

Royal Contract 671

Chapter 671: Grand revelation

He watched his son with an open mind. He wanted to see who he had become after his absence. He seemed to be fine, but he could sense that he had been through a lot.

Or, maybe it was his old age or probably his guilt that made him feel like a sentimental fool. But whatever it was, he was sorry to miss the growing years of his son's life.

"Yeah, I guess it would take more than a heart attack to take me down." Ethan expressed with a defeated smile. "But I am glad that I am still alive."

He was since it gave him the chance to see his son. Or else his secret would be buried with him. Then, no one would have probably known the truth.

Maybe it was the reason why he was still alive. So, he could still correct his mistakes and fix what he had done in the past. If that was the case, he was thankful for the chance.

He thought that when he came today to see him and confront him about his secret. It would be easier. But it was not. Although, he felt pride for his son for doing well despite what he did. He could see that his son had made quite an accomplishment for himself.

But he also felt shame for himself for not finding a way to get to know him when he was born. He had thirty years of opportunity to search for him, but he took the coward's way out.

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"Yes, Alex has been doing a tremendous job of taking over my place." He could not deny that his son-in-law was indeed a good businessman.

He had proven time and time again why he had managed to raise himself from the ranking despite his limited resources and being an outsider.

He would do very well as his daughter's partner in running his empire. But what about his son, who was sitting across from him. He believed this young man also deserved a part of his legacy.

"Anyway, your time is almost up. Why did you come here? If it is about your daughter's case, I just finished discussing it with the DA's office, and they might close the case since the accused is already dead." He informed him, hoping that it was his purpose for visiting him.

"No, this doesn't have anything to do with that. My reason for coming to see you is more personal. But as you said, my time is almost up." He stood up from the chair to fix his coat and tie.

He could see that his son was waiting for him to continue.

Then this time, he extended his hand. "I hope you would not mind if I call you, Gerald." He just wanted to try it on his lips. He had never known his name. Now that he had. He wished to keep calling him by his first name.

"I hope that you will meet with me again. I have an important matter that I want to discuss with you privately. Besides, fifteen minutes will not be enough." He smiled at him, hoping that he perceived the urgency of his message.

He waited until his hands touched his before holding it firmly in his. He firmly believed that he was his son. He did not need DNA to prove it. He could already see it in his eyes and his stand. His face and hair were more of his mother, but the rest was identical to his. He wondered if his son did not see the resemblance as he studied him under his gaze.

He noticed it earlier, how his eyes examined him from head to toe. His son was wondering what he was doing in his presence. But this place was not the right location to reveal their secrets.

"Well, I will have to look at my calendar for an available schedule. But could you give me a hint of what this is all about?" His curiosity was noticeable on his face. He could detect in his eyes his interest in the matter. Though, his mind was probably sending him red warning bells.

"You will have to wait till we meet again. But I do hope you will give me the time of day." He finally turned around towards the door, not saying anything else.

He hoped his son would take his bait and agree to this meeting. Otherwise, he would have no choice but to tell him along with his sister.

"Wait, when and where do you want to meet?" He heard his son ask.

He could not help the smile that graced his lips. His son was indeed just like him. They could not turn away from a good mystery.

He wondered what else he would discover if he could spend more time with him. He would love to know him more if he would only let him.

"You are the busy man, you decide. Anytime is good for me. Just inform me, and I will be there." Ethan turned to glance at him one last time before he nodded to the younger version of him and walked out of the door.

He wished he was walking away, knowing that he would accept the truth about his identity. But he just had to be patient until that time had come.

"Ok. It was nice to meet you, Ethan." He heard his son's voice as he continued to walk away from his office.

He liked the timbre of his tone as he called his name. He wondered what it would be like if he would call him Dad instead of his name. But that was still wishful thinking.

He was already in the lobby on his way out of the building when he saw his daughter enter the main door. She was out when he arrived, but he thought he might have already left by the time she came back.

"Dad, what are you doing here?" Dani immediately spotted him and came to greet him, giving him a tight hug. It was a question he was not ready to answer, so he had to lie.

One thing that he had promised never to do again. But this time, he had a valid reason, and he had no plan to keep it for long. He just needed a few more days before he made his grand revelation.

Chapter 672: A semblance in features

She was surprised to see her father walking in the lobby of her office. She could only remember a handful of times he had come to see her.

Usually, he would summon for her to see him and not the other way around. But he was here, so it must be something urgent that he had to drop by himself.

"Dani," Ethan quickly responded, kissing her on the cheeks. "I was in the vicinity and thought I should check on you." Staring at her face with eyes that had been through many experiences.

She was glad that her father had started to regain his strength, seeing his colors return to normal and his body mass also increase slowly back to its original form.

Although she was still wary that his health had not returned to what it used to be. The doctors told her that it was normal for a man at his age.

Still, she wished that her father would fully recover and would have more time in this world to be with them. She felt that she still needed more time with him.

"You should have called me. I would have come back quickly if I knew you were here." She held his father by the arms and guided him to a seat in the lobby. "Do you want to go back to the office, or are you on your way back home?"

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She sat across from him on the massive area with several passing around them. But her focus remained planted on the man before her.

"I was here to see how you are doing. But you were not in your office. So, I thought I would see you some other time." He reasoned, leaning his body on the backrest, letting his hands rest on his lap. "Besides, I did not want to disturb your busy schedule."

She touched his left hand closest to her and tapped him gently. "I will never be too busy for you, Dad. As long as you need me, I will be there."

She believed that her father had been searching for her brother behind her back. She could not understand why he would not share this information with her, but she did not want to stress him by forcing the issue.

She wondered if her father had found him or was still waiting for his hired investigators for answers. In her case, she still had no clue who he was.

"I would not take so much of your time." He stood up from the seat, pulling her also to her feet.

He took a deep breath before pulling her again for a hug. She could sense that something was weighing heavily on his stance, but she just returned a tight hug to comfort him.

“Well, I am glad that you came by, Dad. Send my love to Mom.” She told him, walking him back to his waiting car, already parked outside, relieved to know that, at the very least, nothing was wrong with him.

“I will.” He answered, his lips curving into a warm smile. “By the way, I hope you and Alex will visit us soon. It has been relatively quiet around the house when it is just your mother and me.” Ethan expressed his genuine longing for her, his only daughter.

She could only imagine what her father was currently experiencing. She did not remember him staying much longer than a few hours inside the house, except for their few family bondings when she was young.

But she heard her mother express her gladness that he was finally taking some time to relax and enjoy his life. She wondered what her mother would say if she found out that her father did not feel the same way.

