

## Royal Contract 711

### Chapter 711: Fly away from the nest

A gathering was ongoing at the Hamilton mansion as Ethan received his special guests. Learning that the Royal couple had arrived, Laura immediately prepared a feast for their friends.

Ethan admired the beautiful preparations that his wife had produced in a short time. Laura truly knew how to work her magic.

"I am glad that you were able to visit us." Ethan showed her guests to the library, where he would initially entertain them as Laura made her final touches on the food preparations.

As they entered his private study, he showed them some of his latest collections that had occupied most of his time lately.

"You know that we would have come sooner for Dani's birthday, but certain problems did not permit us to leave until now." Duke Frederick explained to him as they all settled on the long cushion in the middle, surrounded by the old collections of books and artifacts that made up the remaining room.

"I guess I should envy you for that." Ethan jokingly said. "It is better than to sit around in this house without anything to worry about." He patted his pants as if removing an invisible lint in its fiber.

He had been bored out of his skull because there was nothing much he had to do each day. As much as he would like to meddle with the company, Alex was doing superbly that the company did not need his expertise anymore.

.....

Then, a server entered the room, bringing them a fresh hot pot of tea and some lemon cakes. The server placed the tray in the center of the table and offered to pour them each a cup.

He would prefer a glass of brandy, but he would not hear the end from his loving and caring wife if he insisted on it. He accepted a cup but already knew he would not enjoy the drink.

"I am afraid I might end up like you soon enough. After all, we are not getting any younger." Fred responded, shaking his head as if resigning to his fate.

He guessed that his age would not be so different from his guests. But he did wonder where he was leaving his company since Alex was already handling his company.

However, with Alex's capability, he could surely handle adding his father's business to his plate. He would not be surprised if both of their company merged again. They had already done it before on a small scale. It would not be so different in a larger arena.

"Soon, our kids would take over our responsibilities, and we would have not much use to them anymore." Ethan also agreed, taking the cup of tea and placing it on his lips.

But the tea had barely touched his lips when he pulled it out of his face, and the smell alone made him cringe. He knew he would not like it as he pretended to take a sip but quickly placed it down on the table.

"Precisely." Fred took his tea and drank it with satisfaction, almost gulping half of the content of his cup before letting it go.

He guessed they liked tea where they came from, unlike him, who would prefer coffee and alcohol as his daily beverage. Anyway, he offered them the cakes as he took a piece for himself. At least this was not yet forbidden, and he loved his sweets.

"You kept telling yourselves that you are old but do not include me on that." Katherine interrupted them, patting her elegantly styled hair and sitting upright, emphasizing that she was still beautiful and looking young despite their age.

"Me, too." Laura walked inside the room, beautiful as ever.

She was just like Katherine. Laura also never allowed her age to dampen her spirit. She would do everything to look young but was more likely to feel young, not physically but emotionally.

She walked gracefully towards him, then stopped beside him, sitting by his side. Then, her eyes focused on the cup of tea he barely touched, looking at him warningly.

She poured another cup and joined the conversation, drinking her tea just like their guests. But as for him, he preferred to admire the expensive china sets than consume the actual content.

"Speaking of our children taking over. We came here today because we also have something to discuss with you." The duke spoke up, garnering their attention.

He watched the duke place his tea on the table and then looked up to his wife before continuing. "We know this is a decision that our children should make. But we want to give you a heads up because it will also affect you."

He stared at his friend, wondering what he was talking about since Alex and Dani had not mentioned anything to him when they had last seen each other.

Or maybe something was happening to the young couple, but recent events had consumed most of his time. He barely noticed what was happening to his family.

"You are aware that Alex is still considered the next heir to take the throne of our kingdom," Fred stated as if he was beating around the bush.

"Yes," Ethan answered, but in a way, already guessing what the duke wanted to say. "But Alex had declined that position a long time ago."

He could tell that the possible purpose of their visit was to convince their son to take on the title and rule their land. If that happened, Alex and his daughter would have to return to their country.

That would mean Alex would have to leave his company. But more than that, Dani would leave their city to live hundreds of miles away from them.

"Until now, he is still the best candidate, and the Council still would like him to sit as our King," Fred answered him as if that was the only option they had.

But he could not blame the duke. Alex was a true leader who was capable of making things happen. His son-in-law was a man of action and had many traits that would qualify him to lead any company or even a country to greatness.

"But that would mean that they would have to return and live in your country for the duration of his reign if Alex decided to accept it." Laura now expressed her concern and what was already on his mind.

He did not mind losing Alex from his company. He could manage it again or find someone else to take over. The company could easily survive without both of them.

"If Alex accepts his rightful place, that would be the case." Katherine was the one to answer this time. "But that would still be up to our children. Whatever they would decide, we would gladly accept."

"I guess it would be out of our hands." He knew he could not stop it if that would be their decision.

However, being away from his daughter was a loss that he and his wife never expected. His daughter was everything to him and especially to his wife.

But he knew that they could not keep her forever. He guessed it was time for their daughter to spread her wings and fly away from the nest.

Chapter 712: A successful man

He took the folded paper out of his pocket. Since Stockholm gave it to him, he had never bothered to open it. Laura's words still lingered in his mind. Quickly he returned the paper into his pocket without looking at it.

Should he believe her? Did Ethan wish to meet him? Was it his mother and father's fault that he never met his biological father? If all this was true, how did he feel about it?

He stared at the paper in his hand. Then looked up to the large gate just across from where he had parked his car. Inside those iron gates was the home of his father.

"I am here to attend the celebration." Finally, he drove his car to the gates and stopped for inspection by the security personnel guarding the entrance.

"This is a family affair. Do you have an invitation?" The man asked him, raising his brows at him while tapping on his list, waiting for his response.

He would also be skeptical if he would stand in his shoes since it was his first time stepping into the Hamilton State. Besides, nobody knew yet about his identity. He was still not a member of this family. At least not officially yet.

