

Royal Contract 641

Chapter 641: Silent partner

After they made their quick visit to Haley, Alex and Dani moved on their separate ways. Dani went back to work to finish a few more files. While Alex had a different plan of his own.

"Aaron, take me to the headquarters." He ordered, wanting to get updated on their current situation. Since he left for their trip and arrived, he only heard a few details of what had transpired.

He looked at the busy street, but his mind was going through several things, all at once. He kept thinking of their case against Nick, which was still ongoing.

Then, there was the unknown leader of the gang. He seemed to be going after them for no apparent reason. If he did, then he was clueless as to why.

"Ok. Sir." His new detail answered him while keeping his eye on the road.

At the moment, Tim was busy with the investigation, so he had to settle with his next best man to protect him. Ben was already assigned to Dani.

"Informed me if we are near." He instructed his security as he closed his eyes in the meantime.

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He was not planning to nap, but he wanted to shut the world around him, even for just a few minutes. However, his thought had a mind of its own as it continued to bother him.

At that moment, his father's words returned to him. It reminded him of their last conversation. Honestly, he was confused. Because if he did not want the job, he should have easily said no to it. Why was he still considering the position?

"Sir, we are two minutes away from the building." His driver said, only glancing quickly in the rearview mirror to make eye contact with him.

"Thanks," Alex replied, straightening himself in the backseat and slightly running his fingers through his hair.

He made a mental note to have a hairstylist fix his hair. He did not realize that it had gone longer than he would like. However, it did have its perks, remembering how Dani liked entangling her fingers through its long strands.

As soon as they were in his designated spot, he immediately made his way inside the building. He went through the secured elevator, which would bring him directly to his office.

"Sir, welcome back." One of the new members of the team greeted him once the door opened.

Tim never stopped recruiting men who had enough of the military service but would still want to serve their fellowmen. Therefore, this company was not solely for his benefit and protection.

"I heard that you are training well. How is your arm?" Alex asked the man who had his left arm amputated during his last tour.

The army had to let go of him and send him home. But Tim taught him a new meaning in life when he recruited him for this new job. Turned out he was great at computers. He had been a great asset to his team since he joined them.

"It had healed completely. I am getting used to this prosthetic arm." The young boy said, showing off his new arm by moving it as if it was real. "Thank you, Sir. For all of this."

It was the latest technology that he could find. Although the movements of the fingers were still very stiff, it was far better than not having an arm at all.

The young man almost thought that his life was over when he lost his arm and was sent home a damaged man. But when he learned about this, he immediately grabbed it, hoping to get a second chance.

"I am glad that things are doing well for you," Alex said before Tim showed up and greeted him.

They quickly moved to his office, leaving the other man to get back to his work. But he was glad that men like him were given another opportunity to be part of the productive member of society. And not just another drunken loser, feeling sorry for himself, who had no direction in life.

"How is everything around here?" Alex questioned, sitting on his chair while waiting for Tim to take his place.

Tim also ran a legitimate security team that handled several private security for the high society, politicians, and the likes. He used what he earned from this place to employ his brothers in arms and help some of his fallen brothers in the military.

"You know many things happened around here," Tim playfully said as he took his seat nearest to his side.

He still preferred running around the world with guns blazing rather than tied in his chair doing paper works. However, he had to check the business once in a while.

He placed the folders in front of his boss, giving him the details of his report. After seeing this, he would be locking it up in the vault where no one would have access to them except the two of them.

"Well, we can go through it one by one, or you can just spare me the details and go straight to the most relevant ones." Alex knew that not all that happened in his team was legit or legal.

But Tim believed that some things had to be done, and somebody had to do something about it. That had always been his motto in life.

He quickly made a quick scan of the documents. It consisted of work orders from their usual clients. But as he reached the bottom of the file, he noticed several red-tagged folders.

He knew that it was the files that he was looking for. He set aside the other files and started skimming the first file. Then, realized that it was no ordinary client.

"I thought so," Tim commented when he saw his reaction to the documents. "I knew you would be interested in that file."

The company also provided assistance to the government by securing some private entities from threats through the witness protection program as a private contractor.

One of his clients recently was no other than Samson. He learned that the company presently had full access to his files, records, and safehouse where the witness was hidden.

"It is certainly interesting," Alex responded, checking the rest of the contents inserted in the folder.

There was a particular picture that caught his attention. But upon checking the visitor's list, everything seemed to have checked out. But still, he planned to take an extraordinary interest in this client.

"How come we landed on this job?" Alex questioned his team leader, who might have something to do with this.

He was not expecting this because of the conflict of interest. But the government might have overlooked the situation, or a system failure failed to associate his company with the case.

"I took the liberty of pulling some favors inside," Tim informed him. "I could not let anything slip out of my hands with this one."

He had to guarantee that nothing would happen to their witness. Lately, he had heard rumors of someone making a deal for a hit. With his men in place, the likelihood of that happening was slim. He would take every precaution to keep Samson alive.

But still, he could not be too sure of the agents working side by side with them in this case. One of them might be working for the other side. Still, he was keeping an eye on all of them.

"I think you have this one covered." Alex declared, going through the following marked folder.

Anyway, Tim was running the show in this company, so technically, he did not own this business but was just a silent partner.

Chapter 642: Might as well die fighting

"Nick, get up." The guard shouted. "You have another visitor." The guard banged on his cell, alerting him that he had to move again.

He had just got back and was about to rest when the bars of his cage started making their metallic noise. He wished to ignore it, but he knew the guard would not stop until he opened his eyes and prepared to go out.

But he just met with his incompetent lawyers, who kept promising him that he would be out of here in no time. But until now, he was still rotting in jail.

"Give me a second." He said irritably when the baton started hitting the bars again.

This time, he quickly got up and assumed the position. He was starting to get the hang of this. It was not a good sign, based on his opinion.

"Just hurry up because I do not have time for your shit." The guard angrily said when he took his sweet time.

"Who is it this time?" He asked, doubting that his lawyers went back to see him after he yelled and threatened to fire all of them.

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Whoever was waiting for him on the other side of this cell would have to wait because he was not in a hurry to see him. He might already have an idea of who he might be. It was another meeting he was not looking forward to.

"Just walk, and you will see who it is once you get there." The guard said, not particularly interested in their little chitchat as he rammed his metallic rod on his back to force him to walk faster.

"Easy." He raised his hand as high as possible with the chain in his hands and feet. "I am walking as fast as I can." He laughed a little with his small entertainment.