“Are you bored at the house?” She could read him like a book. She had seen his longing to be back in the game. The way he had stared at the people coming and going inside the building. She could see how much he missed being at the top of a building.

“Yes,” Ethan finally admitted to his daughter what he could not say to his wife. “I love your mother. But staying in that house with nothing much to do and not much to talk to is hard. It is making me insane.”

Her father finally admitted with a pang of slight guilt in his eyes. She understood him, but she also could sympathize with what her mom was saying.

“Have you talked to Mom about this?” She stood beside him on the pavement as they discussed her father’s issue, unmindful of the people passing them by on the busy street.

Her concern centered on what was going on with her father. She wanted to help him with his problem, but it was an issue that only he could resolve by himself. All she could do was support him with his decision.

“Not yet.” He answered her, shaking his head as if he suddenly realized that he had shared too much. “Anyway, we can talk more about this once you visit us.”

He stood closer to her, leaning down to impart a soft kiss on the top of her head. “Now, go back to your work. I do not want your boss to think you are slacking off.”

She could hear the teasing in his voice, making her smile. Suddenly, she remembered a few times they shared moments like this.

She could only wish that they would have more of these memories to share in the future. Her mind went back to her brother. She also wished her brother would have a chance to know him.

“Go rest once you reach home.” She reminded him, not wanting him to overdo things.

She stepped aside as her father rode the vehicle. Once inside, she waved goodbye as his chauffeur closed the door on him. A minute later, his car was driving away.

She quickly turned inside, walked through the lobby, and entered the elevators. She was in a hurry since she still had tons of work left on her desk that needed her attention.

What she did not see was a man watching their little sweet father and daughter interaction? Unmindful of her surrounding. She immediately pulled out her phone and quickly sent a text to Jacky.

As the elevator doors were about to close, a hand suddenly sneaked in between, effectively opening the panels again.

She abruptly looked up from the phone, finally noticing that she had company.

"Hi, Dani. It is perfect timing that I bump into you." Her present companion greeted her as he moved forward inside the small box and stood before her. "If you are not busy, maybe we can talk."

"Gerald, what is it?" She asked, suddenly anxious as her eyes studied his face. "Do you need something important?"

She watched him as the door behind him finally closed, and the elevators jerked into motion as they climbed the building to her indicated floor.

Suddenly her eyes focused on his face, then her lips curved into a smile. Then, she shook her head at the ridiculousness of her thoughts.

"What seems to be funny?" Gerald suddenly asked, probably curious at her reaction. He moved to her other side as they now faced the doors, waiting for them to open.

She suddenly realized that she was smiling for no apparent reason, seeing her reflection on the metallic walls of the elevator. She must have looked crazy.

"Nothing. Something just suddenly popped in my head, and it seemed ridiculous." She confessed to him, not wanting him to think that she was laughing at him.

She did see his face contorted in confusion as he glanced her way. She did not want him to feel insulted or something similar to that. After all, he was still her boss.

"Try me. I love a funny story." He suddenly challenged her, slightly turning to her, sporting a big grin on his lips. "Let me guess. I have a big smudge on my face." His hands patted both sides of his cheeks, searching for dirt on his skin.

"No, that is not it." She mildly chuckled at her boss, who was clowning around. She shook her head from left to right. "It is just that I had never noticed before that you have a partial resemblance to someone I know." She finally admitted what was going through her mind.

She had been staring at her father for so long a few moments ago that when she finally looked at her boss, she suddenly noticed some familiarity between them.

But that could be a mere coincidence, or her eyes were tired from the many sleepless nights. Anyway, she could only laugh at her thoughts, finding no relevance in their current situation.

"Who could that be?" He asked as his eyebrows raised at her in question.

"It is nothing, just a silly thought." She answered him as the elevator finally stopped and opened its doors. "Anyway, can I drop by at your office before I leave?"

She walked out of the elevator. Then, she turned around to look at her boss, who held the doors again to stop them from closing. As much as she wanted to discuss the case with her boss and lawyer, she remembered the work, still waiting for her back at her office.

"That will work for me," Gerald answered her before returning his hands to his side, allowing the doors to close at him. But not before she saw him give her a wave goodbye and a smile.

She also turned around in the direction of her office, in a hurry to finish her work. But the thought of her boss having a semblance in features to his dad made her smile once again.

Chapter 673: Happy birthday, my love!

"I could not wait to see what Haley had done so far with the place." She excitedly rubbed her hands together, feeling the nerve of anxiousness tingle her spine.

She moved around their bedroom, trying to pick a cloth that she could wear to the construction site. But nothing seemed suitable for the occasion.

"I am sure that it would be something great," Alex answered her, watching her pace around the room, moving without accomplishing anything.

She admitted she could not decide on the dress as she threw one dress after another on the foot of the bed. But she did not want to be late and keep Haley and the other guests waiting.

"Don't you have any plan to get out of that bed?" She moved before him, placing her hands on both sides of her waist.

Her eyes focused on him, tapping her feet on the floor as if waiting for him to move. Instead of sliding off the bed, her husband shifted to his side with one hand supporting his head.

While the other hand patted the pillow next to him, beckoning her to go back to his side. But she was not in the mood to play his silly game today. On other days, it might have worked, but not today.

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"Nope. Not this time." She responded, turning her back on her husband, ignoring him for good as she continued to rummage her closet for the perfect clothes for a perfect day.

She finally moved out of the closet with a set of skinny black pants and a matching white-colored blouse. Then, pairing it with a black coat would help with the chilly wind outside.

She looked outside her window and could already feel the winter coming. Although it was not yet winter, the frostiness of the air was already noticeable with the breeze.

She believed it was still a good day to be out under the sun. It would not be hot and not too cold either. She could already feel the excitement in the air.

"You are no fun." He finally rolled out of bed, displaying his partially naked body in front of her before he strode to the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

She could see that he was disappointed not to get his way, but as she said, this was not the time. She had other things planned for today.

Then, just when she thought she had heard the last from him, the door opened, and his head peeked through the crack. "Last chance to join me in the shower." He stated as if it was a limited offer, she should immediately avail herself before it eventually expired.

But she was not taking the bait, shaking her head at his incredulous suggestion. However, he did not give up that easily.

He closed the door, but when he opened it. Slow music started playing.

He finally revealed his body, with only a towel laying lowly on his hips. Then, his body moved from side to side, swaying his hips gracefully in a masculine way, enticing, seducing her to get what he wanted, moving closer until he stood before her.

"Come on. You know you want me to bathe you." He whispered as his breath tickled her ears and his hand caressed her cheeks. She admitted she was not a machine that could turn off her emotion or her heart molded out of stone, immune to his temptations. She also felt her hands twitch to touch him.