"Of course I have." He confidently responded, not planning to get intimidated by this man. "Mrs. Laura Hamilton had personally invited me to come." He looked up at the guard and smiled. "I think you should look up my name in the list. Gerald Brown."

.....

He took out his identification card, giving it to the man for confirmation. He waited as he scanned his list for his name, but it did not take long since he believed it was a short one.

He seemed to check his face before nodding his head, handing the card back in his hand. "You can proceed inside the main entrance. A valet would take care of your car." The guard gave him specific instructions.

It would seem that Laura was serious about Ethan wanting to see him again. But he was curious why he would invite him to this gathering. It was no ordinary party but a family affair.

As he walked in the hallway, ushered by the butler to the garden where the party was ongoing, he kept thinking of what he would do to these people. But instead of proceeding outside, the butler asked him to follow him to another room.

Could he accept them as his family now, or should he keep seeking revenge against the people who had made his life miserable?

But who was truly responsible for his misery? Isn't his father more to blame? His father, who had made him believe all his lies?

"Sir, you can proceed inside and wait for Sir Ethan." The butler opened the door and gestured for him to enter the private sitting room.

Then, he offered him a glass of scotch as he waited in the middle of the room. He refused to sit down and instead roamed around the room, letting his eyes wander around.

He saw several famous paintings that would be worth millions, a symbol of his father's wealth. But he was not interested in any of that because he was wealthy, too. He inherited all of his father's wealth too. At least his father, who raised him.

Then, his eyes focused on the other pictures that littered the place. It was photos of Dani and her parents. From the different stages of her growing up years.

She was the greatest treasure of the great Ethan Hamilton based on everything he had read in articles and the news. The only heiress of his empire.

He clenched his fist, thinking of what his life would have been if Ethan pursued to look for him. What would his life be if he grew up with this family instead of his?

He loved his mother with all his heart. But she left him to his father's mercy. The father he came to know but who never cared about him. All he did was plant all those lies and make him hate this family.

"Gerald, I am glad to see you." His father's voice made him aware that he had finally come to see him. "I am happy that you obliged my request to join us."

He turned around and saw the man who had seen him the other time with a genuine smile fixed on his lips. His eyes were blazing with happiness compared to the guilt he had seen before.

"What do you think you are doing asking me to attend your family affair? What kind of stunt is this?" Gerald still was skeptical about what this man was planning.

Growing up with a father like Joaquin, trust was not a word he would usually use when dealing with people. No matter who they were. Not even this man who claimed to be his father.

"This is not a stunt." Ethan walked further into the room, stopping a few feet away from where he stood. "I take it that you came today because you finally accepted that you are my son." That was his conclusion.

But was he correct? Did he finally accept that fact? Maybe because until now, he had not checked the test result, and here he was, standing in front of the man who gave him life.

"So, what if I did? Would it change anything between us?" He challenged the patriarchal leader of this family. "What do you have to offer that would change my life if I accept to be part of this family?"

He wanted to laugh if his father would say that he would become one of his heirs because a man like him was already wealthy beyond he could imagine.

He did not need his money or his title to rule this place. He was soon to become King of his kingdom. So, what was the use of being part of this family?

"A family. That is all I can offer you." Ethan said as the smile on his face mildly faded. In exchange, a solemn look overshadowed his face. "Hearing that you are now alone. I can offer you a father who would be there for you."

He wanted to laugh but could not. He was not expecting that as his answer. But before he could continue, another voice joined them in the room.

"I can be your stepmom. I know I can never replace Marietta in your life, but I can fill in the gap missing at the moment." Laura walked into the room, standing beside her husband.

The look they exchanged showed him how much they valued their relationship. How much they supported each other. He wished his parents had been like that.

But his father was too consumed by his anger that he missed the opportunity to love her mother the way she deserved to be loved.

He was not about to let these people think they could easily fool him, believing he was desperate to be part of this family.

"What makes you think that I need you in my life? I am a grown-ass man who could always provide for myself and care for all my needs. I am a successful man capable of doing great things." Standing upright in front of the couple.

Chapter 713: It was a match

She had been looking for her parents because she and Alex had decided to consult them about their current situation. As a family, she did not want to exclude them in giving them their opinion on the matter.

They had already heard what Alex's parents thought of the issue. She wished to know what her parents would have to say, too.

She learned that they went into the private room with another guest. She wondered who could be the new guest and what they would be discussing in privacy.

With Alex following behind, they proceeded into the room, entering without waiting for an invitation. She was surprised to see who her parents were entertaining inside the room.

“Because that is what being part of this family is all about. Whether you want it, accept it, or not, you will always be a part of this family.” Laura spoke up, looking at the guest in the room, unaware that she had walked in and heard what she said.

She was confused by her mother’s word, suddenly turning to her husband, who she believed also heard the statement. But Alex seemed to be as clueless as she was about the current situation.

Why would her mother talk to her boss as if he was part of the family? Why was he here in the first place talking to her parents? That did not make any sense at all.

.....

“What is going on in here?” Finally, unable to keep silent anymore as she moved further inside the room, looking from her parents to her boss.

Her father was the first to look at her, but he did not speak up yet, only looked at her first. Then, her eyes scanned her mother’s face, who only smiled at her and moved towards her side.

“Shall we all sit down before we continue this discussion?” Laura intertwined her hand with hers as her mother led her to the sofa.

As they moved, the other men in the room also followed them and sat on the available space.

She kept looking at the faces of the people around her, trying to figure out what was going on. But in a way, she had a sense of what might be happening. Somehow, she put the missing pieces in the puzzles in her mind.

“I think we should let Ethan explain before jumping to any conclusion.” Alex interrupted her thoughts, making her look at him.

Her hands entwined with his, looking for support from the thoughts growing in her mind. She believed that she might have an idea of what might be going on, but her husband was correct. She should let her parents tell the story.

“Are you sure about this?” Gerald mumbled to Ethan, but it was loud enough to reach her ears. It was like they had a secret, and she was not on it.