He might, as well, enjoy the little fun he could make with the people around him. It would seem that he would be here for a while based on his current situation.

"Sit down and wait until he arrives." The guard chained him to the table as he sat on the available chair.

"Ok. I think I know the drill." He jokingly said to the guard, laughing at him. But in truth, he was not finding any humor in his condition.

He wanted to get out of here at the soonest possible time. He did not want to make a plea deal for a lesser sentence. His lawyers kept insisting that the evidence was tight. It would be hard for him to get out of this one.

But he did not believe it. He had seen many of his friends escape their crimes by using their money. So, what were these clowns doing with his money, referring to his team of lawyers.

"I guess we meet again." The next man who walked through the door announced as soon as he was inside the room.

Again, the four corners of the room had no windows, cameras, or mike. Therefore, even if he confessed to a murder, the only one who could hear it was the other man in the room.

But he did not kill anyone, nor did he plan to confess to any of his crimes. Much more admitted to a crime he did not commit just to save the big boss that would not even show his face to him.

"State your case and be gone. But on second thought, I actually do not want to hear any of it." He said to the man, who had a big smile plastered on his lips. He seemed to be unfazed by his attitude.

"That is not how you should treat a friend," Mike responded disappointedly to him, shaking his head as if he disapproved of his behavior. "I am here for you. I think I am your only friend now."

He said too sweetly to him as he circled the table, moving around him as if he was thinking. But he only had one intention in mind. He just wanted his friend to pay extra attention to what he was about to say.

"You are not my friend," Nick emphasized the last few words. "You can tell your boss to go to hell." He was done playing their games.

He could already guess that his boss was playing him for a fool. All this time, he used him as a puppet and manipulated him into this situation. Until now, he wanted to use him to take all the blame.

If only he knew he was, he might have some leverage against him. But he had no idea about his identity. The only thing he knew about the organization. They might have already been destroyed by now.

“Well, I can’t blame you for going batshit crazy. Life inside must be taking a toll on you.” Mike said as he stood behind him.

Before he knew it, he grabbed his head with one of his hands to steady it. He wrapped his other arm around his neck, holding it in the bend of his elbow. Then exerted pressure on his larynx, making him choke on his own saliva.

Then, he drastically released him, making him cough hard, bending forward as he tried to catch his breath. His eyes were cloudy with the slight tears that pooled around the lids, but he still saw his shadow in his peripheral vision when he moved.

“Don’t make it hard on yourself, Nick.” He raised his shoulder as if to make a point. “As you can see, no one will be here to help you. Your money will never be able to help you. Only the big boss can.”

He could see that he was thinking, but whatever it was. He could not read if he understood the message. However, if he would guess. He believed Nick did not care anymore.

“Is that the best you can do?” He partially laughed but was unable to continue.

He was still heaving from the lack of air, but he sat straight and faced the other man. Mike might have the upper hand now, but he was not going down without fighting.

If he was going down, so would the big man. He would find a way to drag him with him. He never reached his position by simply giving up whenever a problem occurred. That was not his way and would never be.

“So be it.” Mike raised his hand in surrender, believing that he had done what he could. “Do not say I did not warn you.” He chuckled as if he was relieved that his job was through.

If it was solely his decision, Nick would be dead by now. But his boss wanted a fall guy. But now, he believed Nick would end up dead soon inside the cell with no one to help him.

“Threats are for sissy. Do it before I get my hands on you.” He bravely said to the other man, threatening to end his life.

Now, he knew that his life was in danger. He just made an enemy with the most notorious leader of the gang. But he would die in this cell if he agreed with him. He had already resigned to his fate, so he might as well die fighting.

Chapter 643: Following the rules

After more than an hour of reviewing some of the files, he had learned a few compelling leads, which he had instructed Tim to look into more thoroughly.

He was ready to leave the headquarters after finishing up the rest of their discussion when a thought occurred to him. He wondered why he had not considered that before.

"Tim, I need you in my office now," Alex called to him as he returned to his desk and fired up his computer again. After a few minutes of tinkering with a few files, Tim entered his room with a frown.

"What is it? Did you forget something?" Tim asked when he found his boss back in his chair, working again. Instead of on his way out of the building.

He knew when he left him a little while ago. He was ready to go home and was on his way out. So, he wondered what was wrong now with this picture.

"Not forget." He answered, which only made his man more confused than enlightened by his vague and short response. "I mean. I think I remember something that might have some connection to our case."

He checked again on his computer and knew it was not enough. There was a connection, he could feel it, but it was in these files. He suddenly remembered something else.

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"Will you get the files that Cassie gave us? The one that you hid in the vault." It might be there. But he knew he read something about it.

"Sure," Tim acknowledged his order and turned around, still puzzled by how his boss was acting.

He quickly went to the vault, careful not to be seen since it was a top-secret location that nobody else had access to except for the two of them.

Once he had retrieved the files, he secured the place again and returned immediately to Alex. He handed the file and remained standing, still waiting for his boss to explain the purpose of all this.

"This might be it," Alex exclaimed excitedly after scanning several documents on his table.

He had checked every word, finding that piece of a sentence that would give him a clue of what he was looking for since he started searching for it.

Tim immediately moved to his side, curious about what he was blabbering about since his boss was not giving him any hint. He moved closer to him and checked out what his index finger was pointing at on the white paper.

"A possibility of a son." Tim read aloud the last words, but still, he could not figure out what they meant. "So?" He asked his boss, unable to comprehend the riddle.

"Don't you see?" Alex said, pointing again to those words as if Tim should have easily gotten the connection.

"I am sorry. But as the report said, this was inconclusive. This report was just a rumor that had no basis." Tim said, discarding the issue as useless.

"Yes, it is in the report that it is nothing but garbage stories. But why would Nick hold into this for this long," Alex questioned, realizing that Nick might know something they still had to figure out.

"You might have a point there." Tim finally conceded, beginning to understand where his boss was heading with this. "Do you think we might still find something important on those files?"

He remembered they barely checked those rumors. Since the earlier detectives and investigators thought it was nothing. Those were just gossip, exploited by the enemies of the previous late mafia leader, Joaquin Augustus.

"I think it is worth exploring. What do we have to lose?" He asked, thinking that they were not going anywhere with the case with the current evidence they possessed.

"I guess I will be working overtime tonight," Tim said, not wanting to waste more time sitting on this case. "Why did I even believe what those detectives stated on their report?"

