

A minute ago, she could not stop smiling and appreciating the place, so she wondered what caused the sudden change. She stared into her friend's eyes, hoping to find some answers.

She extended her hand, leaning forward to tap her on the arm, catching her attention. She seemed to have zoned somewhere else from the way she was staring into the dark horizon.

"Nothing," Jacky said, snapping out of her reverie, unsure if she should share the information. "It is really nothing." She kept hesitating, but the words were already at the tip of her tongue, ready to spill with a little more nudging.

She turned to her friend to find her waiting for an explanation. She debated within herself whether it was something that she should even be discussing with her friend.

"Are you sure? You know you can share anything with me." Dani knew her friend well enough.

A little more push and whatever she kept bottled inside would suddenly rush out of her lips. She was not saying that Jacky could not keep a secret, but she was not good at bottling whatever was bothering her.

"It is just that I am not sure by what I saw." She reluctantly conveyed without going into details.

She stood from her chair and walked further on the patio, getting a clearer view of the surrounding.

Even in the darkness, the place still possessed a unique elegance and grace as the trees moved with the gentle wind creating a rustling sound,

She looked back into the house and could hear the noises of the two men who were still busy messing around.

"Maybe if you tell me, I might be able to help." Dani's curiosity suddenly perked up, wondering what her friend might be hesitating to tell her.

She also shifted in her seat, following her friend with her eyes. Then, she also turned in the direction of the kitchen, following her gaze. She also saw from the door what the two were doing.

She could tell that whatever her secret was, it might have something to do with Marcus. Her mind refused to believe that the two might be having problems, not after what she had witnessed earlier.

Again, Jacky darted a quick look at Marcus and returned to her seat, facing her. She stared into her eyes with a seriousness Dani rarely saw in her face. "I think Marcus is about to propose."

She finally confessed, closing her eyes, remembering the ring in between her fingers. She loved it, at the moment her eyes landed on the shiny object in her hand.

It was what she imagined it would look like when he finally proposed to her. She wanted to question him earlier about the ring but decided to return it in its place instead.

She did not want to ruin what he had planned for her by preempting his proposal. She planned to act surprised when he finally went down on his knees and asked for her hand.

"Oh! That is great. I am so happy for you." Dani shrilled excitedly, slightly jumping in her seat and clapping her hands.

When she saw that her friend remained quiet and did not share her enthusiasm, she knew something was seriously wrong. She grabbed her friend's hand and tried to coerce her to confide in her.

"But it appears that is not what you wanted to hear." She quickly retracted, lowering her voice not to attract the boys' attention.

She looked at the forlorn expression on her friend's face. She could not understand why she was not ecstatic about this news. She knew that Jacky loved Marcus. There was no doubt about that.

She was just not sure how Marcus felt. From her observation, Marcus might be in love with her, too. Maybe he was just too stubborn to see it yet.

"Wait, how did you know that he plans to propose?" Dani asked, believing that there was more to the story.

She once again gazed at the other room and could see that the boys were almost through. Their alone time was soon coming to an end.

"I found the ring in his pocket this afternoon," Jacky admitted. "Then, I assumed that he would give it to me tonight."

Actually, she was anxious during the dessert, thinking that he might use that time to ask her to marry him in front of their friends. But the plates were cleared, and the night was almost over. But there was still no mention of the ring.

“Oh, my, Jacky.” Dani felt terrible for her friend. It must be devastating on her end. “Maybe he is planning to do it another time.” She eagerly suggested, trying to cheer up her friend.

She did not want to think that Marcus would intentionally hurt Jacky. It was possible that he suddenly changed his mind about tonight at the last minute and decided on a better way to propose to her.

She suddenly wished that Jacky did not see the ring in the first place. So, she did not have to wait like this and just be genuinely surprised when the time came.

She stood from her chair and wrapped her friend in a tight hug, wishing that it could help her in what she was going through. It was the only thing she could give her at the moment.

“It is ok.” Jacky hugged her friend back, suddenly hearing a short sob come out of her lips. She did not mean to cry, but she was slightly feeling disappointed.