Her father looked at Gerald as if he was reading him, and then his gaze shifted to her mother as if asking for guidance. Finally, his eyes landed on hers.

She also noticed that her mother’s hand squeezed his hand, which rested on his lap. It looked like her mother was giving him some moral support.

“I want to introduce you to your older brother.” Ethan looked at her, and without any more preamble, he told her their secret.

He looked at her father. Surprise or shock must have registered on her face because that was what she felt.

Confusion.

She was unsure if she heard his father correctly. Did his father tell her that Gerald was his older brother? His missing brother? But that was impossible. Gerald was a well-respected member of the community. Her boss.

He could not possibly be the boss of the underground syndicate. He was her friend. He could not be involved with what Nick did to her. He could not have masterminded her abduction.

There were just too many things that did not fit the story. Many pieces did not make sense. But from the look that Ethan and the rest of the people around her were giving, it would seem she heard him right.

"Gerald is my brother." She mumbled, not a question but a mere statement as if finally accepting the fact but still needed some time to register its meaning.

He felt hands move around her back, and arms enveloped her. She turned around on her right, finding Alex supporting her. He might have noticed her reaction to the news.

"Yes, he is." Her mother was the one who answered her next. The three seemed to know about this but forgot to inform her. Thankfully, Alex seemed to be just like her, unaware. Or else she would be left out.

"Why did you not tell me?" She questioned her parents, looking from her father to her mother. She still could feel Alex attempting to calm her down, but she was trying hard to be, not wanting to keep blaming her parents for their past mistakes.

"Because I still needed to know if it was all true." Gerald finally broke his silence and looked at her. He inserted his hand into his pocket and pulled out a folded paper. "I have our test result."

Gerald raised the paper slightly in front of them all before throwing it in her direction.

"What is this?" She asked, looking at the paper on the table, just a few feet out of her reach. She was not sure why he was giving it to her.

"I took a sample of your saliva and had our DNA tested. If it would match, then we are truly blood-related." Gerald nodded to the paper, daring her to look at the content.

She was not aware that he had done it. When did he take her saliva sample? She could not think of a time that he might have the opportunity to do so. But then, she remembered the incident that he was in her office recently. Maybe he took it then.

She took the paper, unsure if she should be the one to open it. But who else would do it? Deciding she did not want to prolong the agony of everyone, she opened it and read the content.

"I guess. It was a match."

Chapter 714: The ups and downs

The DNA test from his blood and the sample he took from Dani finally confirmed that they were a match. There was no more denying the fact. It was conclusive.

"Then, it is official. I am blood-related to this family." Gerald raised his glass to welcome himself to the Hamilton family, drinking the rest of the content without waiting for the others to toss his welcome. Not that he wanted that.

Still, he could not believe that he was now part of this family. The family he had detested all his life because his father had told him all those lies about the great Ethan Hamilton. In the end, this man turned out to be his real biological father.

"As I said to you before, you are always welcome to be part of this family," Ethan spoke up, speaking for the rest of the family. "Our house is now your home." He looked directly into his son's eyes, hoping that he would see his sincerity.

He knew he could not turn back the time. He already lost the opportunity to see his son grow up to become this fine young man. But he hoped that it was not too late to get to know him at this point in their lives.

"We do not want you to feel like we are forcing you to accept us to be part of your life." This time, it was Laura who spoke to Gerald. "But we want you to know that you have a family willing to stand by you anytime you would need us."

Laura only wanted him to know that she had accepted him into this family wholeheartedly. She never had an ill feeling about him. She believed they were just all victims of the circumstances.

.....

The past had played a cruel game against all of them. Everybody already suffered from the mistakes, and it was enough. It was time to move on.

"Honestly, all of this is simply not easy to take." Gerald finally answered the couple. Then his eyes turned to the other couple who had kept their silence, just listening to their conversation.

"We understand." Ethan finally spoke up again, nodding his head in agreement. He also believed that this could not be easy for him or his daughter, who appeared to be still dazed by this entire revelation.

Alex kept his silence, just holding on to his wife, giving her support. But he could see slight anger in his eyes, knowing what he might be thinking about Gerald.

He could not blame them. Gerald was guilty of harming them, but for him, he was also a victim of what he did to him. No one else deserved the blame for what happened to all of them but him.

"Laura, could you give us some privacy?" Ethan turned to his wife, tapping her hand to get her attention. "Could you assist Alex and Dani back to the other guests?" Directing his request to his wife, who nodded quickly in understanding.

He needed a few minutes of private time to talk to his son alone.

"I hope you would not mind if you escort the two ladies outside." He told Alex, who nodded his affirmation, standing up. "Dani, I will talk to you later." He said, hoping that would be enough in the meantime.



He knew his wife would support his plan, but he could only hope that his daughter would learn to forgive and forget the past and get on board with what he wanted for this family.

"Do what you think would be best for this family," Laura whispered in his ears, giving him enough encouragement to proceed with his idea.

Then, Laura stood up from her seat and waited for the other two in the room to follow her. Dani was a bit hesitant, but she also stood to follow closely behind his mother with Alex by her side.

"So, what is this all about?" Gerald had watched the little ceremony, but he still did not feel like he belonged in this small circle.

He could see a slight agitation in his father's movement. Whatever he was planning to say was making him a little bit nervous. Compared to earlier, he showed a slight hesitation in his following words.

"This has something to do with Dani. I knew you were involved in her kidnapping." His father's eyes watched him as if he was waiting for his reaction, a confirmation.

"I hope whatever happened in the past would remain in the past, and we could all move on." Ethan did not wait for him to answer as if he already knew that truth but was willing to forget all about it.

"You are now part of this family, and if you could not accept me, at least consider her as your sister. Protect her as your own." Ethan suddenly begged from him, even kneeling before him.

Gerald did not expect that. He could not believe that the great Ethan would go down on his knees for his sister's life.

But could he do it?

Was he truly part of this family? Did he want to be?