Her heart quickened with his sudden nearness while her breathing hitched at his suggestive innuendo. Her eyes could not look away, transfixed with his that called to her.

"I only want to shower. It will save us time if we do it together." She replied, but it lacked any conviction, concluding she also wanted what he offered, and he knew it.

Not a second later, her feet moved as he pulled her gently towards the smaller room. Once inside, his hands moved to untie the robe she was wearing. Then, it fell on her feet on the floor.

Her eyes remained focused only on him, not breaking their eye contact. But she felt the tip of his fingers as they slid her hair to the back, grazing her skin, sending shockwaves through her spine.

"Then, let me help you with this." He uttered in his husky voice, indicating that he was much affected by this, not just her.

Then, he held the strap of her nightgown, sliding them off her shoulders until it also followed the robe pooling at her feet. Now, he moved backward, staring at his masterpiece.

She was not shy. She liked it when her husband lusted after her naked form. It only spices up their love affair even more. She loved it when his eyes, lips, hands, and every part of his body adored every inch of hers. It made her feel special.

Eventually, when his hands finally landed on her waist to pull her closer, her whole body shook in delight. Electricity rushed through her every nerve, exciting her to no end.

"I think Haley will understand if we are late for a few minutes."

He told her as his lips finally came down to claim hers. He seemed to be a man possessed as he dominated the kiss.

She would admit that they were always tired or preoccupied the last few days. She could not blame her husband for feeling deprived since she also confirmed feeling the same way.

She moaned into his mouth, allowing his tongue entry to mingle with hers, exploring every crevice that created sensations throughout her body.

But the pleasure did not stop there as his hands moved away from her waist. One hand moved upward while the other in the opposite direction.

Then, her ass touched the cold wall of the shower, followed by her back as her hands entwined tightly around his neck, hanging for support.

He finally left her mouth to explore the rest of her upper body, letting his lips guide them to where they wanted to be. After playing with her neck, he moved on a downward path, landing on her supple breast, providing her the sensation she never thought she was longing for, not until now.

The tension he created had her writhing under his ministrations. She craved for more and begged for more. She took what he was giving her, but she needed more.

“Ahhh!” She could not control the moan that escaped her lips as pleasure after pleasure shoot through her entire body.

Then, her legs entwined around his body as a new set of sensations drove her to oblivion. He thrust to her like a man who was on a mission. She allowed it, loving the feeling of the two of them joining into one, moving towards the same path, wanting the same thing.

“Aaahhh!” He also groaned loudly, one after the other, unable to control the passion that exuded out of him, feeling the sweat that covered their bodies as he finally filled her need with his love. This time no more barriers protected them from their future.

For the last time, she felt him shudder before he laid his head on her shoulders as he kept supporting her weight with his body. But before he finally let her go, he whispered something in her ear.

“Happy birthday, my love!”

Chapter 674: Perfect birthday

It was not the same as earlier when she woke up excited about her project. Her jubilation had increased tenfold after receiving her first gift of the day.

She never thought he remembered since he did not show any signs. But she loved the way he had surprised her this time. Anyway, she always loved all his surprises. She never could ever guess what he had always hidden up his sleeves.

“Have you seen what Haley had initially done with the place?” She asked her husband, slightly curious about the plans.

She had asked her friend to send her some blueprints or pictures, but she had not seen anything yet. She wondered if Alex had it but forgot to give it to her. They had been busy with many things, so she expected he might have misplaced it.

Her eyes turned to her left, expecting to see the construction site soon, feeling her palms sweat at the thought of finally building one of her dreams.

"I think I already gave it to you, but you were busy. You might have forgotten it." Alex explained as his hands maintained a steady hold on the steering wheel, and his eyes never wavered from the road ahead.

This time, her husband opted not to have someone else drive them to the site. Although two vehicles still trailed them behind as she looked in the rearview mirror.

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"Yeah, you are probably right. Well, it doesn't matter now." She uttered as the site finally came to her view. It was a large area, and she could already see several machines moving around and people gathering around the spacious front lawn.

"Did you invite the media?" She asked, seeing some cameras set up in front of a podium.

She was surprised because it was supposed to be a small private affair. She did not want the crazy media scene to ruin her solemn moment with the kids she invited from the orphanage.

Instead of celebrating with a massive party for her birthday, as Jacky initially had suggested, she agreed to make this small gathering with the kids as her honored guests.

"They are close friends who had helped me in some of my promotions. They would keep a low profile and help us create more awareness for the foundation." Alex explained to her, which made sense.

She finally agreed to let them stay, but with the condition that they would not bother the kids. She watched excitedly as the kids moved around the front yard, playing with the toys she had set up for them.

Finally, Alex parked the car not far from the activities, and she immediately unbuckled herself and exited the vehicle without waiting for Alex to open her doors.

She stood in amazement at what Jacky had arranged for the place. It looked like a picture that just popped out from a fairy tale book.

"Do you like it? I think Jacky almost lost thirty percent of her hair, making this thing happen." Alex said as he stood beside her, admiring the scene before them.

She could imagine what her friend had to go through in the short time she had when she finally decided to do this. She suddenly remembered a few occasions in her childhood her parents would arrange something like this for her.

It had always been the perfect party that all her friends enjoyed spending with her, and many envied too. She was the perfect princess of her father, who only deserved the best.

But this time, this was not for her. This entire party was for those kids deprived of a chance to be happy and enjoy their youth. She would be celebrating with them.

"Are you ready to meet them and check on Haley and her team?" Alex asked as he ushered her toward the front lawn, where many gathered around the fountain of playful dolphins.

"Yes, I am so excited. I think I am about to pee on my pants." She jokingly replied to her husband, which only made him roll his eyes at her.

She could not help it, believing he was not the only one who could fool around. She smiled at him, then allowed him to escort her toward the people, moving around the spacious area.

She immediately spotted Jacky, who had her hands on her waist, barking orders to a few uniformed men. She did not want to be on that receiving end. If she was in that mood, then those men deserved it. They probably had messed up with her orders.

Then, on another side, on the opposite end of the lawn, she saw Marcus talking to Haley. She could not decide who she would like to go to first. She opted to check on the kids instead.

"Hey, there." She came closer to a familiar boy that she had not seen for a long time. "Andy. I am glad to see you here."

She did not know that Jacky had invited her brother to the party. She was glad because she missed him as she enveloped her in her arms. "I also missed you, Dani." The not-so-young boy responded, hugging her tighter.

"I want you to meet my husband. Alex, this handsome man is Andy." Then she made the necessary introduction.