She had thought that things between them had progressed at a steady pace. She could not help but wonder if their relationship suddenly hit a roadblock.

Chapter 626: Catch one with live bait

She swayed from left to right, trying to balance herself from falling on the small plank of wood. Although she was a strong swimmer, she still felt she was not appropriately dressed to dive in the slightly cold water.

“Are you alright?” Alex asked as he also boarded the small boat they were taking out on the lake.

He had invited her for an early fishing expedition on the lake, and she gladly accepted, believing it would be fun. The sun was barely up when they made their way to the waters, but she had already loved the way the rays touched her skin.

She always enjoyed her morning jogs back in the city, but this was different. The air seemed pure as it passed through her nose, down to her lungs.

“I think I will live as long as you don’t capsize this boat.” She rocked the boat a little, checking if it was sturdy enough.

She was not actually thinking of riding a boat when he said fishing. Instead, her idea was just to stay on the wooden deck by the lake with a long fishing pole.

“Whoah, careful now,” Alex complained as he started swaying with the boat, spreading his hands to balance himself out. “You don’t want to end this when we barely began.”

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Luckily, he knew a few tricks to stay steady in rocky situations even after her stunt. He quickly took his place on the small bench just opposite her and assumed the liberty of rowing the boat.

"Oh, sorry. I was only checking if this will not disintegrate in the middle of nowhere." Dani quickly explained, tapping the side of the boat. But in truth, she was not that innocent at all.

She played with the ribbon of her dress as her husband started moving the boat. She watched his arm muscles flex as he made a slow pull of the oars.

She was supposed to watch the scenery. But her eyes kept wandering back to her husband, who seemed to be so comfortable in his task.

"Do you enjoy the view?" Alex finally noticed the way her wife was checking him out. "I can take off my shirt if you want." But before she could answer, he anchored the oars at both sides, then pulled over his shirt and dropped it on the side.

Smiling at her, he resumed his previous position, moving the oars again. This time, Dani finally had a full view of his chest muscles and abs as they moved in unison with his arms.

She had seen his body many times before, but not in this manner. It was like an orchestra as they rippled in waves, creating a different kind of harmony, which was pleasing to the eyes.

"I certainly enjoy it thoroughly now." She admitted, openly ogling his body from her position.

But she still appreciated the view that surrounded them. It was a beautiful site that many should enjoy. But she knew that not everybody had the privilege to afford such luxury.

"I am glad." He continued to row the boat at a significant distance. "I think we can stop here." He declared to her.

He was trying to find a location deep enough for the fish he wanted to catch but not too far from the docks. Finally, he stopped at the perfect spot.

Once again, he anchored the oars to the side. Then, he dropped their small anchor on the riverbed, so the tide would not sweep them away.

"Oh, is this the spot?" She looked around, and she could see that they were almost at the center of the body of water. "Cool." She could feel her excitement at finally catching her first fish.

Although the lake seemed like a big catch basin, she could see it still extended towards the forest in a narrower river. But the water still remained calm and serene.

"The trick in fishing is not to make any unnecessary noise," Alex explained, pulling two fishing poles. Then arranging it for the two of them.

"So you just swing this thingy on the water, and then it will catch a fish." She pointed to the hook that was now carrying a bait on it.

She suddenly pulled back when the thing stuck on the hook squirmed and moved. She did not know that the worm was still alive.

Although she was not squirmish, she was still caught in surprise since she had never gone fishing before. But she was fascinated by the concept of live bait.

"I was waiting for you to scream, but that will do." Alex laughed at her initial reaction. But still, he would prefer to catch her when she fell. Joking aside, he was fascinated with his wife.

He finally demonstrated to her how to fish using an old-fashioned hook. Then, reminded her to keep quiet while they waited for the fish to take the bait.

"Ok. But how long does it take for the fish to come and take the bait." She asked as the hook floated not too far from the boat.

She remembered that this process had some similarities to her work. Well, at least the part that they created baits for criminals to take until they were caught.