Many questions still plagued his mind. Not because he had discovered that he shared the same blood with these people, it meant that he would automatically associate himself with them.

"I..." He was about to respond to him when Ethan stopped him.

"Please, let me introduce you to the rest of the family. Let me show you what it would be like to have us as your family." Ethan interrupted him, not allowing him to reject them without giving them a chance.

Looking at Ethan's face, he could see his excitement about his new idea. As if that was the perfect solution to their problem. But he doubted it.

"I don't think that would be a good idea." He finally answered, a bit wary about what Ethan was suggesting.

But still, his curiosity piqued his interest. What would it be like to be part of this family? What was it like to have loving parents who would want to make sure that he was ok? What was it like to have a sister? Someone to share your life with, the ups and downs.

Chapter 715: The wheels never actually stopped turning

Dani looked at the closed door they left behind before proceeding outside where the other guests were waiting. She wondered what else was her father telling her boss or her brother that should require them to leave.

But she trusted her father that he knew what he was doing. Whatever her father decided to do with this matter, she would support him.

"How are you feeling?" Alex looked at his wife. His eyes searched her eyes, but all he could do was speculate until she shared with him what was going through her mind.

He placed his hand on her back, guiding her outside, hoping that his presence would be enough to give her support. He could tell that his wife was still in a slight shock.

"I am a bit overwhelmed by the news. Honestly, I would never have thought that Gerald could be my brother." She looked at her husband, still with that bewildered look plastered on her face.

She finally turned to her mother, mildly tapping her by the shoulder, stopping her from going further, far enough for the other guests to overhear their conversation.

She noticed that her mother had been silent since they left the room. She wanted to know what she was thinking. At the moment, her mind was swirling with different questions that required some answers.

.....

"How long have you known about Gerald?" Dani questioned her mother, knowing that her father never kept anything from her.

She watched her mother's face turn up to face her, but there was no guilt in her eyes. She believed that her mother always thought that she made decisions for this family, not for her sake but the good of everyone.

"I had always known about Gerald. But it was not my place to tell anyone about his existence. However, I think that it is time that we buried the past and continued with the present." Laura told her daughter.

She was unsure if Dani would understand what she did, but she would not change anything. If she had to do it again, she would still keep her word, the promise she gave to Marietta.

"What do you think is happening inside?" Dani once again asked her mother, hoping she might shed some light on what transpired inside the room. If anybody knew anything, it would be her mother.

She again turned slightly toward the door, but it remained closed. When she turned to her mother, she saw that she also followed her eyes.

"Your guess is as good as mine." Laura finally answered her, shrugging her shoulders to make her point. "But give your father some slack. This situation had never been his intention."

She did not want to see another rift between her daughter and her father because of this new information. On the other hand, she hoped that it would finally close this horrible volume in their life for once and for all. So, they could all move on to the next.

"I think your mother is right. We all make mistakes, and sometimes despite our good intentions, we still create more problems than we want." Alex interrupted.

He wished he could do more, but at the moment, there was nothing else he could do but wait for Ethan to decide on this matter.

Now that he acknowledged Gerald as his son, he believed many changes would soon follow. Not only in this family but also in the company that he was now managing.

"What about Gerald? What now?" Dani could not continue her question, but she knew Alex could guess what she meant by it.

She could still remember the times she had spent working with Gerald, not knowing he was the man behind her traumatic experience. Yes, Nick was one of the culprits, but he was also involved in the crime.

A shudder went through her spine, reminding her of the fear that had gripped her at that time. Now that they had learned that Gerald was part of the family, would that change?

"We could not do much about it at the moment. All we can do is wait till we know more about Ethan's plan..." Alex paused, looking at the two who walked out of the room. "...and Gerald."

He could not read any of their expression. Whatever the two had talked about in private, they were not giving it away that easily. But he could only guess that it would affect everyone before him.

He only hoped it would have a positive impact because he would not allow anything to hurt his wife. She had been through enough because of this man. He would not spare his life if he decided to harm her again, even if he was now a Hamilton.

"Are you ok?" Laura whispered, leaning closer to her husband when he finally stood beside her.

She could not help but worry about his condition ever since these succeeding incidents happened to their lives. It had been one situation after another, and she could only wonder when it would end.

"I am fine, but I hope you will indulge this last whim of mine." Ethan turned to her with an imploring look as if he was about to do something that she might not want.

But she could already guess that it might have something to do with Gerald. She already promised to support him in whatever decision he would make.

She would not be surprised by what else he was planning to do for this family. That would include Gerald now. Besides, she had already accepted Gerald in their lives. She had no plan to take that back.

"Do what you must." She encouraged her husband, knowing that he had been through enough. She did not need to make him suffer any further. But she could only hope that things would turn out better for all of them this time around.

But she guessed that life was a never-ending cycle. Sometimes life seemed to be running so smoothly. Then one thing would happen to hinder the flow. After a while, it would all turn out fine.

Then, the process would start again. Whether one liked it or not, the wheels never actually stopped turning.

#### Chapter 716: Bound by duty

“Have you heard from Amelia?” He finally asked when she opened the door of her apartment.

As much as he wanted to stay away, his body had a mind of his own, disobeying whatever his mind ordered, even disregarding the warning bells that rang in his head.

He still found himself knocking on her door, walking further inside her apartment, and locking his arms around her embrace. He was a man possessed, obsessing about her.

He let his hands hold her by the waist, pulling her closer to his body. Then kissing her on top of her head as he waited for her answer.

“Nope.” She answered, ushering him toward the living room. She wished she had, but until now, she had no luck. “I tried calling her several times, but either her phone was always off, or she might have blocked my number.”

Eida wished her friend would hear her side of the story, but she could not blame her for being mad at her. She deserved it if Amelia would stop talking to her.

She did feel guilty about betraying her trust. She should have admitted to her friend about her relationship or whatever this was she was doing with Lance. Instead of allowing her to discover it in that manner.

.....