He questioned himself, knowing how shitty the situation was back then. The detective might have accepted a bribe to close the case. Or they were just not up to the challenge of enforcing the law. But whatever was the truth, he would try to find it.

"I wish I could stay for more, but Dani might be wondering where I am. I promise that I will be home for dinner." Alex made excuses, leaving his most trusted man to handle the situation.

As much as he wanted to explore more about his latest discovery, his wife was still his priority. Besides, Tim would surely call him once he found something else.

For now, he was satisfied that he had found something to think about other than his problems. Although he could not declare it was a solution. At least, it had shed some light on one of his problems.

"I will call you once I have something else," Tim promised before dismissing him from his presence.

When the two of them were alone without the company of his men, they were just equal. They have a mutual understanding of their importance to each other.

"Thanks." Alex grabbed his things and immediately went on his way. As he said earlier, he had no intention to be late for dinner.

Once he was in the backseat of the car, his thoughts went back to that piece of statement. A child was probably born during that time. The mafia don probably had a son and was the heir to his underground organization.

He knew all of this was connected somehow. However, he could not figure out what could be the link that would tie it all together. But eventually, he would have his answer.

He quickly rode the elevator to their apartment. Ben already informed him that Dani had been home for an hour. So, he was expecting that she was done cooking and preparing dinner by now.

"Dani, I am home." He announced, entering the room in search of his wife. As he expected, he found her in the kitchen, putting the final garnishing.

He could smell the delicious food she had prepared. His cooking lessons seemed to be paying off as he feasted his eyes on the well-plated dishes on the kitchen top.

"What do you think?" She asked, hoping that they tasted as good as their aroma and appearance.

She knew she could cook a decent meal. But if she compared her dish to Alex's dishes, she was not yet that confident. Hers might fail in comparison.

"I will say, good job," Alex said, sniffing the different aromas coming from the food.

He assisted her on her seat before sitting on the other side of the dining table she had already set. Then, he poured the wine she already had chilled.

"I wonder what this is all about," Alex asked, not used to her preparing something this extravagant.

When he took his first bite of the beef, he felt like he was in heaven. The seasoning was perfect, and the meat was the way he wanted it.

He stared at his wife, appreciating what she had done tonight for him. But as he looked at her, a new thought popped into his mind. It was a new idea that could help them with their case.

"Do we need a reason to have a good meal?" Dani asked, interrupting him with his thoughts. She was happy that he seemed to be genuinely enjoying his food.

She had carefully studied how he liked it, so she hoped she had done a precise execution of one of his signature dishes. She was a lawyer, and following the rules was her expertise.

Chapter 644: Chased by the devil

Eida was pissed with Lance for not taking her calls. She thought they were over this kind of bullsh*t. But apparently, the prince was still an immature prick.

He promised her a story. Then, he had the nerve to ignore her call after standing her up for their lunch appointment. She would have accepted a reasonable explanation, but the prince just kept playing with her.

"Are you sure that he is not in your office, just hiding from me?" Eida kept asking his secretary earlier as she repeatedly called his office to get in touch with him.

But his secretary only replied the same line to her. He had been out since that morning and had no plan of returning to the office today.

"Pick up the phone." She mumbled as she dialed, once again, his number.

She had been calling him up since his last voice mail. Well, his only voice mail. But he never picked up any of her calls or responded to her text messages.

She was driving when he called earlier and was in a tight situation, so she failed to answer him. But she immediately called him back after she heard his voice mail.

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"What is wrong with you?" She talked to her phone, staring at the name on the screen as his voicemail answered her again.

She was confused by the way he was acting. From the call, he seemed desperate to see her. She recalled how he was apologizing to her in the voice message. He had seemed to be sincere about it.

Suddenly, he disappeared off the face of the earth, never to be found. She had already tried his apartment, but he was not home, based on the doorman that she gave a good tip.

"Answer your damn phone." She mumbled frustratedly to the phone as she parked at the last place she believed he was likely to go when he was nowhere to be found.

She looked at the almost empty parking lot, wondering if he could be here this late at night. Although she could still count a few cars within her sight, she doubted if any races were going on tonight.

But she did see some people still lingering in the building. The lights were still bright inside the arena from where she was standing. Maybe there was still someone racing tonight. Maybe practicing.

"Excuse me, but I am looking for Prince Lance." She approached the girl she remembered as Gian.

She was not giving up on her story just like that because he changed his mind. He would show the prince that he could not just ignore her and back out from their arrangement.

"Ms. Harlowe, it is nice to see you again." Gian greeted her, of course, recognizing who she was. She did mention that she was a fan. "Is the prince expecting you?" Gian asked.

"Ah, about..." Her words were cut off when Gian spoke again. She was already concocting some form of a lie. However, it would seem she did not have to.

"Of course, he is. You have to forgive me. Force of habit." Gian excused herself, remembering how the two looked so sweet together.

She could only wonder if the two ended up together as lovers or just friends. It was time to find out as she asked her to follow her in the direction of the arena.

"Thanks for helping me out." Eida gratefully said, appreciating her help.

At least Gian saved her time from trying to convince the receptionist to give her information about the prince. Now, she had confirmed that he was here.

As they neared the entrance to the arena, she could already hear the loud motors of the engines as they raced around the tracks. She figured one of them must be the prince.

"Does he race on the weekday often?" She asked the young girl, wondering what he was doing here.

"How long has he been here today?"

"Usually, he only came here on the weekend. I seldom see him during a workday. Unless the tour is very near." Gian answered her. "For this day, I think he was already here by after mid-afternoon. Just not sure what time."

She stopped asking questions when she finally stood in front of the pit stop where Gian first took her. She recognized a few men who stood on the sidelines but could not remember their names.

"Thanks." She told Gian, waving goodbye to her when she left. Then, she greeted the man who she remembered was the team captain. "Rick, hi!"

"Pleasant surprise to see you here, Ms. Harlowe," Rick answered, not remembering Lance mentioning that he had a guest today. But the prince could be unpredictable sometimes, just like the last time.

He still offered her a seat on the sidelines as they waited for the last three laps to finish. He could only wonder what the relationship between the two was. But he was not about to snoop around for answers.

"I am here to see the prince, but he was not expecting me." Eida finally admitted as she watched the fast-moving cars with awe.

She admitted that the prince taking her for a ride in his race car was still one of the most thrilling experiences in her entire life. She might want to do it if given a chance.