At the corner of her eye, another boy came rushing to her side. She could not believe it. She recognized him right away. "Jeremy, you have grown a lot." Seeing the skinny kid, forming a few fats and muscles on his arms and body. His cheeks were not shallow anymore, giving him a healthier look from their last encounter.

After talking to the two boys and introducing them, they seemed to hit it off, enjoying seeing them interact with each other.

She was expecting that once she had set foot in this place, a banner would be up, and the kids would gather around to cheer her up, greeting her just like what she had seen in surprised parties.

But she loved this more, not taking the limelight on this day. She wanted everyone to think that this was their special day, not just hers.

"Hey, kids. Are you enjoying yourselves?" She asked the little ones who had their hands submerged in the water, trying to catch some actual fish swimming in the pond.

The kids seemed to be loving playing with the water and watching with amazement as water flowed on the dolphin's lips. That was not all. After a few minutes, the dolphin would shoot up water in the air through its blowhole on the top of its head, creating splashes of water around the fountain.

"What about you? Are you enjoying your day?" His voice tickled her ears as it reminded her of their earlier tryst.

But she smiled at him, showing him how genuinely happy she was with what was happening around her. She could not dream of a perfect day than this.

"Hey, birthday girl. I am sorry I did not notice you earlier. Those catering crew almost screwed up the food. Luckily, I had made backup plans." Jacky assured her as she took her phone out again from her pocket and answered a call. "You have to excuse me, just a minute." She pointed her fingers in the air and walked away.

There went her friend, she thought, but she was happy that Alex had never left her side. So far, she had nothing to complain about as everything seemed to be going as planned and more. She could not ask for a perfect birthday than this.

Chapter 675: Ready to be a parent

She walked toward the person in charge of this entire project. But her eyes zeroed in on how her friend and Marcus were discussing something. She was not sure if they were arguing.

It was like it was a serious matter from her vantage point. It looked like there was a familiarity in their movement. But then again, she might be putting colors to something that might not have any meaning.

"Did Marcus and Haley know each other?" She finally decided to turn to her husband, who was walking alongside her.

From the look on his face, he might be as clueless as she was, shrugging his shoulders at her. She figured she would find out for herself as they neared the two, who were still unaware of their presence.

She turned at her back and could not see any sign of Jacky. She might know something that she did not know. Anyway, she continued to walk until they were just a couple of meters away.

"I don't know what you mean." She heard Marcus with slight annoyance in his voice while his face was mildly irritated.

But he quickly smiled and stopped whatever he was saying when he realized they had company, immediately turning around to greet them.

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However, he had this look that reminded her of the saying about a hand caught in a cookie jar. He looked guilty for something. What it was, she had no idea.

"Hi, Dani. Happy birthday!" Greeting her with a kiss before he turned to her husband.

"Happy birthday, Dani!" Haley also did the same, giving her a hug and a kiss.

"Do you two know each other?" She finally asked, unable to control her curiosity as her eyes shifted from one to the other.

She noticed the two glanced at each other before they answered almost simultaneously.

"We do," Haley said first.

"We do," Marcus answered next. "But we have not seen each other for a while." Marcus again continued as if explaining their connection.

Her eyes continued to study them but lost her focus when a loud shouting at her back caught her attention. Some kids were fighting over a ball.

"Will excuse me for a minute?" Dani moved away from the group as her interest shifted to the commotion on her back.

Now, one young girl started crying then a young boy also followed suit. She walked closer, kneeling before the girl who had her doll in one hand while the other was busy wiping the tears on her face.

"What is going on? Why are you crying?" She asked, gently pulling the girl near her.

The young girl did not respond right away but continued to cry, pointing to the young boy, who was also sobbing on her other side.

"Are you fighting because of the ball?" She concluded. Then, she moved to the other boy, asking him the same thing. The boy had the ball securely in his hands while he had cried his heart out.

"Now, now. Stop crying." She whispered soothing words to the two, running her hands on the young girl's hair, hoping to calm her down. She inspected both children for injuries. Thankfully, there were none.

"What is your name?" She asked the boy who was the first to stop crying. She offered him a tissue that she took out of her purse and allowed him to wipe it on his face.

She took out another one and wiped the girl's face as she also tried to calm down. She could now see that the young one was pretty, removing the hairs sticking on her wet, teary face.

"Aira." The young girl answered in between her sobs.

Then, she turned to the boy, asking the same question. "Aries." He answered her, his voice almost back to normal.

She finally could see the resemblance between the two. She concluded that they might be twins or siblings at the most. Now, she found them adorable as she stood in between them.

"Who wants to tell me what happened?" She asked the two, then the boy raised his hand first, followed by her sister. "Ok. You first." She pointed to the boy. "Were you fighting?"

"No, it was an accident." The boy said in his tiny voice, explaining to her the incident. "I was running when she accidentally stood in front of me. Then we bumped into each other."

"Was anyone hurt?" She asked the two, shifting her attention from one to the other. The two nodded. They started pointing at their heads, but she did not see any bruises.

She concluded that it might be the shock of the experience more than the pain that made them cry. But from her point of view, the two kids seemed to be ok.

"I think I might have a good remedy for that." She pointed to both of their heads. "Will you stop crying and wait for me here while I get it?" She asked the twins.

"I don't want any injections. That hurt." The boy quickly replied, afraid that she might give him the shots.

"I don't want to drink that disgusting medicine." The girl also chorused her brother.

She could not blame them because she also did not like those things. Fortunately, it was not the medicine she had in mind. "I think you will like this one." She assured them before moving away from them to make a quick run.

By the time she got back, she had found her husband sitting with the twins. They had moved closer to the fountain, sitting on the bench. With Aira sitting on his lap with her doll and Aries listening to him attentively.

She could not help but admire the scene, imagining her husband with their two kids while she bought them some delicious treat. The kids looked so entranced with him as they listened to him attentively.

"Hey! I am back." She greeted the kids and planted a sweet kiss on his lips. It certainly felt like they were one big happy family as she handed a lollipop to each one, thanking her with a hug.

Their smiles were enough to light up their faces. All traces of their cries disappeared as they quickly removed the cover of the sweet treat.

But what caught her eyes more was how they looked at her husband with adoration in their young eyes. She believed that her husband was right. They were ready to be a parent.

Chapter 676: The best party ever

"Hi! I am Jacky." She quickly introduced herself when she found Marcus talking with the architect and Alex.

She wondered where Dani was until she turned around and found her talking to some kids. She realized she had not greeted her yet since she was too busy with the preparations.

But she also wanted to introduce herself to this new person that seemed to be a nice person. She just loved making friends, especially if she was a friend of her friends.