She could still remember the shock and hurt that registered on her friend’s face. Amelia came here looking for a friend, then what she found was a snake who betrayed her.

“I also had the same response when I tried calling her,” Lance admitted, sitting down on the sofa with her wrapped around his arms.

He started playing with the tendrils of her hair, entwining the strands around his fingers as he thought of Amelia. He liked Amelia, but only as a friend or maybe a younger sister. But he could not hurt her by marrying her.

“Where can she have possibly gone?” She was clueless since this was the first time she had experienced this scenario.

Amelia was not the kind of friend she hung out with for long periods. They usually saw each other on occasions when they accidentally found themselves in the same place, at the same time.

But other than a few hours of spending some time together and talking about mundane things, they would go on separate ways. Of course, except for some occasions that Amelia confided in her about her father.

"I tried looking for her through our friends and the possible places she frequented back when we were young, but she was not there." He scratched his nape, wanting to release the tension he felt from his problems.

He shifted his face to her, trying to read what she might be thinking, and judging from her long breath, she must be feeling so horrible about all of this. He could not help but blame himself for putting her in this situation.

But in his defense, he was clueless that the two of them were friends. But he wondered if that would have stopped him from pursuing Eida if he had known.

"Do you think she is ok?" She guiltily asked, looking at him while her hands fidgeted in her lap.

She suddenly wished she was not attracted to this man at her side. But how could she stop seeing him when her mind kept nagging at her to let him in.

She had never done a relationship. That was never her style.

But when she was with him, all she wanted to do was not let him go. As soon as his hands touched her, she melted immediately in his arms. She could not think of anything else but be with him.

"You know her. She is more than capable of taking care of herself." Lance assured her, holding her hand firmly in his grip.

It was the first time he had seen her out of control of herself. Usually, she had complete command of a situation, but at the moment, she was looking at him for answers.

Her eyes were full of worry about her friend. But all he wanted to do was enveloped her in his arms and take care of her. Provide her with a shoulder that she could rely on in times like this.

"But, this is different. We hurt Amelia." She finally stood up, away from his arms.

She walked towards the window, gazing at the view of the busy street below them. She hoped that Amelia was ok, just somewhere safe, nursing her broken heart. But she wished to hear from her soon.

"But I will hurt her further if I agree to marry her." Lance could not do that, not to her friend or anyone. "Amelia did not deserve that."

He would not force himself to marry someone and subject them to a life of misery with him. He could not compel his heart to love someone.

But was his heart beating for someone? He could only wonder for now. He believed he still had no answer for that at the moment.

"Nobody deserves to be subjected to a lie." She agreed, but her mind questioned if she had an idea of what she was also doing with him.

Her heart drummed inside her chest, protesting her wisdom in going deeper into this relationship. Was she setting herself up for a heartbreak too? She could not possibly be dreaming that a prince would marry her.

"Yes, I also think that I need to tell you something." He had been confused about what he felt about her.

His eyes looked around the room, finally realizing that he barely knew this woman, but the effect she already had on him was astronomical.

He had known Amelia all his life, but he could not bear to be with her as her husband. Suddenly, he was thinking of the implication of his thought. Was he falling for her? This woman, presently, with him.

"I..." She was about to tell him something too, but before she could continue, his phone rang, making her stop.

"I am sorry about this." Lance apologized for the interruption. He quickly grabbed it inside his pocket, wanting it to be Amelia calling.

Seeing his father's name on the screen made him wish he did not have to answer the call. But it was his duty as his son to answer him when he summoned for him. He still felt bound by duty to oblige as a dutiful son.

#### Chapter 717: The nobility

Eida wished he did not have to leave so soon. He barely had arrived. Now, he was saying goodbye to her again. But how could she stop him when his duty calls. He was a prince, after all.

"I will try to be back tonight. But do not wait for me. I will call if I am already on my way over." Lance told her, wishing that he did not have to leave her in the first place.

But his father insisted that he should assist on an urgent matter. It was a disturbance in the company that needed his attention. He did not remember leaving a situation when he left the office, but it could be another incident that went out of hand.

He pulled her in a tight hug before kissing her passionately as they stood by the door. Suddenly letting her go was becoming harder each time that they were together.

"Just drive safely." She said with concern, remembering how they loved to drive fast. Then, with one more kiss, she finally let go of him.

She watched him walk toward the elevator until he vanished behind the closed doors. Slowly, she returned to her room and closed the door, leaning on the wooden frame, feeling a loss she had never felt before.

Would she always feel this way whenever he left her alone? The feeling of emptiness creeping up inside her. She was never dependent on any man, but why was she feeling so down when he was not with her.

.....

As if she needed him to breathe or for her heart to start pumping normally again. She felt weak and out of motivation when he was not around, but her entire world went upside down once he entered her door.

This scene was crazy, especially since she was not a fan of relationships and commitment. She never believed in putting her life in the hands of a man. But here she was, wishing for him to come back.

“Get your mind back on the game.” Her mind told her, but it felt like she was not the same person anymore.

She quickly moved to her kitchen, hoping to busy herself with food or something that would preoccupy her mind. Maybe after a nice meal alone, she could go to her office and work.

It did remind her that she still had to convince Lance to do a face-to-face interview with her. At this moment, that seemed to be the least of her worries.

She was moving around the kitchen when her door made a buzz. She wondered if Lance had returned so quickly. It had been barely a few minutes since he left.

She wondered if he had left something.

She checked her phone first, thinking he had called or left a message. But it was empty except for the other messages she received from the office. Not one came from Lance or even Amelia.

“Wait!” She shouted as she wiped her hands on a towel, moving away from the kitchen to answer the door.

Maybe she should give him a key so that he could come as he pleased to her apartment. But would that be too presumptuous of her to assume that he would want full access to this relationship?

It sounded like she was jumping the gun and assuming that he was serious about what they were doing when she fully knew that this might not even mean that much to him.