But she was not here for a ride in his car. She needed the story that he promised her. Her boss was right. She had been too focused on this family that she lost her touch on the big picture.

"I figured as much because he usually tells me if he has plans on dating in his car." Rick jokingly responded to her admission.

"It was not a date." She quickly reacted to his statement, suddenly feeling embarrassed that everybody must have thought that. "It was an interview. A professional appointment." She clarified.

Did everyone really think the last time she was here? She went on a date with him. What about now? She remembered the way Gian reacted to her presence. She was almost giggling while talking to her.

"Call it whatever you want. But you are here now. In the middle of the night, seeking him out." Rick said as if that should mean anything.

He returned to his job, looking after his boy, who should be focusing on the road. And not on the barriers that stood in his way.

But he had seen the chemistry between the two. He could not deny that he had seen sparks fly when the two of them were in the car. It was just a matter of time before the two would finally admit that they had a connection.

"You are wrong. This is purely business." She denied his claim. She could not believe that this man was presuming she was here for a booty call. That was simply absurd.

She admitted that she felt some attraction to him. Oh, damn. She was totally attracted to him. But it did not mean that she would allow that to control her.

"Fine." The man said as he observed the car as it made its last turn. Just a few more, he was about to beat his own record. He predicted, looking at the clock in his hand.

He could see that his prince was troubled. Lance never came here without a schedule unless he wanted to run away from something. It was the only reason he was here today, racing as if he was being chased by the devil.

Chapter 645: Unprofessional and borderline creepy

"What are you doing here?" Lance said once he saw her standing by the sidelines. "Did my secretary not tell you that I am busy? I think your schedule is still for tomorrow afternoon."

He did not want to sound rude, but seeing her was not such a great idea. At the moment, he was not in the mood since his stunt failed to do its job.

He thought after he had finished several laps. He would finally find something to calm him down. Unfortunately, it did not help. He was still on edge. Then, he rested for a while and repeated the process, but it was still the same result.

“What is wrong with you?” Eida asked, her voice climbing up a decibel higher, feeling her pent-up frustration was about to burst.

She could not believe how he was acting around her. It was like he was a completely different person from the one she had met several days ago.

The prince she talked to the other day in this same tracks might not be as charming as she wanted him to be. But he was not rude and arrogant either. This one turned out to be a first-class jerk.

“What is wrong with you?” His deep voice was louder than usual as he felt the last string of his nerve breaking. “I don’t need this now. I will just see you at the office tomorrow.”

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He turned around and walked away from her, striding fast toward the building. He had no plan to argue with her in front of his crew. He was going home to rest. If it was even possible in his current state.

“We are not done talking yet, so you should never turn back on a lady.” She yelled at him as he moved away, unable to control her temper anymore.

She did not care if she was shouting at the prince and if they were gaining some more attention from the few people around them. But she was not going to let him disrespect her that way.

She marched in his direction, following closely behind him. She was not going away just because he did not want to see her. She deserved an explanation why he, all of a sudden, was blowing her off.

Her job was on the line when she agreed with his conditions. She followed them according to his rules. Now, he had the nerve to tell her to f*ck off. Well, he could not get rid of her that easily.

“Stop following me.” He told her as he continued to walk in front of her, speeding up his strides.

But she would not cease trailing behind until he finally gave up and entered one of the rooms in the building. She still followed him inside without realizing what it was.

“Why should I stop? You still owe me a story, and you are renegeing on your words.” She would not have bothered him like this if he only had fulfilled his promise to her.

She was not exactly looking at the signs as she stared at his back, still fuming in anger. “I will not leave until you give me what I want.” She continued to follow him further inside the room.

Then, she suddenly stopped, realizing what she got into when she started hearing whistles from around her. She turned around to see several men in different stages of undress.

Her eyes almost popped out of her sockets when a big burly man accidentally stood in her way. He had his towel in his hands, rubbing it on his still dripping wet hair. The rest of his body was completely naked.

"I am sorry." She excused herself, quickly recovering from her initial shock, remembering that she had seen naked men before.

She stepped away from the man and pursued the prince, realizing that she had just walked into the men's locker room. Finally, she found him in one of the lockers, pulling off his jacket and sweaty shirt.

"As my secretary probably already told you, I already arranged for us to meet tomorrow afternoon." He faced her, repeating what he had already said earlier.

"No, I am not waiting until tomorrow." She answered him adamantly. She had already waited for her story long enough. She had been patient with him and his entire family. She was done.

"As you can see, I am tired and not in the mood to answer any of your questions." Lance tried to tone down his voice, wanting her to understand and leave.

"I am not leaving." She continued, but Lance was done trying to compromise with her.

He did what he believed would make her go away. He unbuckled his pants and undid the buttons of his pants. Then, he pulled down his remaining clothes, not caring if she was looking.

She did not expect that he would get naked in front of her. His gesture suddenly made her feel more embarrassed. She quickly covered her eyes and turned around.

"I want my story now." She demanded but kept her back on him, not backing down even after the stunt he pulled on her.

She could not understand why she would feel embarrassed seeing him without clothes when she had done far more than look at a male membrane before.

Maybe because he was the subject of her story. Her mind tried to reason with her, giving her different excuses for her unusual behavior. In her line of work, she had witnessed more embarrassing things done this.

"Now, sure." He quickly replied. "Come on. Let us step into my office." He jokingly said as he tapped on her shoulder to direct her to the shower where he was going.

She turned around, knowing well enough she was the subject of his ridicule. She could hear the controlled chuckles of the few remaining men inside the room. But she was not going to let them affect her anymore.

"I only meant to say that I can wait for you outside until you finish what you have to do here. But I am not waiting until tomorrow to talk to you." She tried to control her eyes from wandering down as she faced him.

She knew that once she saw him naked, she would never be able to unsee it. Looking at his bare chest was tortured enough. What more if her mind would keep imagining what was down there?

"The door is right there. I am sure that there is no other exit here. Or, if you do not believe me, you can also watch me shower. That will give you more things to write about." He teased her, trying to gaud her to give up.

"No, I believe you. But I think you are right. I should probably wait for you outside." She kept her chin up, avoiding looking down as she turned around and finally left the room.

Once outside, she leaned on the first wall she could find, realizing her legs were about to give way. She took several deep breaths when her lungs were about to collapse.