"Hi, I am Haley." The other woman accepted her offered hand and shook it. "I just love what you with the place." Haley continued, praising her for what she had done with the place.

"If you will excuse me, but I think my wife needs my help." Alex nodded to them, stepping away and going in the kids' direction.

"Nothing compared to what you planned to do with this place," Jacky commented, remembering seeing the picture of the house that would stand in the still unfinished structure.

So far, the area still seemed unappealing, but from what she saw earlier, a massive structure would rise in the center of this area, a wonderful house that would serve as a home for many homeless kids who were abandoned or orphaned by their parents.

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"This is more of Dani's idea." Haley denied being the heart of this project. If not for Dani, this would never have materialized.

"But with your help, it becomes not just a dream but a reality," Jacky stated, thinking of the many kids just like her and her brother, Andy, who would benefit from this project.

She was fascinated when she first heard about this project from her friend, Dani. She immediately volunteered to help out, thinking that it was her chance to get back to the community.

At the same time, it was her opportunity to help her friend. After all the many things her friend had done for her, she could finally repay her through this.

"Just accept my thanks and my friendship." Jacky hugged her, not waiting for her to decline her offer. For her, a friend of Dani was also her friend.

"I am sure you have met my boyfriend, Marcus." She did notice her boyfriend talking to her earlier, but she was too busy to join them.

"Yes, we already met." This time, Marcus answered her, finally breaking his silence as he stood beside her. "Actually..."

But before he could finish his statement, Haley interrupted him.

"We were friends back in college. But had lost touch until now." Haley explained, making her smile at the thought of what a small world they had.

"I am glad that the two of you have finally reconnected. I am sure you have had many things to talk about since the last time you saw each other." Jacky enthusiastically said, simply loving reunions.

Then, her phone rang again, and when she picked it up, another issue was ongoing. She knew she had to take care of it before it became a full-blown problem.

"Will you excuse me again, but something is wrong with the cake?" She planted a quick kiss on Marcus' cheek before stepping away from him, leaving the two to continue their conversation.

But as she moved away, she sensed that something was off with the two of them. Her spider's senses were usually correct, making her think they might be hiding something.

But she was not judging since she also had many skeletons in her closet. She just hoped that Marcus would not opt to hide things from her. She wished he would come to trust her enough to tell her everything about him.

While she was walking to the delivery trucks, she bumped into Dani, who was looking for a treat. "Happy birthday, Dani." She hugged and kissed her friend before showing her where she kept her stashes.

Then, she excused herself again to deal with the issues with the cakes. She moved away from her friend, walking in opposite directions, but she still turned to look back at Marcus and her new friend.

It would seem that they were back in some deep conversation which only strengthened her suspicion of a secret they were hiding. But again, she was not judging.

"I hope you have enough cakes for all the kids attending this party." She told the baker who had accepted her orders. It seemed that there was a miscommunication on their side, but they were quickly remedying the problem.

"I don't want anything to mess up this party." She told all the crews who stood in front of her. "They might be kids, but they are the most special guests here."

She expected more from the people she had hired since they were the best in the catering business, but they seemed to fail to realize that even if they were not serving the elites of the elites, they still needed to give their best service ever.

These young ones were the boss today, so they better provide them the world-class service they all deserved. Or else they would hear terrible feedbacks from her that would ruin them for their next gigs.

"Yes, Mam." The head waiter finally acknowledged her words, finding her a little intimidating. Well, they should be because she was not taking crap from them.

"Fix the issues and be ready to serve the food on time." Luckily, there was still time because the program had not yet started.

There were still several things she had to do before this party started and many more to do before it ended. But she would do everything she could for Dani and those kids.

She walked away from the food crew, looking for the master of ceremonies. She believed it was about time to start the program according to their timetable.

"Should we introduce everyone?" She told the host, who was already waiting for her at the foot of the stage.

She signaled the kids' chaperones to gather them around and let them settle on their seats. Then, she walked over to her friends to usher them to their designated tables.

Marcus and Haley did not wait for her call as they walked toward them, walking alongside, barely looking at each other. But she dismissed the idea, for now, not wanting any distractions from her task.

She believed relationship issues would have to wait. At the moment, her priorities were to make all the celebrants have the best party ever.

Chapter 677: Parenting

The groundbreaking ceremony began as the host introduced the special guests, helping them with the foundation coming from the government and the private sectors.

Then, the kids were introduced together with the people behind the scenes. The ones who had been working hard to make this dream come true.

"Finally, we have our birthday celebrant who visualizes this dream. Let us welcome our very own Princess Daniella Hamilton Blackstone." The host clapped his hand, pointing to her.

Standing on the stage with her husband and friends, she moved toward the podium set up for her speech. It was necessary to welcome all their guests, thanking the different sectors for their sponsorships.

But most importantly, her eyes focused on the kids that represented the kids that would benefit from this project. Her heart went to them because they were deprived of a life that every child should be entitled to have.

“Thank you...” Dani started relating the rehearsed speech she had prepared for this celebration. Then, her eyes shifted to the people who had made all of this possible.

Starting with her friends, Jacky and Marcus, for making the event great, then Haley, who had created a magnificent plan for the project.

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“To my husband, for supporting me wholeheartedly with my plans and donating this area to my cause.” Continuing with her speech. “Thank you, Alex.” Blowing a kiss in his direction.

With eyes slightly teary, she turned around to the arrival of new guests, who were moving to the front seat. Her father patted Jeremy’s head as he sat beside the boy. Then, her mother sat beside the twins on her other side, smiling at them.

Her heart swelled at the beautiful sight before her. She had to remember to thank Jacky for the insight. Again, her eyes scanned the room, appreciating the support of all the people around her.

“I always believe that every kid has the potential to be anything each wishes to be, but without care, love, and the chance to achieve their dreams, we deprive them of a future.” She returned to her speech, roaming her eyes to the crowd.

Silence enveloped the gathered crowd around her. Even the children seemed to be behaving at the moment as everyone seemed to listen.

“I know that what I started doesn’t guarantee the future of these kids.” Pointing to the children sitting in the front seat. “But, I wish only to start by giving them a safe place to start with their new life.”

A round of applause reverberated in the open area where the ceremonies took place, standing at the top of the makeshift stage, smiling at her guests.

She did not want to prolong her speech to avoid boring the kids. “Let me just thank you all for coming, and I hope all will have a great time with what we prepared.”

Her friends cheered and clapped their hands after she ended her speech, then a few more of their guests also provided some of their thoughts on the project and pledged their support.

“That was a great speech, and happy birthday, Princess.” Her father moved toward her, giving her a hug and a kiss. Then, her mother also followed her father with sweet greetings.

