

Royal Contract 771

Chapter 771: Lost time

Ethan finally woke up, seeing his wife sleeping on the chair next to him. His eyes recognized the room, being in this same situation before.

His eyes focused again on his wife, who looked so exhausted, and his heart broke for her. She was far worse than before. Now he worries about her more, knowing that anything could happen to him.

But he had faith that his wife was much stronger than him. She would survive far better than him even after he was gone.

"I am sorry. I don't know if I can still keep my promise." He whispered, but no sounds came out of his lips, feeling the ache and weakness of his body as he tried to move.

He knew he would be disappointing his beloved wife for the hundredth time. It was something he never liked doing, but like everyone else, he was just human. It was now out of his hands.

He could only wish for eternal life, but such did not exist in this world. He could only be thankful for the long, great years granted to him by whoever was in charge of his life. Years that he had cherished with his family.

"I love you." He whispered as his voice finally broke out, making a breathy sound. His hands reached out to her, but he could barely raise it from the bed. Then, give up, deciding to watch Laura in her sleep.

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He wondered how long he had been in the hospital. What was his current condition? But based on what he could feel with his body, he might be in a worse situation than before.

He attempted to move again, but the pain was too much. "Aaaggghhh!" Ethan could not stop the groan that escaped his lips. Still, he bit his lips to minimize the noise he made, but Laura stirred in her position, and her eyes opened, looking directly at him.

At first, her face registered surprise, probably at seeing him awake. Then, her lips curved into a gentle smile while her eyes showed relief.

"Ethan, I am so glad that you are finally awake," Laura spoke with happiness in the timbre of her voice.

She immediately stood up from her chair, setting aside the blanket covering her body as she moved closer to him. Then, her hands automatically moved to cover his, and her lips touched his forehead with a tender kiss.

He felt comforted that she had stayed by his side all this time, through good times and even the worse ones. But simultaneously, he felt terrible that there was a possibility that he would leave her behind.

"I can't keep my eyes closed for too long. I need to see you." He spoke gently, slightly stammering in his words as the dryness in his lips affected his speech. "Can I have some water?" He requested.

"Of course, just a second." Laura quickly moved to the side of the room, where she grabbed a bottle of water with a straw and stepped back to his side.

She slowly allowed him to drink a sip on the straw, which was more difficult than he thought. But after sensing the tiny drops of water touching his throat. He felt slightly better.

"How are you feeling?" Laura excitedly asked as she fuzzed around him, asking several questions. But he could barely answer any of them.

He could still see her agitation behind her smile. The fear was still all over her eyes despite the bubbly laughter coming from her lips. He wished to assure her everything would be fine, but he did not want to make another false promise.

This time, he had no reassurance that tomorrow would be better than today. He could only give his wife the present. His time at the moment, nothing more. But he could only hope it would be enough.

"I am ok." Well, he wished that was not a lie. He felt good despite the circumstances.

Still, it was better to say that instead of admitting how much his body wanted to give up. He loved seeing his wife smile, but he dreaded that he might make her cry soon too.

He wished for a miracle, hoping he could spend more time to be with his family. He still had to see his daughter become a queen and scoop his grandchildren in his arms.

He wanted to grow old and gray with his wife in their house, with all their beautiful memories. But if that should be too much to ask, he would settle for a few more minutes with her.

"I better call the doctors. So they could check on you." Laura pressed the emergency button, calling for assistance from the staff.

Soon, a nurse appeared at the door, asking if she needed anything. But when she saw that he was awake, she smiled and said that the doctors would be attending to them shortly.

He guessed it would be best if he had a discussion now with his doctors. So he would determine the extent of his condition. He could best prepare himself for the worse and his family as well.

Hearing the prognosis of the medical experts, he was not that hopeful. Although they had given him a slim chance, it was not enough for him to assume much from his condition.

"Where are Dani and Alex?" He finally asked, seeing that Laura was alone. However, he was glad his princess was not here to see how much he was in pain. They had already been through enough.

He just wanted to enjoy this remaining time with his family if that was what fate had planned for him. What else could he do?

He was glad that the doctors gave him some for his pain. It made moving a bit easier, but other than that, there was nothing much they could do but wait for him to heal.

"They must be on their way. I am sure Dani would be happy to see you are finally awake." Laura smiled at him, moving around the room with renewed spirit.

He wished he could share her enthusiasm. But deep inside, he doubted he would last long. Still, he smiled and attempted to appear like he was getting better.

"I am glad to see you are up." A man suddenly appeared behind Laura. Of course, how could he forget him? He still had a lot to make up for his lost time with his son.

Chapter 772: No!

Eida walked into the balcony, seeing Evan was alone, finishing his morning coffee. She wondered where Amelia was as she looked for her. She could only surmise that her friend was busy with her foundation.

"I am sorry. I thought nobody was out here." She was about to turn around when Evan stopped her.

"Hey, Eida, do you want to talk?" Evan called and asked, facing her as he placed his empty cup on the table.