She was barely breathing, holding on to the air inside her lungs, when he took off his pants. Thankfully she did not faint in front of him from the lack of oxygen in her brain.

However, she could not deny, not anymore, how much she was attracted to him, even from the first day she saw him. She had kept it bottled up, under control because she did not want to be obsessing about him.

"He is not worth it." She mumbled to herself.

She never went after a client. Never dated one and never had a relationship with one. That was just unprofessional and borderline creepy in her book.

Chapter 646: Good riddance

He grabbed his towel, wrapped it around his waist, and walked into the individual shower room, gaining a few jabs from the guys from the little show he made.

He still could not believe she had followed him inside the locker room. But he could not help what he did just a few moments ago when she would not stop.

Although he did feel guilty for being so rude to her. She did not deserve it, and he knew it.

"So, what was that all about?" Rick stood by the cubicle opening, unmindful if he was scrubbing his body off its sweats.

He was curious about what was going on with his apprentice, trying to get into his mind and conditioning. After all, the race was not very far from now. He needed his racer to be in top shape, not only with his body but also in his mind.

He did notice the way he was driving today. It was borderline devilish and reckless. Devilish if he was in the zone and breaking records like today. But reckless if his mind was zoning out into somewhere else. Then, that would be deadly.

"It was nothing. Just a reporter who could not wait to get her story." He dismissed the question as if it was nothing to worry about.

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He knew what his mentor was thinking, and he did not want him to worry. He had everything under control. Although he could still feel the restlessness of his body and mind.

He knew he would find a way to solve all his problems. He just needed a little time. But at the moment, that was not what he had. He had to think fast. Or he would find himself married to someone he cared about but did not love.

"If it becomes something, you know I am always here to listen." Rick tapped him in the back before moving away, knowing that he could not force him to open up if he did not want to.

"By the way, maybe you can release some of that tension so that you may feel more relaxed," Rick added before continuing on his way.

Lance knew what he was referring to. Somehow, Rick might be right. It had been a while since he had a serious relationship. A very long time, it would seem, to be exact.

But he was not the kind of guy who slept around. He would not subject a woman as someone he could use and then leave behind. He just could not do that.

Although, he did not also make a vow of celibacy. He still craved a girl's touch. If he was being honest, he was indeed obsessing about someone too.

"I am heading home." He shouted to Rick, who was still talking to some of his crew. Then, saying goodbye to the other guys.

After a few more minutes, he walked outside the locker room, scanning the place for her presence. He wondered if she was still waiting for him, but he believed she might still be.

One thing he was beginning to understand about her. She did not easily give up. Something that he was starting to like about her. Her persistence and tenacity.

"I thought you might have drowned in the shower." She said as she came out of the shadow. She was sitting in one of the chairs in the lounge area behind a plant.

She was still feeling slightly embarrassed about her earlier actions. Especially when men came out of the locker room, looking directly at her with a smile on their lips.

She was still a girl who could still feel shame for her uncontrollable actions that sometimes had brought her into trouble. She did have some regrets about her impulsive behaviors, like the one she had with Nick.

"Fortunately, I know how to swim." He responded, seeing that she had not lost her humor after her earlier experience.

He gestured for her to follow him. He guessed that he would not be able to get rid of her yet. He walked toward the parking lot where he had left his car earlier.

"My car or yours?" He asked, planning to end this tonight.

If she could not wait for tomorrow, he might as well finish the interview right now, even if it would take him all night. It would be good for him to finally get rid of her permanently.

"What are you planning?" Eida asked, curious about his question. She looked at him as they stopped in front of his car. She wondered if they were doing the interview inside the car or was he planning to go somewhere else.

"Your car then." He decided, raising his brow at her, questioning which one was hers.

He did not see the sports car she was using the other time he saw her. Besides, he could always ask his driver to pick him up or take a cab after they were done talking.

"Sure." She walked not far from their position as he followed close behind. "Where are we going then?" She asked, planning to drive her car.

She finally stopped in a family car, not the usual car she would like to drive, but it was a reliable car when she stalked a story. It could easily blend in with the other vehicles, unlike the other car she drove, which usually stood out, attracting a crowd.

"Well, this is interesting." He was indeed surprised by her choice of car. But the condition of the vehicle was not relevant. He had another issue that he needed to finish.

"Just drive." He said as he sat on the passenger's seat, and this time, he was putting his life in her hands.

But he had not realized the lateness of the night as he found the bars already closed. He had started talking about his life, selecting only the topics he wanted to be included in his story.

"I guessed that should conclude my life." He said, wanting to end the night.

He could not find a place where they could talk. So, he thought that information should do it. It would be enough to make a good story about him.

"Wait, that barely scratched the surface." She complained, not ready to let him go yet. "I think I have an idea." She said, rerouting their direction to another path. She did have control of the car. Therefore, she was using that power over him.

"What do you have in mind?" He asked, raising his thick eyebrows towards her.

He doubted she would find any clubs or bars in this area that would still be open until now. But he would like to know what she came up with as an alternative.

"I was thinking of my place. It is quiet, and we can talk all night about your life." She eagerly suggested, springing up what her mind conjured first in such a short time.

Besides, she did not want him to have an excuse to set her aside again. If she could finish the interview tonight, then there would be no more reason for her to see him. She could finally say good riddance to the quite attractive prince.

Chapter 647: Out of sex

"Come in." Eida gestured for him to enter her apartment after she had opened it for him.

It was a welcome change that she was entertaining a man in her apartment without them ripping their clothes off as soon as the door closed.

She had never entered a committed relationship with anyone since college. She had no plans to do so anytime soon. Her affair with men was usually short-lived and just casual sex.

She had been more focused on her career and not on relationships. She had a goal that she had to attain. She was almost there, and she could not afford any distractions.

"You have a lovely home," Lance commented, seeing the well-decorated living room.

He walked further inside the spacious room and checked the rest of the place. He was curious at the rate a reporter liked her earned in this profession. She must be famous to afford an apartment like this.

He was not a fan of reporters or anyone in the media. So, he would have no idea of her status in the industry. But based on the reaction of people around her, she seemed to be well known.

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"You have to thank the previous owner. I just bought it and lived in it." Eida disinterestedly said as she moved to the other side of the room, which was the kitchen.

She remembered the first thing she did with her biggest paycheck. She looked for a place. When she saw this one, being in the center of everything, she bought it, including everything in it.

The owners were moving far away, and they had no interest in packing up their things. Therefore, they offered it to her at a discounted price. She never bothered to change it since she moved in.