"Well, if you keep talking, we will never catch any fish." He warned her, shushing her to silence.

He liked her enthusiasm, but he also wanted to catch a fish they could roast for dinner tonight. He placed a finger on his lips to signal that she should stop talking. They could always discuss fishing later.

"Ok, fine." She mumbled under her breath, preventing her mouth from creating too much noise.

She moved on her seat, slightly rocking the boat, creating a rippled effect on the water. This, of course, earned her a glare from Alex, who signaled that she should not move either.

Suddenly, she felt bored by the long wait. She looked silently around the water, checking if there was a fish in sight. But she could not even get a glimpse of one.

Out of nowhere, her hook started moving, bit by bit. It was a mild activity that created small motion under the water. She suddenly felt the excitement of catching her first fish.

"I think I got one." She whispered in a shaky breath as her adrenaline shot up in her system. She did not expect that she would actually catch one with live bait.

Chapter 627: Clear sailing from here on out

"Don't make a sudden sound," Alex warned her again, seeing the excitement in her eyes. She could hardly hold the pole correctly as her hands trembled on the handle.

Even he felt the rush of catching their first fish for the day. It did not matter if she was the one who was able to capture it as long as it would become dinner tonight.

"Oh, my!" She finally shrieked when the hooked almost slipped from her grasp. "I think I need some help."

She quickly held it tightly as she fought the fish from escaping. She pulled on the pole, hoping that the fish would finally surrender to her.

"Just keep it steady and slowly reel it in." He instructed as he slowly stood up from his position and moved towards her.

Instead of holding the fishing pole, he just watched and guided her on what she should do. Slowly, she fought the fish and reeled it in until it finally gave up and floated in the air.

"That is a nice size fish. You did a great job." Alex hugged her, kissing her forehead as the fish lay on their feet on the boat before he transferred the scaly animal inside the box.

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"I think I can get the hang of this," Dani said, still exhilarated from her extraordinary experience.

"Shall we continue with catching our dinner?" He believed one fish would not be enough for the four of them.

"Oh, you are on." This time, she could feel her heart pumping her blood quickly.

After he had set up another bait for her. They had resumed their position. But this time, she kept her silence without bothering Alex, who returned to his position.

The next fish was caught this time by Alex. It was smaller than hers, but it is still a good catch. Then, the next one took longer, but Alex hooked another one. Still not as big as hers but good enough for dinner.

"I think we should head back for breakfast," Alex suggested, feeling his stomach growling.

He only had coffee and a piece of bread, just like Dani, before heading out on this adventure. Now, he believed he needed a heavier breakfast to satiate his hunger.

"Yeah. I think I had enough of this excitement." Although she only caught one compared to the two that Alex did. She still felt like she had hit a lottery. At least she had captured the biggest one.

As he took care of their poles and returned his arms to the oars, they slowly made their way back to the docks. He could feel the sun slowly making its might known as it started to prickle their skin.

As they approached the docks, she caught a glimpse of Jacky and Marcus waiting for them. Then, she remembered last night's event.

"Alex, did you know if Marcus is planning something extraordinary special for Jacky?" If anyone knew what Marcus had been plotting, it would be him.

She still could not understand what was happening with the two. But she only hoped that they could resolve it soon before it became another problem that would tear them apart.

"Except for taking her on this trip so that they could bond, nothing that I am aware of," Alex answered her, confused with her question. "Why?" He asked in return.

As far as he was concerned, this was entirely his plan. He just asked Marcus to tag along with Jacky. If he concocted his own personal thing. Then his friend did not mention it to him. He was just as clueless as she was.

"Well, I am just curious since they seemed to be going on so well." She quickly replied, not wanting to spill her friend's secret. "I just want to see the two of them happy, just like us."

She could see from her angle that Jacky was smiling from whatever Marcus whispered in her ears. She could only wish that her friend was genuinely over her heartache.

"I am sure that Marcus is working hard to make Jacky happy. I assure you that he changed." Alex told her as they neared the moor.