It was even possible that he was using her to drive Amelia away from him since he was not interested in marrying her. She was the perfect alibi to make Amelia run away again into her world, away from this place.

“Don’t be silly.” She chastised herself as she neared the door, only to be met by another buzz on the door.

Whoever was behind that door was quite impatient as the buzz went on again, making her ears bleed from the constant noise. She would make sure that the person behind that door would wish never to cross paths with her.

“Wait! I am not deaf, but I think you are.” She shouted amidst the noise as she drastically swung the door open.

But before she could say more. Shock took over her as her eyes gazed at her unexpected visitor. Suddenly, her mouth went dry, and her eyes slightly bulged out of their sockets as she stared at the face before her.

“I am sorry, I thought it might not be working, so I kept pressing on it.” He made his excuse, but she doubted that was the case. She believed he did it intentionally to intimidate her.

At the moment, she believed it had worked as she lost her nerve to speak. Her mind kept telling her to say something, but her lips refused to move. She was left gawking at the man, looking like a big fool.

“By the way, I hope you don’t mind my sudden visit.” The man spoke up, slightly jolting her brain and body to function together again. “Let me introduce myself.”

“No need, Count Thomas Wellington.” She finally found her voice again. “I know who you are. Would you like to come in?” She widened the door opening, gesturing for the older man to enter her premises.

She moved toward the living room where she had occupied earlier with his son, suddenly wary of his presence in her apartment, slightly having an idea of why he would seek her out.

Then, it clicked in her mind. The phone call Lance received just a few minutes ago. This man knew she had a relationship with his son and wanted him out of her apartment before he arrived.

“You have a very nice apartment for a journalist.” The Count commented, moving further inside the room, but he did not bother to sit down as he turned around to face her.

“Thanks, but I do not think you came here to make idle chitchats.” Eida did not believe in prolonging the agony. She already knew why a Count was here to see her.

Not because he was bringing her some honor, but on the contrary, he was here to take back what was his, his son. For this royal family, she did not belong in the nobility.

Chapter 718: Worth the sacrifice

The Count was also captivated when his eyes landed on the woman his son was dating. He could already guess what his son saw in her. She was indeed beautiful. And judging by her career choice, she was also intelligent.

But what his son did not realize was how unsuitable she was to be standing beside him. Despite her popularity and success in her chosen field, this woman before him would never be good enough to marry his son.

“You are not only beautiful, but you seem to be using your head as well, Ms. Harlowe.” He commented as he looked around the room, studying her through the things she owned. “And I suggest you keep using the latter more.”

He could see that she had good taste, from the furniture to the paintings hanging on her wall. But still, it was not enough for her to sit beside his son when he took his place as King of this kingdom.

“Let us cut to the chase. I know you are here not because of me.” Eida was not going to stand there and kept listening to his insult.

She understood what he was implying with his words. But she had no plan to stoop as low as him and throw an insult at him too. But she was not playing his games either.

“Then, you must realize why I am here.” He moved further inside the room, not done studying her house. He looked outside her window as if checking the view from his position.

.....

He occasionally glanced in her way before returning his attention outside. Given a choice, he would go to one of his meetings rather than be standing in her presence.



He did not think she deserved a minute longer of his time, but he would indulge her just this once. For the sake of his son, he would act civil to this woman.

"I might, but I do not wish to jump to any conclusion. If you don't mind, I would like you to state your case and be gone." She told him, wanting to get rid of him soon.

She had met the King, the Duke, and the other royal family. She never had any issues with royalties or any of them before. But today was different. She believed there was always a first time.

He sported a friendly smile as he faced her, but his tone and words were far from near welcoming. However, she never trusted that he carried good intentions when she entered her door earlier.

"If I must spell it out for you to avoid any confusion, then so be it." Count Thomas shrugged his shoulders as if she was a nuisance he could not wait to get rid of soon. "I do not know about you, but I love my son. I am only thinking of his best interest. And at the moment, I believe that is not you."

If that was not loud and clear enough, he might be mistaken when he assumed she was intelligent. But the expression on her face told him that she understood his meaning.

"I have a proposal, and I hope you will accept it." He continued before she could react to his earlier statement. He went back to the living room and stood near the coffee table.

He pulled a document out of his breast pocket and dropped the folded papers on the top of the table. He even took a pen out from his pocket and placed it above the white paper.

"What is that?" Sharpening her eyes on the file. But somehow, she already knew what was on those papers as she walked closer to the middle of the room.

She could already tell that it did not bear good news. On the contrary, it might be a death sentence for her relationship with his son.

"Something for you if you would agree to my proposal. All you have to do is sign it." His calm voice floated in the air, but he never felt calm under her presence.

He wanted to squash her to nothing for impeding his plans. He believed she was the only obstacle standing in the way of his son's impending marriage to Amelia.

He would remain to stand, not wanting to stay longer than necessary in this suffocating room until she perused the papers and signed them.

"What makes you think that I will sign that?" Eida looked at him and pointed at the table, challenging him to state his case.

She still could not believe that this man would come to her home, insult her and now convince her to sign some papers. Although she was curious about the content of those papers, she already knew she would not like the gist of them.

"Because you love him, and I know you want only the best for him." His mocking tone suggested that he did not believe what he said. But he was still tolerating her presence.

But she was surprised that he would say those words to her. But it made her analyze her feelings for his son. If she did love him, she would find it hard to let him go. But if she was only using him, signing these papers would be a breeze.

She grabbed the papers and opened them. On the first page, she already knew what it was. As she continued to skim the rest of the documents, she understood what he wanted to happen.

“What if I do not wish to sign these papers?” She waved the papers in her hand at him.

She admitted she was still confused because, until now, she was still conflicted about her feelings for his son.

Compared to her past relationships, she had never felt like this before. Only with Lance did she feel protected, safe, and cherished. Did it mean that she had fallen in love with him?

She was not exactly sure since she had no basis for it. She had never experienced falling in love before. At least none that she was aware of in the past.