"I must say they had an exquisite taste." He could see the exquisite pieces displayed on the walls and around the place. He believed she was lucky to buy such a nice place.

He followed her to where she disappeared and found her moving around the counter. Once again, his eyes roamed around the smaller space compared to the other room, but still, it looked like she had barely used it.

"Would you like something to drink? Coffee, wine, scotch, or water?" She offered, opening her refrigerator to get what he preferred.

She knew she could use strong alcohol at the moment. But she was not entirely sure if that was wise. Drinking while driving was unacceptable but drinking while she was horny might be worse.

Suddenly, taking the prince into her apartment seemed to be a terrible idea. She regretted suggesting it now. But, she could not throw the prince out of her apartment after what she had to do to get him to agree to the interview.

"I think coffee will be great. I need something that will wake me up if I have to talk about myself all night." He replied to her offer.

He believed a drop of alcohol might not be a good idea based on his condition. He needed his full wits and self-control if he would last the night with her in this apartment without pouncing on her.

"Ok. That is a good idea." Eida agreed with him, hoping that the caffeine would wake her up from her madness.

She immediately placed some water on the coffeemaker and arranged the coffee and the cups. All that was left to do was wait for the coffee to boil.

"Should we continue with the interview while the coffee is preparing?" Lance suggested, hoping to get the task done and be gone at the soonest possible time.

“Yea, I guess that is another great idea.” Now, she sounded dumb. She felt like she was a busted recording machine, repeating her words because her mind was failing her at this instant. “Let me get my phone. So I can record it.”

She believed she needed time away from him to calm her nerves and get her bearings. The small space in her kitchen had been a little suffocating with his massive presence.

After a minute of deep breaths, she grabbed the bag she left in the other room when she entered the apartment. Then, she took her phone out before returning to the kitchen.

“I thought you got lost in your apartment.” Lance jokingly said as she returned with him, tending to the pot of coffee.

She suddenly realized that she might have taken longer than she thought. “Anyway, shall we start?” She had no excuse for her long absence. Therefore, it was better to ignore his statement.

She took her place on the other side of the counter while he returned to the other side with the two hot cups of coffee. He handed her one while taking a sip on the one in his hand.

“Go ahead. Fire away.” He told her, prepared to answer her question he deemed necessary to her story and ignore those that might be sensitive to disclose.

She stared at her notes on her phone about the list of topics she had prepared to ask him but suddenly felt awkward discussing them. She scanned a bit more until she found a slightly nonintrusive question.

“News is quickly spreading that the Council had deemed Prince Edward unworthy to take the throne.” She read on her phone but suddenly realized that her target market would not appreciate the question.

She aimed for the young female population, looking for a real-life prince charming that would save their day. This line of questions would never attract them.

“In your opinion, do you think Prince Alexander would finally come home to take his place?” She continued, finishing the question that she believed would never see the light of day.

It would not sell if she focused on politics. She knew that it was not the topic she wanted for this story. She only added that to make it a little relevant.

“I never like telling my opinion. Especially if it involved a decision of another person.” He answered her candidly, glad that she was talking about matters about the palace and not about himself.

She scrolled again, but all she saw were topics about his love life and career that they had already discussed in the car. She could not ask about his family since everybody already knew about them.

“Ok.” She mumbled more to herself as she read the first question at the top of her list. “How many girlfriends did you have as far back as you can remember?” She had no more choice.

“Well, I think I have five or six, but some of them were when I was young and immature.” He admitted there was a time that he also dated without thinking much about it.

But he had changed. The last relationship he was into lasted more than a year, but it just did not work out for them. Now, he had no idea if he would be able to find the girl that was right for him.

“Are you in a relationship right now?” She suddenly felt like she was the one interested to know his answers. Was she only using this interview to get more information from him?

“No. I am not.” His answer abruptly made him think.

He suddenly remembered what Rick said but quickly buried it in the deepest recesses of his mind. He did not need his words to remind him that he had been out of sex for a long time.

Chapter 648: Family skeletons

Alex found himself wide awake in the middle of the night. He knew his body was tired, but still, he could not help his mind from wondering about his earlier discovery.

His head turned to his left, and his eyes stared at his sleeping wife. He debated with himself if it was wise to include her in this wild goose chase that he planned to do.

“Are you ready to learn all the skeletons that I might learn about your family?” He whispered in silence as he gazed at the serenity sketched on his wife’s face.

She barely recovered from their traumatic experience. Could she undergo another one? If he learned that there was more to the story than Ethan had told them?

He finally gave up on closing his eyes because it was no use. He would not be sleeping anyway. Instead, he would keep staring into the void of nothingness until a few things popped up again in his mind.

He walked to the balcony of their room, silently moving around the room to avoid waking her up. Once outside, he could feel the cold air slowly sipping through his body.

He was surprised to see the full moon above, rarely having the opportunity to do so. But it was a pleasant change compared to the thoughts stuck inside his head.

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“What’s wrong?” Her melodic voice penetrated his silence. He was once again in deep thought, not noticing he already had present company.

He turned around, surprised to see his wife up and about. She was directly looking at him with her sleepy eyes. She stretched a little and yawned as she moved toward him.

“Nothing. I could not sleep.” Alex waited for her as she came closer. Then, he wrapped her arms around her shoulder, thinking that she might get cold from the briskly cold air.

“You should return to bed, Dani. I will join you in a little while.” He whispered as they stared at the view before them.

At this angle, this city seemed so peaceful. But they knew they were not looking at the finer details. There was more to it than meets the eye.

“I will once you come with me.” She was not leaving his husband, who was bothered by something based on her observation. “What is it? It does not look like nothing to me.”

She savored the warmth his body was emitting to her. The cold breeze was penetrating her thin nightgown. She realized that she should have worn her robe before coming out in the open air.

"Fine." He conceded in both things that were in his mind.

First, he planned to go back to bed with her before she caught a cold. Then, he finally decided to include her in his plans. He would tell her what was on his mind.

"Ok. So?" She did not look at her husband. But she focused her eyes on the same moon her husband had stared at earlier for a long time.

She wondered why so many people in the city could not see the beauty around them. All one had to do was looked up in the sky to see the sun's glory in the morning. Then, the moon's radiance at night.

"Let us first go inside." He grabbed her hands and felt the coldness in her skin. "Your hands are freezing." He commented before pulling her back inside the safety and warmth of their room.