"I am surprised to see you both here." Dani did not expect that her parents were also coming to the event.

Then, a tugging on her pants made her look down, finding Aira's cute dainty hands getting her attention. "Excuse me," Dani told her parents. "But have you met Aira and Aries?" Tapping Aira in the head as she showed them to her parents.

"Yes, she had been entertaining me earlier while we watched your speech. She told me that you are very kind, giving her candy." Laura also patted the little girl on the back. "And Aries here was a real sweetheart." Her mom continued.

Smiling at the adorable face gazing at her, she smiled. "What is it?" Kneeling at the tiny child, finally focusing her attention on her need.

Her parents excused themselves, moving along to greet some of their guests also present at the event. They were a handful of their colleagues in the business that had joined in her crusade.

"I want another candy." She uttered in her sweet little voice. "Can you give me another one?"

Her smile was so adorable that she might even give her more than candy if Aira asked her. She had never been good with a child, not because she did not like them.

It was just rare for her to be with young ones except for events like this. The only long interaction she had with young people was with Andy, Jeremy, and on a handful of occasions.

"But you already ate one?" His brother interjected, reprimanding her sister. "I am sorry, but you do not need to give her another." Aries looked at her, gaining her attention.

She also never had the experience of bickering with a sibling. Her mind suddenly brought her back to finding her brother. What if she had known about him when they were young? Would they be just like this two?

"It is not for me." Aira quickly responded, putting her hands on her waist, showing her brother that she was not afraid of him. "It is for my friend."

She did not expect that at a young age, probably around five or six. They were already very thoughtful of their friends. Was she liked that when she was young? She hardly remembered what she was doing when she was their age.

"Oh! Which friend?" Aries asked, his face scrunched up as if not believing her sister.

Then, Aira pointed to the young girl at her brother's back. "Lily." Suddenly, her eyes noticed the boy turned pink at the mention of the girl's name. "My brother had a crush on Lily."

"Is that so?" Dani immediately asked, curious at this little girl who was still standing a few feet away from them.

Aira's face looked like she approved of the two, nodding her head as she kept telling his brother's secrets.

"Aira, I don't like her." Aries abruptly interrupted her little sister, embarrassed at her revelation.

“Hey, that is ok.” Dani refereed the two before it became out of hand. “Having a crush doesn’t necessarily mean love. It is just admiring another for some of her good attributes.”

She meddled with the two, who finally agreed to what she said, nodding their heads as if they completely understood her words. But she was happy that she averted the situation from booming into a fight.

“Come on, let us get some more candies for everyone.” She suggested, loving how the two kids held on to her two hands.

Walking hand and hand, they moved to the tables on the other side of the massive area where the treats covered the entire surface.

She took a basket and asked her partners to help her distribute them to the kids joining them in this celebration. But she made the two promise that they could only have one because they would be eating soon.

If this was what being a parent was all about, maybe she should not be afraid of it. Her mind and heart suddenly yearned to learn more about parenting.

Chapter 678: Safe haven

“What is the deal with you and Haley?” Jacky was not supposed to ask him about that issue, but she still noticed him looking at her from time to time across the lawn.

Besides, her recollection reminded her that he was supposed to say something when Haley interrupted him. She noticed these things and usually bugged her until she had answers.

“On second thought, I do not want to know.” She suddenly changed her mind, believing that it was not her place to ask him about his past when she also had several of them in her closet.

Thankfully, one of the event managers called her for some minor issues that she had to attend to, excusing herself from dealing with Marcus at the moment.

She marched towards the party organizers only to learn that it was nothing serious but resolved immediately. Since she was there, she reminded them to serve the food after the breaking ceremony, which would soon ensue.

Having no other options, she walked toward a group of people she needed to talk to, including the project manager. “Haley, can I have a word?”

“Sure,” Haley responded, excusing herself from the crew building the project and walking with her. “What is it?” The architect asked her.

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“We are going about to do the breaking ceremony. Is everything in order?” Her nerves were suddenly on edge, but there was no reason for her to be nervous.

Haley seemed to be a friendly person. Besides, Dani would not be friends with her if she was not. But, she suddenly felt intimidated by her.

She wondered if it had something to do with her previous relationship with Marcus or whatever they had in the past. She could not help thinking if she was another fling of Marcus that he dumped after he had lost his interest.

“Yes, I already arranged everything. All we need is your signal.” Haley smiled at her, which seemed so authentic that she felt guilty for feeling this way against her.

She suddenly realized that she was jealous for no apparent reason other than she might have had a previous relationship with her current boyfriend.

It was suddenly ridiculous to blame the woman she was trying to befriend with such notions for a past that happened long before she and Marcus were together.

“Ok. I guess I will check on one more thing before we should start with the ceremony.” Jacky instructed Haley as she was about to move away from her.

Then, a hand stopped her from making more steps, preventing her from living. It held her arms, not tightly, but enough to make her look back.

“I am sorry, but about earlier,” Haley said, staring at her as she kept her grip on her arms.

Jacky knew she was about to say something about Marcus, but her timing was just off today as another voice shouted her name, calling her attention.

Haley immediately released her hand and stayed quiet about whatever she was about to tell her. She did not plan to stop her. She wanted to know what was going on with the two, but it had to wait till later.

“Jacky.” Dani walked towards them with two little kids hanging on both sides of her hands. “Finally, you meet my friend, Haley.” She greeted them both again and introduced the two kids to her.

“I promised them cakes. Can we see them?” Dani said, winking at her friend before smiling at the young ones. “They will only look at them.” She reiterated to the two kids who were clapping their hands excitedly. Oblivious to what was going on with her.

But she doubted Dani would know anything about Marcus and Haley. If she did, she would have already told her about it. Dani would never keep a secret from her.

“Sure, come on, follow me.” She instructed, waving her hands to the two cute kids with them. “I will just tell you when it is time.” Turning to Haley before moving away from her, slightly disappointed that she missed her explanation. She admitted that she was very curious about the two of them, but she bore no hard feelings against them.

However, she still had time to talk to her later. The day was far from being over. She just hoped that she would have an opportunity again. But if not, she would wait for Marcus’ explanation instead.

“What do you think of Haley and what she plans to do with the house?” Dani asked her when they were at a considerable distance.

She thought of her question, and she would admit, she truly wanted to be friends with her. If it had not been what she saw earlier, she would not be feeling uncomfortable around Haley.

“She seems great, and I like her.” She could not deny that.

She grabbed the boy’s hand and played with him. Later on, he was swinging in her and Dani’s arms as they walked toward the area where the cake was waiting for them.