Maybe assuring her wife was not such a good idea, he thought. After all, Marcus still had a long way to learn about committing to someone.

He knew his friend had good intentions, but his experience had always been different from his childhood and adulthood. He believed he still had to overcome his past conception of love before reaching the level of maturity that he and Dani had.

"I hope so. Because I don't like seeing Jacky hurt and crying." She said with a forced smile, looking up to her friend, waving at her.

She could still remember the tears that flowed down her cheeks as she revealed her disappointment at where her relationship with Marcus was going.

"I am also it will never come to that," Alex said his final words as they were greeted by their friends and helped out of the boat.

He assisted her first out of the boat. While Marcus extended his hand for her to hold as she climbed on top of the wooden deck. Then, Alex returned for their gears and the box with their catch.

Marcus, in return, invited them to their cottage to share the breakfast that Jacky had prepared. Everyone seemed to be in a good mood as they walked back to their place.

"We will just change and follow you guys," Dani told Jacky, feeling the bids of sweat sticking on her back and neck.

She also noticed that Alex was slightly soaking from his sweat. He did wear his shirt once they started fishing, uncomfortable to be displaying his body for the birds and the animals to feast on. Well, those were his words. He said that his body was solely for her eyes only.

"I hope it will only take a few minutes because the food is getting cold." Jacky teased them, thinking they might do something else after taking their clothes off.

It was an idea that did not cross their minds, but now. Well, a few more minutes would not hurt. As the two quickly rushed back to their cabin.

"We won't take long," Dani assured her, but that remained to be seen.

However, she still felt it would be better if her friend could also experience the kind of happiness she had felt when she married her husband.

She hoped that Marcus and Jacky would have a better relationship. It would be clear sailing from here on out.

Chapter 628: A snake in the grass

"Can you grab me a cup of coffee and a muffin?" Tim instructed one of his men, who dropped a few files on his tables. He had just finished another meeting with his head of security that morning.

They discussed updating their security system after last night's break-in. He could not afford another slip up like that. Cause another incident might be worse and could mean their deaths, as their enemy clearly pointed out.

He checked his watch, calculating if he still had a few more minutes before he had to leave. He had planned to meet another informant before lunch, and he did not want to be late.

"Yes, Sir." The well-built man nodded his head, acknowledging his simple task.

He returned back to his files. So far, the reports he had received still led them nowhere. Although the pictures might be pointing to something, they still could not grasp the entire connection.

They could not go with a story that lacked the necessary facts to back it up. A half-baked case would never stand in court or his principles.

He would not falsely accuse anyone of something that he had not enough evidence of. Everybody deserved their day in court to defend themselves. But he could also be the judge and executioner if need be. If he could prove their guilt.

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"Bring it to me as soon as possible." Tim dismissed the man as he skimmed the files now littering his table.

He usually preferred to be out in the field, scouting some area, on a mission, and most importantly, guarding the prince. But today, his obligations stuck him with research, reports, and other things that did not interest him that much.

But what he had to do next was just what he needed this morning. It was one of the things that excited him and kept his adrenaline pumping. He could not wait to be in his next appointment.

"Sir, here is what you had asked for." The soldier came back, disrupting him from his work. He carried a paper cup and bag, placing them on his desk.

Then, the young man quickly cleared the room, making him gaze at his retreating back before the door closed again, leaving him again with his thoughts.

His men usually followed him without questions, not because they had no voice in their organization. But because they trusted him explicitly. They respected his authority.

He took his obligation as if his life depended on it. Because he was not responsible only for himself but also for every member of this association.

"I am not doing this for myself, but for all my fallen comrades." He spoke on a picture that he pulled inside his drawer.

He ran his fingers on the glass frame, tracing her face as he stared at those adorable eyes. He was the love of his life, but she died a tragic death when she was mistaken to be him.

Now, he once again was faced with a dilemma. Another decision had to be made once he stepped foot on his next appointment. He returned the frame to the drawer and stood up, carrying his gun. Swearing that it was for the betterment of everyone.