Once back on their bed, he rubbed her palms and fingers to warm them up. His was also cold but not as bad as hers. Then, he looked into her face, realizing she was patiently waiting for him.

"Are you ready to tell me what is making you awake at this late of the night?" Dani asked, enjoying the feel of his hands against her skin.

She knew whatever he was keeping. It was not his intention to hide it from her. It was probably one of those secrets that were very hard to reveal since it might hurt her.

But after what she had gone through, what more could hurt her. Still, she slightly feared that maybe she still had a few things to learn about life. It seemed it always had a few tricks hiding in its sleeves.

"You see when I left you. I did not go back to the office. Instead, I visited Tim today." He took a deep breath, picking his following words carefully.

He knew that was not unusual, so she would not be surprised by his explanation. She knew he sometimes checked on Tim from time to time. But he did not tell her about what he learned today.

"Did you learn something new?" She asked. Finally, this new information enlightened her confusion. But still, it did not answer her questions.

She did not want to push him to tell her what he knew, but she was also anxious to learn if there was a development in their case. She hoped to close this chapter of their story so they could move on.

"I might be onto something, but it is just a hunch. Nothing conclusive. I still have to delve into it much deeper." He told her, finally letting go of her hand and standing up to get his phone.

He was still unsure if telling her something that did not guarantee to lead to anything was the right thing to do. But keeping things from her, he believed, was far worse.

He searched the file he had taken a picture of earlier and showed it to her. He watched her as she questioned him with her look.

"Ok." She took the phone and scanned the file, looking for whatever he showed her. It was a new file that she had not seen before. "Where did this come from?"

Although it said in the file that the evidence was inconclusive because of lack of substance, she still found it informative. Yes, rumors were the basis of the information, but many of these things turned out to be true.

She wondered which one could be the information that could lead them to the truth. But she could see one particular line that stood out from the file.

"It was part of Cassie's files. The one she took from Nick. But Tim and I thought it had no sound basis. So, we disregarded them." He admitted making a mistake when he never double-checked the integrity of the information before condemning it useless.

"Well, you might be right about it, but then again. Maybe we can find something useful from this." She said, hopeful that one of this information might lead them to something.

"Do you have more of this?" She could feel the excitement of discovering more things that might finish this case once and for all.

"Just a few, and Tim is already checking every fine detail in it. But if you want to see it, we can always stop by his office." He offered, seeing that she was anxious to get her hands on them.

"What are you thinking earlier?" She still did not get why he saw this as a problem rather than a solution.

"Because I am thinking of talking to Ethan about this." He did not point out what particular subject matter. But he was hoping she would think of it as a general. "Would you like to join me to visit your father in the morning?"

If Ethan had something to say, he believed it would be better if Dani would be part of the conversation. All of this involved her, and she had the right to know why.

He understood family issues and the many stories of their ancestors hidden in the past. He also had his shares of family skeletons hidden in their massive walls.

Chapter 649: A few bundles of joy

"I think there is something else that is bothering you. What is it?" Dani asked her husband, who had been silent in the car while driving.

She called her mother early this morning to tell them that they were joining them for breakfast. It had been a while since she had breakfast in the house where she had grown up.

Presently, she stared at the man beside him, who she believed had been too quiet since they woke up. He barely said a few words since they left the house.

"I am just thinking of what Ethan might say about the rumors," Alex admitted to his wife, glancing at her to see her face.

This meeting with his father-in-law might or might not lead to anything since rumors tended to be false. But then again, when there was fire, there was gas fuelling the flame.

He believed that Ethan might know some truth about the rumors since he admitted to being part of the group at some point in his life. He might have stayed in touch with a few of them or kept tabbed on them even after he had left the organization.

"We will see." She answered him. She might be slightly concerned about what she might learn about his father and his further involvement with the group. But she knew, this time, she could trust her father because he was a good man despite his past.

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She remembered the last time they had talked about his past. She could see how much toll it still had on his body and mind. It must have been a burden he had been carrying for a long time, a secret that weighed heavily in his heart.

Her mom had to stop the conversation and force her father to take some rest. She knew that there was more to the story, but it was left unfinished.

"I hope we can find some answers from what he knew." His hand let go of the wheel and squeezed hers, assuring her that everything would be alright.

As much as he did not wish to entangle Ethan in this case again, he had no choice. He wanted to find the mastermind that had them going in circles. He would never believe that Dani would be safe until he was behind bars with Nick.

All he ever wanted was to get to the bottom of the truth. He knew that Ethan might hold the key to some of the answers. He just hoped that there was no more deep secret that would further break her heart.

"This is a welcome surprise, but I am happy to see the two of you." Laura greeted her daughter and son-in-law with a smile that radiated love and longing once they entered the mansion.

She missed her daughter dearly, and every time her mind would remember the ordeal Dani had gone through, she could not stop herself from wanting to protect her again.

But luckily, she knew that her daughter had a good loving husband that would do everything he could to prevent that from happening again.

"Where is Dad?" Dani asked her mom as they entered the foyer of their house.

It still felt the same, just like when she lived in this house. Although it had undergone several renovations, it was still her home. It was big, but it always had that homey feeling.

Maybe it was because of her mother, who had filled this lifeless structure with memories of their life, laughter, and love. It could also be her father who had created a magical world for her when she was young.

"Waiting for you since you called." Her mom beamed at her, excited to spend the morning with them. "He is outside in the garden."

Since her daughter moved out of the house, it had been too quiet. Although they managed just fine to entertain themselves, still, it was different when she was around.

She sometimes believed it was too big for just the two of them. She could only hope that their family would start growing, so they could have little rascals running around the place again.

"You know you can always come and visit us if you miss me that much." Dani jokingly said, feeling the longing of her mom for her company.

She made a mental note to invite her mom for a mother and daughter bonding. It had been a long time since they had done that. It would be just the two of them enjoying the day.

"Maybe we will do that more often. It had been too quiet here since you left." Laura confided, feeling a bit nostalgic. "Ethan, they are here." She announced once they stepped outside the garden.

She could see her husband busy with his computer. Even if she insisted he should not be working, he still found a way. She believed that old habits die hard.

"Princess, finally, you remembered to visit us." Ethan quickly stood up and hugged his daughter. "You had been hugging her all to yourself." He turned to Alex with a slight accusatory smile.

But all of them knew that he was kidding around. Although he missed his daughter, he knew that she had already started building her own family.