“Then, you will have to wait for the consequence. But if you sign it, I assure you that you will be greatly rewarded.” The Count told her or was that a warning or a mild threat.

He kept staring at her as his feet tapped gently on the floor. He grew impatient the longer he waited for her to read the rest of the document. He could not wait for him to leave this room and never have to set foot in it again.

Moreover, she almost had a heart attack at the reward he planned to give her. “Wow, this certainly is a lot of money.” She pretended to fan herself, feeling woozy at the figures written in black ink.

If she would think about it, that money could set her for life. She would not need to work for a day in her life. Now she knew what it felt like for those who accepted bribes.

It was not her first time to be in this position. That was not the point. In her line of work, it was ordinary for clients to offer her money. But that amount of money would be hard to resist. It was tempting.

“I can arrange more if that is not enough.” The Count offered, which made her raise her eyebrows higher. “Just name your price, and I will make the necessary arrangement.”

He finally wore a satisfied smile, thinking that she might be taking the bait. He had no qualms about losing some millions if he could get back his son from her clutches.

That was just spare change compared to what his family would gain if the marriage between Lance and Amelia happened and when his son finally sat on the throne.

“I only want to make this clear. If I accept the money, I can never see Lance again. Not on the side, nor become his mistress.” She knew she sounded sarcastic.

She could not have stressed enough what she would be giving up in exchange for the money she would receive from the agreement. It sounded so simple, but it was not.

Not only did it imply that she was only after their money, but she was only using his son. She would laugh at the situation if she only found it funny.

"Of course, that is why I am paying you. So, you will be out of my son's life for good." His eyes narrowed at her, not liking her tone and how her face looked at him.

He thought that he already had her in the palm of his hands, but it seemed that it would take more than money to convince her to leave his son alone.

"I see." Making her voice sound condescending. "Do I have to sign it now?" Not that she planned to sign it, she just wanted to know how desperate the Count was about getting rid of her.

"Or, can I just send it to you after I have included my necessary demands?" She could not help the smile that displayed on her face.

Suddenly, the older man was fuming at her. Not liking the way she was joking around. But she could not help it, looking at the seriousness on his face.

She now realized that the Count would do anything to marry Lance to Amelia. Aside from that, he was also determined to get rid of her.

But what bothered her the most was the extent of his power. He could destroy her and everything she had worked hard for her entire life. Was Lance worth the sacrifice?

Chapter 719: An easy escape from that playboy

After seeing that Angela was doing fine and was already sleeping, Amelia excused herself and decided to check herself in a nearby hotel. She still did not feel like going back home. Not that she planned to set foot on that house again.

But before she could leave the hospital, Evan stopped her, reminding her of the dinner Angela had insisted they had. She finally said yes to make him leave her alone.

Now, she was staring at the phone in her hand, debating whether to call him about their date. She was considering canceling on him or not showing up, but that would seem impolite.

Amelia finally opened her phone, which had run out of battery when she was in the hospital. Only to realize how many missed calls and messages she had received while it was off.

GO HOME.

That was one of the first messages she opened coming from her father. She would assume that the rest of his messages would have the same content or more or less in the same line. Well, she had no plans of going home at all.

There were several also coming from her work, inquiring about her schedule. But that could wait. She had no plan to travel yet in her condition. She was still a little distraught with her current situation.

.....

Although she did not want to think that what happened to Angela was fortunate, she could not help but thank her fate that Angela's condition had been a perfect distraction from all her problems.

WHERE ARE YOU? I AM SORRY. I HOPE WE CAN TALK.

Amelia could already tell that the rest of their message would have the same content too. But she was not ready to talk to either of them. They had broken her heart, but it did not mean that she hated them.

Probably just hurt because they failed to tell her about their relationship. She assumed when Lance mentioned he was dating someone. It would be someone she might not know.

Then, when Eida talked about the man on the tape, she presumed it was just another man in his long line of suitors. Now, she could not erase their moans in her head, remembering the recording.

She quickly closed the messaging app and turned to her phone dialing app, thinking of contacting him. She recalled saving his number from the last time she called him.

She wondered if she should call him now while she still had time and cancel the dinner date. But the thought of disappointing Angela when she asked about their dinner tomorrow was not appealing either.

"What about one dinner?" She asked herself, looking in the mirror at the other end of the room and seeing her face still sporting that grim look.

But at least her eye bugs were not as prominent compared to earlier. She already had a good sleep as soon as she had laid her body on that soft bed. Now, all she needed was a bath and some fresh clothes.

"You are bound to eat anyway. Why not indulge the old lady?" Her mind still tried to convince herself.

"It does not have to be a date. Just two people, eating together." Her mind seemed to be on a roll.

"Besides, it is better to have company than to eat alone at a time like this."

It did sound more appealing, eating with the company of that man. He looked charming, but she doubted he was harmless from how he seemed to be undressing her every time he would look her way.

Still, he did not seem like he would do anything horrible to her. Maybe if she asked him to have dinner at a restaurant in this hotel, she would not worry that he would do anything untoward. Besides, Angela vouched for his character.

With a positive mindset, she quickly called a shop where she usually bought her clothes and had some delivered to her room. Being a valued client always had some perks.

She had several dresses, pants, blouses, and other things to choose from in just less than an hour.

"I don't know about this." Throwing the first dress she found. "Not this one either." She was not interested in the choices she had seen so far.

She did not want to look stuffy but not slutty either as she continued to check the clothes hung before her. Then, she took another one and paraded it in the mirror.

"It looks perfect." She twirled it a bit and enjoyed looking at herself, even smiling at her reflection, loving how the dress flowed down on her knees.

Then, she suddenly slumped down on the bed, realizing what she was doing. She had no idea why she was looking forward to this date, feeling excited and giddy about the prospect of seeing that man.

"What is wrong with you?" She mumbled to herself, looking at her reflection in the mirror, still holding on to the dress.

“Admit it. At least you enjoyed that few minutes of prancing around.” Her mind reminded her.