He looked at the food, now sitting on his table, and grabbed it on his way out. With a purpose, he strode toward another hallway away from his office.

He walked further to the other side of the building. It was still part of the building but a new addition to the facility. It had another secret passage that authorities would never find if they came to check the place.

Once he keyed in the password, the secret door opened and revealed another hallway with several doors. He knocked on the first door and looked at the hidden camera.

"It is me." Automatically, the door opened as it recognized his voice and scanned his eyes.

It was a moderate size room where the controls were located. Several screens covered the walls, indicating the different cameras placed in the various location in the building.

"Sir, I think he had studied all the blind spots around the area, making him invisible to most of our security." The man sitting on the control reported immediately to him.

But he pointed out a few instances where he was caught by the cameras, but it was just barely, making it hard for the one who was guarding last night to spot him.

"Then, you better give me a detailed report on what we should do about those blind spots. What about the key card?" He asked, not wanting another problem to slip through their fingers.

He remained standing just beside him, checking the screen and the other rooms in the building. From his position, everything seemed to be in order.

"It was already deactivated. I also reprogram the current key cards, updating everyone's status." One of his tech men assured him that this incident would never happen again with the new system they had put in place.

"Good. Keep up the good work." Tim praised his men, giving credit when it was due, tapping the man on the shoulder.

After giving a final look at the other screen on the far right, he told his men to continue working on the new system. He did not want any bugs to mess up with the new system.

Then, he moved out of the room, walking to the second farthest door in the hallway. Outside he did the same with the door, and again it opened.

This time, it revealed two men who looked up to him when he entered the room. Once again, they were sitting on a monitor, watching something.

When he turned to his right, he gazed at a glass window covering half of the other wall. On both sides, cameras were pointing to the other room.

“What have you gathered so far?” Tim asked the first man nearest to him while looking beyond the glass window.

On the other side of the glass, he could see a man sitting quietly on a single chair. His eyes were burning with anger, but his body was already badly bruised.

He moved closer to the partition, staring into those eyes. He knew the other man could not see him behind the one-way glass. But he could feel those deadly glares were directed at him.

That man used to be someone he had admired. A brother that he trusted with his life. Currently, he was reduced to a traitor, a snake in the grass.

Chapter 629: Betray the brotherhood

“He still had not said anything relevant to our situation.” One of his interrogators answered him. “We believed we need to apply another method to make him talk.”

The other man sitting on the other side walked to his side and watched their captive with him. “You trained him well. I don’t think our usual interrogation techniques will work with him.”

He stared at the man that despite his condition, still sat straight, fighting the pain inflicted on him by his men. He believed that it would take extreme measures to make the man sing.

“I am going to talk to him.” The other man was about to open the mike, but he stopped him. “In person.”

He stepped away from the glass and walked toward the exit. The door opened, and he proceeded to the next door. With the same procedure, the door opened. It revealed the only man inside the room.

“Finally, Tim. You have the guts to show your face in front of me.” He smirked at him, biting his lower lip which was still slightly fresh with blood. “After I told you everything I know, you do this to me.”

The man shouted at him, slamming his hand on the arms of the chair where he was chained, trying to get them free. But he was securely bound that he could only barely move from his position.

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“Let us get one thing straight, Joe.” Tim circled the other man, inspecting his condition before stopping in front of him. “You only give me shit.”

He stood in front of him, leaning on the glass door, just watching the other man as he writhed in his seat. No matter how much struggle he made, he would not escape those chains.

“No. I did not.” Joe shouted, denying his former boss’s accusation. “I told you everything I know about the organization.”

He looked at Tim with pleading eyes, trying to convince him that he was telling him the truth. He knew that he had to persuade this man to let him go. Else, he would never see the light of day again.

“Bring me a table.” Tim tapped on the window behind him, knowing that his men would be listening to their conversation.

After a few seconds, the door opened, then a small table was carried inside the room upon his request. He had it placed in front of Joe before dismissing his men again.