He did genuinely like Alex for his daughter. He was happy that someone would be taking care of her long after he was gone. But that would be a long time if he could do something about it.

"Let us sit down and eat. I prepared all your favorite food." Laura interrupted the reunion and offered the meals she had done for them.

"You always know the way to my heart, Mom," Alex responded with a boyish grin, suddenly remembering his mother. She liked to fatten him up when he was just a little boy.

He wondered why he could say Mom to Laura while he could not call Dad to Ethan. Sometimes, he would prefer to call him Sir. Maybe it was the authority Ethan commanded in his stance, making him want to salute him instead of hugging him or shaking his hand.

"When is my grandchild due?" Ethan asked out of the blue as their conversation revolved around the new apartment they had bought and the foster home project.

He wanted to have a new baby girl that he could spoil and treat like a princess. He wished the house to have young boys that would create loud noises around the hallways as they played knights with their swords or soldiers with guns.

But in this new age, he had learned that most things that young kids do were play with computers and cellphones. But his grandchildren would be different. He would fill them with hopes and dreams using his stories.

"I assure you that I am working on that." Alex winked at his wife, which earned him a jab on his ribs.

He also liked to have kids soon. Despite all the troubles they were into at the moment, he believed that having someone to care for would always balance everything out.

He never saw his future children be a distraction or obstacle to his goals. But more of an inspiration to strive for more. He knew that Dani shared his sentiment.

He could not wait for his new family to be blessed with a few bundles of joy, hopefully soon.

Chapter 650: Marriage of convenience

"Can you call Amelia in her room? He asked one of the maids who served his coffee and breakfast.

He wanted to discuss with her daughter the plan to wed her with her childhood friend, Prince Lance. Thomas, his friend, suggested arranging the wedding of their children. And he could not agree more.

He was not expecting the Count to consider it since they had never talked about it before. But learning about his friend's plans, he knew that her daughter marrying the prince was a good move for her benefit and their business.

"Sir, Ms. Amelia will be down soon." The maid announced before disappearing again into the kitchen.

He never liked the help to be littering around when he did not require their presence. But he would like that everything around his house should always be in order.

He wanted the whole mansion to be always presentable. There should be no dust on any surface or an object out of place. He required competent staff that knew what they were doing.

"Dad, you called for me." Amelia showed up in the garden, where his father liked to eat his breakfast. But she was not joining him today since she had already eaten her meal much earlier.

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Since her mother died about ten years ago, family meals were never been the same. Her father was too busy to deal with her growing up. She had learned to be on her own.

The only time her father showed he cared was when he needed something from her. That was a rare occasion. She could probably count in her the fingers of her hand.

"Yes, please join me." Her father gestured for her to take the other seat beside him. "Have you eaten already?" Her father asked as if concerned for her health. But she knew better.

"Yes, Dad." She answered with a slight frown on her forehead, wondering what her father was up to, judging by his expression.

She followed her father, just like before, not wanting to anger him. Besides moving away from Lance, another reason she took the job overseas was to get away from his demanding and dominating father.

His father had tried to control her life. That was the only time he took quite an interest in her. He would tell her what he wanted for her. But that was not what she wanted for herself.

As soon as she found an opportunity to be far from him, she took it, taking the money that her mother left her. She started her life away from all of this.

"I was talking to Thomas yesterday, and I think you will like what he suggested," Leonard said with a grin on his lips. He was excited to tell her, knowing how much she had a crush on Lance.

He knew all about it since she would usually confide in her mother. His wife would, in return, tell him about it. He had ignored it before, finding no use in the association of the two. After all, he was wealthier than the Count and more successful.

However, what he said to him suddenly changed everything. He had no desire for the Wellington wealth but a crown. That was different. Thomas told him about the plan to make his son the new King.

"What is it, Dad?" She was afraid to ask, but she knew that his father would say it anyway. So, she might as well hear about it. She still had a lot of things to do.

She planned to pack and leave the next day. It was a mistake that she came home, realizing it now. Lance did not miss her or grow fonder of her with their distance, and her father still had not changed.

"He suggested that you should marry Lance." His father stated as if that was the best news he had received. Excitement was written all over his face.

"When the Count saw you, he instantly knew you were the perfect wife for his son." He continued, not caring about the shocked expression on her face. "I think this is what you always wanted."

He stared at his daughter, watching her reaction. He knew that would change her mind about leaving again. He heard earlier from her maid that she planned to fly back tomorrow to where she came from, wherever she had been.

"What?" Amelia finally found her voice, recovering from her surprise. Marriage to Lance. She repeated in her head as if she had heard her father wrong.

She could not believe what his father was saying. She did not expect that his father would do such thing as to arrange her life in such a manner.

She always tried to be a good daughter to him even after her mother died. She had stretched her patience to understand him. But this was insane.

"You heard me. I agreed with Thomas. I think you should follow your heart and marry the man you love." Leonard said to his child, giving her the blessing he believed she deserved.

He believed that finally, he would be doing her daughter a favor. At the same time, he would be gaining something that he wanted. It was a win-win situation for the two of them.

"What are you talking about?" She was confused with his father. How did he know about her feelings for Lance?

But it did not matter since the man she loved did not love her back. So, how could she marry him? It was like a shotgun wedding where she was forcing a man to marry her just because she loved him.

She knew Lance would do it. He was a good son and always had been obedient to his parents. But could she sacrifice his happiness for hers?

"I know all about your secret. But that is not what is relevant." His father said as he sipped on his coffee. "You will marry Lance, and he will marry you because it is the right thing to do."

He would not let anything stand against this union, not even his daughter. It was time that she grew up and took responsibility for her life. She could not keep running away from her destiny.

"I will not allow you to force me into this marriage. I am not a child, and this is not the medieval times where you have a say in my life." She answered her father with a tone slightly pitchy and loud. She found the entire idea ridiculous and outrageous.

"Why are you so against this?" His father was slightly curious. He believed that she would be thrilled by the idea.

He watched her daughter turn away from him, but he saw the hurt in her eyes. He believed that there was more to this than she was telling him.

"Because Lance doesn't love me." She said with tears dropping in her eyes. "He will probably agree to this marriage, and then he will hate me for it."

She could already see what would happen when this marriage pushed through. She might be happy because she would be marrying the man of her dreams.

However, her future husband would be furious at her for trapping him in this marriage. It would become a marriage of convenience where neither one would be happy.