Honestly, she did. She was not expecting to be excited about the clothes after her depressing experience. Maybe going out with this man would be a nice change for her.

He could at least get her mind off the two most significant people in her life that she did not want to think about at the moment.

Finalizing her decision, she stood from the bed and placed the dress on top of the linens. Then, she proceeded to the bathroom for her much-needed bath. Maybe a half-hour bubble bath would help her frail nerves.

She lavished herself on the delicious scent of the lavender oils, submerging herself in the mildly warm water. A few minutes emerged on those calming waters was all she needed. It had already done wonders to her body.

After feeling refreshed, she wrapped herself in the bathrobe and walked back to the room, more determined to get this dinner over. She took the phone and started typing the details.

She decided to meet him downstairs, not wanting him to pick her up at her hotel door. She believed it was safer that way. At least after dinner, she could excuse herself and make an easy escape from that playboy.

#### Chapter 720: Roller coaster ride

Dani looked outside the car window, staring at the road ahead but not seeing anything as her mind shifted from one thought to another.

She was not exactly expecting the sudden turn of events that occurred earlier. She had not envisioned meeting her brother under that circumstance.

She was not exactly alone, remembering the faces of their entire family when her father revealed his most hidden secret. That moment was priceless. She did not even have an idea that her father had found him.

Suddenly, she remembered the incident back at the office where her father had visited her. Now, she knew she was not his purpose for coming to her office. It all suddenly made sense.

“Are you ok?” Alex asked with concern as he maneuvered the car in the moderate traffic. She could tell that her husband was worried about her condition after that big revelation.

She quickly turned to him, smiling, wanting to reassure him that she was ok. A little confused, hurt, scared, but slightly relieved as well. Who could blame her for feeling so confused at the moment?

He glanced at her quickly, taking her hand and giving it a quick peck of his lips before letting her go as his eyes concentrated back on the road.

.....

“I am.” She assured him, placing her hands on top of his before turning her face again on the road outside.

As much as she wanted to shut her eyes and forget the things swirling in her mind, even for a minute, she could not. She knew she had to process it first before she could finally let it simmer on the side and deal with it later.

But as her eyes scanned the landmarks outside, she noticed that their route had changed. Alex seemed to be driving the wrong way.

She quickly shifted her eyes to her husband, who still had his eyes steadily fixed on the road. "Where are we going?" She finally asked when she had confirmed that they were not on their way home.

Far from that, they seemed to be going in the opposite direction.

She shifted in her seat. At least to the point, her seatbelt would allow her and face her husband, who only grinned in her direction.

"We are going to dinner, then have some fun." Alex finally answered her, putting the car in gear as they slowed down and turned into a curve.

She wondered where they were going, but she could not help the excitement that coursed through her veins at the thought of going on a date with her husband. It had been a while since they had done something like this.

Not because he did not want to or have time for her. It was more for security reasons. But now, the threat seemed to be down to the minimum. She could not agree that it was a good idea to be out with him again, having some fun.

She could see from the rearview mirror that their security was following closely behind. So, she had nothing to worry about, seeing their trusted people around.

"I am a little hungry," Dani admitted, not being able to eat much the entire day, holding on to her queasy stomach. "I hope you are not thinking of driving far."

She had no idea where her husband was taking her, but she expected it would be full of fun and excitement. He had a way of making a boring date into something enjoyable.

"We are almost there. Just wait a few more minutes." Alex assured her, stepping on the gas to speed up the car, just a little bit faster but not enough for them to break any street law.

"Do you think Gerald will cease his attack on our family now that he is part of it?" She finally asked the thought that was bothering her the most.

She gazed at her husband as his eyes slightly squinted as if he was thinking deeply before his facial expression normalized again. She could only assume that the thought of Gerald also affected him just as much as her.

"I hope so." His tone had a slight undercurrent of anger, but he tried hard to hide it.

She could not blame her husband for feeling that way. She was also having some issues regarding her older brother. She could only wonder how she would react when she finally saw him at the office. Well, she was still working under him.

Although his father announced her brother's existence among their family members, it did not mean it was already out to the masses. She still had no idea if her father or Gerald had any plan of going public about this new development in their family.

"Anyway, we are here." Alex broke her thoughts, smiling at her, probably wishing that the talk about Gerald would cease in the meantime.

She was surprised to see them in front of a fine restaurant, just across from a cinema. Should she dare assume after dinner, they will be watching a movie? She hoped so.

It had been a long time since she was inside that dark room, holding hands with her date as they stared at the big screen. She also remembered the soda and the popcorn that went with that.

"What are we waiting for?" She questioned, hearing her stomach growl, more excited about the prospect of food.

Alex immediately exited the car and assisted her inside the beautiful restaurant. It was not a first-class restaurant that sported a Michelin star, but it looked very cozy.

"What do you think of some steak or a sea bass?" Alex asked her as they perused the menu on the table.

"I like the grilled fish." Tapping her fingers on her chin as she thought of the food she would like to eat. At this point, she was not too picky since she was starving. She believed she could eat anything.

Alex ordered for them and started pouring the wine into their glass. She let her eyes roam around while waiting for their simple dinner.

"What should we be toasting for?" She asked since she needed something to be happy about as she raised her glass to him. She could not think of anything worth celebrating.

It took him a few seconds before he answered her, but it was not something that she was expecting. But she guessed this day was just full of revelation.

"What about me, accepting the crown?" Alex looked into her eyes as if he was reading her reaction to his announcement.

She could tell that it was not a joke from the seriousness on his face, but should she be rejoicing in such news. However, she did promise that she would be open to whatever he decided.

Now, it would seem that her husband had finally made his decision. She could understand why he would choose that route. It was his family's legacy.

"Then, let us raise to that. To my future king." She clinked her glass with his, ready to support him in whatever he did.

However, it would also mean that she had to rethink her plans for the future. At this point, from everything that was going on around her. She believed she was about to go on another roller coaster ride.