He slowly moved towards the table, placing the mildly hot coffee and muffin in front of him. He knew that the smell of the two had already wafted into the room. Putting it in front of him would intensify his hunger.

"Wow, this smells good," Joe responded, sniffing the delicious aroma of the coffee. Then, his nose shifted to the other bag. He instantly knew what it was. It was, of course, his favorite.

"It is all yours if only you would tell me something that I did not know." Tim continued to walk back and forth in front of him, like a teacher waiting for his student to answer.

"But I already told you everything. I swear." Joe continued with his act, not wanting to be caught lying.

Last night, he was sure that he had convinced Tim about his story. He let his guard down and even had a drink with his former boss. It was working according to his plan. He had it under control.

After a glass, his men surrounded him and took him into their custody. He fought as hard as he could. But he was no match against four men, younger and more agile than him.

"But it is not good enough," Tim responded as he stopped in front of him and uncovered the coffee, letting its delicious scent fill the room. Then, he unwrapped the muffin, displaying it in his view.

"I am telling you. I can find out more if you just let me get out of here. The boss still trusts me. I can spy for you and tell you their other secrets." But there was another thought going through his mind at that moment.

He had to find another way to stay alive. He had to think of a new tactic to keep Tim from blowing his head off. He knew that he said last night that he was not afraid to die. He lied.

"I am sorry, but that is just not good enough." Tim finally had enough of his lies. He could tell from last night that Joe had a plan. Of course, he had taught him everything he knew.

He quickly drew up a plan, trying to convince Joe that he was starting to believe his every word. While doing this, he alerted his team to scout the surrounding area for possible threats.

He believed that Joe would not simply walk into his office with a threat of a gun on his head. He could only think of one reason he went there. He was a decoy.

"But..." Joe was about to reason with him again when Tim shut him up by striking him on the cheeks with the handle of his gun. This made Joe twist his face in the other direction as a new fresh of blood splattered on the floor.

"Bring him in," Tim announced to the mike on the corner, and a few seconds later, the door opened again.

A man carrying a file walked toward them and handed Tim the folder. With a nod, he was gone again, leaving the two of them in the room.

Tim dropped the file on the table, together with the food. Then, opened it to the first page. It was pictures of dead men lying in the ditch in the dark part of the alley behind their building.

"You know them?" Tim shoved the files into his view. "They were sent to infiltrate the building last night." He could see recognition in his face. "They possess a duplicate of your keycard." He pulled a card from the file and showed it to him.

"You crossed us for the last time, Joe." This time, he would not show mercy to this man who did not give a damn about them and continued to betray the brotherhood.

Chapter 630: Big reveal

"We were so hungry waiting for you guys. I thought it would be lunchtime by the time we ate." Jacky teased her friend as she moved around the kitchen.

It was their turn to clean the mess after eating their breakfast while the men went outside to check the horses at the stables. They were planning to do some exploring of the land.

"We did not take that long?" Dani felt her cheeks turn red. Until now, she could not help but feel a little embarrassed. But she knew her friend was just teasing her as usual.

Sometimes, she thought Jacky could use some filters with that mouth of hers. But she loved her friend for all her good traits and her faults. It is what had made her special.

Eventually, she glared at her friend and threw a napkin at her. The cloth hitting Jacky in the back effectively stopped her from taunting her. But they did end up laughing at their situation.

"I was just teasing. But I am happy that you two are catching up with your honeymoon. Both of you deserve to be happy." Jacky turned a bit serious this time.

She was glad that things between her friends were going well despite their circumstances. She hoped that eventually, she would feel the same way.

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She still felt the sting of what happened yesterday, but she believed everything happened for a reason. She just had to wait for the right time.

Maybe she should be thankful that Marcus did not propose to her yesterday. She did sense that he was still not ready for such a commitment.

"True. I feel like Alex has done so many things for me, but I barely did anything for him." Dani confided her insecurities.

Since the abduction, she had been drowning in her own trauma. She barely even acknowledged that Alex also had experienced the same thing. Maybe even worse, yet he was the one always there to support her.