“Oh! Look, Aira.” Aries extended his hand in front of them, letting go of their hands to point to her sister the big cake.

When her sister also let go of their hands, he grabbed her, and they both ran toward the area containing the different cakes. Their eyes lit up upon seeing the assorted colorful designs of cakes fill the long table.

“Wow! They look so beautiful.” Aira gasped in delight, checking each one of them.

“Yeah, look at this one. It has my favorite hero.” Pointing to the cake with an action figurine.

“I hope this is mine.” Aira gazed at the one with a doll on it.

“Do you like the cakes?” Dani asked as she moved toward the two.

“Yes, they are all wonderful,” Aira answered her with a smile that had a gap between her teeth. “What about that big one? Who owns that?” She pointed to the two tiers of cake in the middle.

“It is for our friend Dani here. It is her birthday too.” Jacky announced to the two, making them both shout to greet her.

“Now that you have seen our cakes. Would you join the others and convince them that they should behave and eat plenty so we can feast on this later.” Dani asked the two, who nodded their heads forcefully to indicate that they would do what she asked.

“Ok. Go now and play with your friends.” Jacky asked the two, and they sped, running back to the other kids who were now busy playing on the carousels and other rides set up for them.

“Did you know that Marcus and Haley knew each other? What a small world?” Dani finally asked Jacky about what she had discovered earlier.

“Yeah, it is a small world. I just knew about it just moments ago.” She admitted it to her friend but appeared that it was not a big deal. This event was a special occasion for her friend, and she had no plans to bring the drama to it.

“Anyway, are we ready to get this party started?” Dani asked her. She was glad that she managed to act cool about this.

Anyway, she had things to do, and thinking about her boyfriend was not her priority. Her eyes wandered around the place and saw her brother making new friends.

She hoped that they could help many more kids so they would not have to go through what she, her brother, and probably half of the kids had experienced in the past.

She wanted them to have a better future than to live on the street, with hardly any food to eat and afraid of what the night would bring. This time, many would have a safe haven that would care for them.

Chapter 679: A good samaritan

Boom!

Pop!

Bang!

A series of what seemed to be mild explosions resonated around the vicinity, causing a slight panic among the crowd. Many would have run, but the organizers quickly tried to calm everybody down.

Alex immediately pulled her to his side and protected her with his body. While the rest also scooted down or took cover under the tables or chairs. Many guests wore confusion, fear, and anxiety on their faces.

“Are you ok?” Alex immediately asked, checking her for any injuries. It was probably his instinct working, fretting over her safety.

Her hands trembled while her heart almost skipped a beat from the terrifying experience. But she began to relax after seeing that everyone was ok.

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“Yes, I am good.” Dani immediately responded, smiling at him for reassurance. “What about you?” Turning her attention to him, worried about his condition.

The loud noise also quickly disappeared, making everybody wonder what it was. Then, a loud voice called out from somewhere in the back where the delivery vans were parked.

A few seconds later, the host was back on stage, announcing on the microphone that it was nothing but some balloons popping backstage.

“We are sorry for the inconvenience. It was just an accident.” The host continued, trying to calm the people around the lawn area.

She could see that many had their smiles back on their faces while still clutching their chests. However, panic had toned down after realizing that there was no threat.

Kids were back to running around as if nothing had happened. Only proved that children were more resilient than adults who were still slightly shaken by the unusual accident.

“That was a great way to wake everybody up after the last speech.” Her father laughed, unfazed by the incident. According to him, it would take a louder blast, compared to that, for him to be scared.

The last speech by one of the guests was a bit boring that almost made the kids sleep from their seats. Luckily, they had candies to hyper them up.

“Dad, that is not a nice thing to say.” Dani patted her father gently, sashing him to silence. Others might hear him.

The host cut their conversation, calling everybody’s attention, directing them to proceed to the other side of the construction site for the groundbreaking ceremony.

"That explosion was the only highlight of his speech." His dad continued, not caring if someone else heard him, causing Alex and her mom to laugh at his statement.

Dani could not help it, so she ended up laughing too. As they say, if you could not beat them, join them. It was kind of true anyway.

"Come on. It is my wife's time to shine." Alex pulled her toward the next activity. Soon, all of them, including the guests, gathered around the construction area for the culmination of her dreams.

After the ceremony and some picture taking, they gathered again on the front lawn for other activities, another main event. Alex guided her to a long table where she saw the cake baked for her.

It was indeed a lovely cake, but she was more excited to see the kids, around thirty of various ages, smiling with awe displayed on their faces as they stared at the cakes before them.

"I hope I did a good job throwing this party for you," Alex whispered behind her as she aligned herself at the center with the other kids, ready to blow the candles in their cakes.

The twins stood beside her, excited to see the cakes they wished were theirs. Jacky made sure to grant their wishes even before they could even blow the candle.

"Ok. Let us sing all of our celebrants a happy birthday song and allow them to make their wishes come true." The host announced on his microphone.

"But it is not our birthday," Aries said, slightly complaining while standing at her side, scratching his nape as if he could not figure out why he had a cake.

"Because we did not have a cake on our birthday." Aira finally answered his brother, explaining why they had to blow the cake.

Then, the place echoed with voices singing them the happy song. The kids started clapping, so she also clapped with them. She had never experienced a birthday like this before. Not with her family and friends with her to join her on this momentous occasion.

After the song ended, the host asked them to blow out the candles, but after making their wishes. She wondered what else she could wish for when everything she wanted was standing just a few feet away from her.

Then, a thought came to her mind. There was still something that she had been dreaming of lately. She would be the happiest person alive if that would become true.

"Come on. Kids. Blow your candles." Aira and Aries deeply breathed and exhaled it forcefully on top of their cakes, hoping to extinguish the fire on the tip of the candle.

Aries accomplished it on his first try, but Aira had to repeat it several times before she could put the fire away. "Ms. Dani, you still have not blown your cake?" Aries pointed out, patting her on her hands.

"Don't forget to wish, Ms. Dani." Aira also added.

Now that she knew what to wish. She closed her eyes and mumbled something in her mind. Then, once she opened them again, she quickly blew the candle, making the kids shriek in delight.

“What did you wish for?” The boy asked, but her sister slapped him on his back.

“You don’t tell anybody about your wish, or it will not come true.” She told her brother. Then, she tilted her cute face to her, waiting for her acknowledgment.

“Yes, you have to wait for it to come true before you can tell a soul about it.” Dani looked at Aries first before Aira, who nodded in approval.

“Then, I will not tell you. I want my wish to come true.” Aries said to his sister.

She figured that maybe the two never kept secrets from each other. She heard that twins had that impossible bond that many did not understand.

“Come on. I think it is time to eat the cakes.” Jacky interrupted their little conversation, helping her to distribute the cake to their guests.

“I love it.” She answered Alex, who looked at her, puzzled by her declaration. “I love my surprise party.” She elaborated, making Alex smile.

“I am glad.” Alex wrapped her up in his arms while she took a fork full of the cake and placed it on his lips.

With his mouth wide open, he devoured the cake with gusto. But he also returned the favor, both ending up with cakes on the sides of their mouths.

As she was wiping her lips, a voice greeted her, wishing her a happy birthday. She turned around at the familiar voice, finding one of her guests late for the party.

“Gerald, I am happy that you made it. I believe there are still cakes serving around.” She offered, always the gracious host. “Let me get one for you.”

Fortunately, a waiter passed in their direction and gave him a piece as they talked about the party and the foundation. “You are doing a great job here,” Gerald commented, pledging his help to the project.

As part of his cover-up, many foundations had known him as a philanthropies for some charitable programs. He promoted awareness and donated for the good of the community. It did not hurt to be known as a good samaritan.

Chapter 680: But was he?

“Jacky, wait up.” She heard his voice. Instead of stopping, her steps quickened, moving her to the other path. Honestly, she had been avoiding him since their last encounter.

She was also avoiding being alone with Haley. So far, it had been working since she was busy with all the events. But now that the ceremonies were almost over, it would seem that she was finding it hard to make any more excuses.

“Jacky. I said stop.” Marcus grabbed her arms, effectively slowing her down until she had no choice but to stop.

With no choice, she turned around, facing her boyfriend, who did not seem to get her point. She was not in the mood to deal with him yet.

“What?” Jacky placed her hands across her chest, tapping her feet as she waited impatiently for his answer.

She was not mad at him. She had no idea how to deal with the situation yet since she still had a few more things to do for Dani’s party. Afterward, she was sure to talk to him about Haley all he wanted.

“Can we talk?” He rubbed the back of his neck with his palm as if his body was stressed out.

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She could sense that what he was about to tell him was something important. He usually never became tongue-tied about any issues, like how he was acting now.

“We can, but can we do it later?” She tapped her phone that started ringing, talking about being saved by the bell.

She quickly placed the phone on her ears, pretending to talk to the person on the other line, but her mind was still with him, thinking of his face as she moved away.

Anyway, she had to prepare for the inevitable because she could not keep dodging him or Haley, who seemed determined to talk to her alone.

“Thank you guys for all your hard work.” She faced the crew who had worked hard to make this event successful.

There might have been some mishaps, but they still managed to push through and deliver a good service. They had satisfied what was needed. They deserved praise for it at the end of the day.

Then, she moved on to the closing ceremony, the final stage of ending a successful party. She saw that Dani was busy entertaining some guests and her family.

The rest of the guests formed groups, probably discussing businesses or social gossip. Who knew that they also were gossipmongers.

“Hey, are you tired?” She found a few kids slumped on their chairs, nodding their heads, seemingly running out of steam. What did she expect after they had been running for hours around the playground?

Her mind could only conclude one thing, napped time. Therefore, she had to wrap up this event soon before those cute kids wind up sleeping on the grassy lawn.

“Dani, I think it is time for the closing remarks,” Jacky whispered to her friend’s ears, avoiding disrupting her conversation with the guests.

After excusing herself, Dani went along with Jacky, who had been acting strange. But there was no time to dwell on it as they had a program to finish. She did notice the tired faces among the crowd.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I again would like to give the floor to our birthday girl, Ms. Dani.” The host announced, gathering everyone’s attention. Even the kids seemed to be slightly alert, hearing her name.

"Thanks again for joining me in this great endeavor that I started. I would not have reached this point without all your support." She began her speech, appreciating everyone who had devoted their time, energy, power, and money to this project.

She also thanked the cute, lively kids who had joined her on her birthday. It had been one of the most memorable celebrations she had ever experienced.

Afterward, she thought that the master of ceremony would finally conclude the program, but he did something else. "Can I ask Prince Alex to join us on the stage?" Once again, she was left speechless. What now?

"What is this?" She mumbled to her husband, who only shrugged his shoulder, but the glimmer in his eyes told her that he knew something but was not saying anything.

"Can I also ask on the stage, Mr. Marcus on the stage?" Then, the host moved to the side, waiting for the last person he called.

Everybody was looking, expecting something to happen but had no idea what. Even Jacky was surprised by the sudden change in her program, thinking that what was happening was never part of the plan.

"Well, Mr. Marcus had begged me to let him on the stage. Being a very gracious host. Of course, I allowed the poor man some time in the limelight." The host began telling the crowd, which earned him a few cheers and some laughs.

On the other hand, Marcus was slightly embarrassed, but as they said, the show must go on as he stood in front of everyone, braving what he had planned to do.

"But of course, I had to ask the person paying me to host this job his permission. Thankfully, he turned out to be this man's best friend." Pointing again to Marcus. "Anyway, thanks, Prince Alex. Your support means everything to your friend's dream."

Again, the crowd laughed at the host's comical words, but she could see Marcus' discomfort as he stood on the stage.

"Give the man warm applause." The host clapped his hand, handing the microphone to Marcus and giving him the floor.

She watched him a few feet away, noticing his slightly trembling hands and sweats on his temples. In truth, she had not seen Marcus sweat in nervousness before, what was manifesting before her. She could only wonder why.

The crowd indulged the host and started clapping their hands loudly, still clueless about what Marcus would be doing on the stage.

"I think all of you might be wondering what I am doing here, taking your most precious time." Marcus started, slightly blinking to think of the line he had rehearsed in his head for a long time.

Some of their friends cheered for him, probably thinking he might sing, but Marcus was tone-deaf. Then, some just nodded their heads, wondering, just like her.

“Come on, boy. You can do it.” Her father shouted among the crowd, unable to contain the excitement. He seemed to know something too, she thought.

“I am getting there, Ethan,” Marcus replied to one of his mentors and a father to him. Dani was overwhelmed with happiness at the interaction.

Her father nodded at her friend as if he was giving him a blessing, but for what. Anyway, she turned her attention to her friend, who sat at a table just watching also in wonder. She was as clueless as she was.

“I asked you all here, especially you, my bestfriend, Alex, and your lovely wife, Dani, to be my witness.” Marcus continued with his speech, looking at her and her husband.

Dani could not help but be happy in the developing scene. She believed that she might know what was happening, but she did not want to preempt it by meddling in it.

She would wait and watch Marcus play this one out. If her suspicions were correct, maybe her birthday had not seen the best surprise yet.

But was he?