She was thankful that Alex had been patient with her and supportive, but she had to play catch up and return the favor. She believed she also had to do something special for him.

"We all know that is not true. And Alex understands that you both went into a difficult situation." Jacky dropped the towel she was holding and moved closer to her friend, wiping the table.

She held her by the shoulders and looked her directly in the eye. "You did what you have to do to survive. Now, you will be just fine. And Alex, me, and even Marcus will always be here for you." Then, she pulled her friend for a warm hug.

"Thanks. I am so lucky to have you guys." Dani hugged her friend back, tighter this time.

"What is that?" Jacky said, feeling the cold liquid running down the skin on her back. She quickly released her friend from the hug, checking her back for the source of her discomfort.

"Oops," Dani quickly said. "I am sorry!" She realized she had placed the wet, dirty rag on her friend's back when she hugged her tightly. It soaked her dress with the moisture in it. "Let me help you with that."

Dani immediately dropped the rag she was holding and grabbed the dry tissues on the kitchen counter. Then, she started dabbing the wet portion on her back.

It barely made a difference on Jacky's dress. Then, the smell of the spilled wine earlier also drifted in her clothes, which did not make the situation any better.

"That is ok. I think it is not working. I stink." Jacky said to her friend, still feeling the icky feeling of the dampness in her back. "I think I better shower and change to something else."

She checked her back through the reflection in the windows, but she could barely see much from the glares of the bright sun. She knew she had no more choice but to find something else to wear.

"I am sorry." She kept saying to her friend, holding her hand together as she continued to apologize. "Just go shower, and I will finish up here."

She did not mean to put the rag on her back. She was carried away by their moment, not realizing that her hand was still holding on to the icky cloth.

"Oh, don't you worry. Cleaning this mess is payment enough." Jacky pointed to the sink before proceeding to the bedroom, leaving her to deal with the remaining mess.

Well, she guessed this was punishment enough as she continued to clean the kitchen by herself as Jacky changed and fixed herself. In fairness, there were only a few things left to clean.

"Hey, are you ready to go?" Alex walked back to the kitchen coming from the back door, pulling her into a hug. Luckily, she was almost through with everything.

"Where are we going anyway?" She asked, just putting the last glass on the shelf.

Just in time, Jacky came out of the bedroom, just as Marcus also entered the room. "Are we all ready to go?" Marcus strode to Jacky, standing by her side as he looked at the other couple.

"You mean." She stopped in her tracks. "We are going riding with you?" Jacky was surprised by this news. She had never been on a horse before. "I thought it was just the two of you."

She looked at the three, slightly terrified, unsure if she could join them on this trip. The only thing she trusted with her life was a machine that would take her from point A to point B.

But entrusting an animal that could have some kind of temperament was another matter she still had to consider. She had heard many incidents where horses went wild, and the riders ended up in a ditch.

"Don't worry. One thing I am good at is riding a horse." Marcus winked at her, thinking that it was funny. But it only earned him a jab on his ribs, courtesy of the woman at her side.

The funny thing was, it did sound different in his mind, and Jacky might have misinterpreted his words for something else involving his past.

"Hey, what is that for?" Marcus asked, holding on to his injured ribs, but it was more an act since the jab barely hurt him. "I am serious."

"I assure you that Marcus knows more about horses than any one of us," Alex assured Jacky, knowing that Marcus was an expert in horses.

His friend used to play for the polo team during their college years. He could even ride the horse backward. But work and other obligations did stop them from doing most of the things they loved.

"I guess. I can try." Jacky said, finally feeling more comfortable about the idea. But, she still had to see the horse up close.

She was not a coward who would easily back out from a challenge. Maybe she could do this. She did see some horses in Central Park, and they seemed friendly enough.

"That is my girl." Marcus proudly said, glad that she finally agreed.

He turned to her, pulling Jacky into a hug. Then, kissing her on her forehead to assure her that it was ok. He really wanted her to come and join them in this expedition.

He wanted to share with her everything about him. Things that made him who he was. He wanted her to know more about him before his big reveal.