She turned around again and moved toward the balcony's railing, staring at the view on the horizon. Everything around her seemed to be moving as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

Yet, her world seemed to have gone on a non-stop downward spiral. Until now, she had no idea how she would work on making her life seem normal again.

"What is it, Evan?" She finally asked, turning around to face him again.

She might have a clue of what was going on in his mind. His face was like an open book. She could easily read his expression.

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He also stared at her face before he shifted his attention to the view before them.

His hands held on to the metal railings that prevented them from falling to the pavement below. It seemed to tighten the more he thought of what he would like to say.

"How are you doing? And the baby?" His voice was full of concern. She was unsure what to think of his action since they barely talked much. Although he had helped her these past few days, she still did not know him much.

She did hear that he was a friend of Lance, but unfortunately, she did not know about Lance's life other than the Royal family. Lance was strict concerning his privacy, sharing nothing much about his friends.

"I am good." She trod carefully with her answer. Still, she could not tell if she should trust him or not. "I think my baby is also doing fine."

Instinctively, her hands moved towards her belly, allowing her palms to caress the baby bump that was still flat at the moment. But soon, she had read that it would appear and gradually grow.

"I am happy to hear that." Evan's eyes also followed her hand gesture, but this time, he smiled. "I am terrified of babies. I don't know if I should even have one." Evan disclosed as he continued to watch her with fascination in his eyes.

"What is going on with you and my friend?" She finally could not help it. She had noticed the attraction between the two of them. Even if she had not caught them kissing, she still could tell that there was chemistry between the two.

"We are just fooling around." He casually admitted, but his face seemed to be telling her otherwise.

Her friend, Amelia, was not the type of girl that would casually enjoy an affair. She was not like her. She always put her heart first before anything else.

She believed that was why her friend was affected so much by that kiss. She must be attractive to this man, more than she could handle.

Her love for Lance blinded her from the possibility that there might be someone else for her. She never considered that maybe Lance was not the one for her.

"Are you sure about that?" She doubted every word he said.

She heard about his lifestyle. Just like her, he did not like commitment. At least what she used to be, but somehow, Lance changed that.

She wondered if Amelia could change him too. But it was not a risk she would like her friend to take. Sometimes, it did not simply work that way.

As much as she wished for a happy ending for this two, she doubted that starting a relationship in this scenario would be good, just looked at what happened to her and Lance.

"What do you mean?" Evan asked, his eyes narrowing at her as if questioning her words. "If you think kissing Amelia meant more than just me wanting to have sex, then you are wrong."

Ding, ding, ding!

She could tell she hit a nerve.

He was a classic denial king, someone afraid to admit that he also caught the love bug. He was no different from her when she realized she was in love with Lance.

"I am not saying anything about you." She raised her hands in the air, not wanting to push him too hard. "But my friend is not like me. She doesn't know how to play the field."

She could see that his eyes were in deep thought as he kept silent. She could tell that he did not need to hear that from her because he knew who Amelia was, and that was what was eating at him.

"I know." His admission. How he released the air in his lungs told her he had thought about that a lot. "She is not like the others."

She could see that confessing something like that would not be easy for a man like him. She appreciated that he did not try to hide who he was from her friend and hurt her.

But what they both decided to do with their growing attraction for each other was all up to them. The two were both consulting adults who were both aware of their circumstances.

"I know." She answered him, knowing how special her friend was. Any man would be lucky to have her. Lance would have been fortunate if the two of them had ended up together.

Then, she turned around, ready to look for her friend again. But before she could completely step inside the apartment, Evan stopped her again.

“He is now awake and looking for you.” He coolly said. She had to turn around upon hearing his news, making her heart skip a beat from happiness, knowing he would be ok. “Do you wish to see him?”

His back faced her as he continued to gaze at the horizon that was starting to form some clouds. She could tell that they might be some rain later on.

Lance was awake, and she was happy about it. But.

Just like the looming rain, her world turned gray again as darkness started to swallow her world. Eida finally answered before leaving Evan to stand alone outside. “No!”

Chapter 773: Heavier burden

When Alex heard that Ethan had woken up, he immediately left the office to check on him. He offered to pick up Dani in the office before proceeding to the hospital, but she preferred if they just met there.

But when he arrived at the hospital, Dani was still on her way. She was caught in unexpected traffic but would be shortly joining them. He did not mind since he wished to discuss something with Ethan.

“Good morning, Ethan.” He immediately greeted his father-in-law when he entered the room, seeing Ethan silently sitting on his bed. “It is nice to see that you are finally awake.”

However, Alex did not anticipate seeing Gerald laughing with Laura on the other side of the room. His mother-in-law seemed to be growing at ease with her stepson.

Not that he had anything against that, but he could not trust a man like Gerald. He believed this man had something planned against them. He was not ready to let his guard down around him.

“It is also great to see you, Alex.” Ethan greeted, but his head seemed to be staring past him. He could only surmise that he must be waiting for Dani to enter the room.

“Where is Dani?” It was Laura who finally asked, finally noticing his arrival.

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She stood up and walked toward him, giving him a hug and a motherly kiss on his cheeks. Gerald also followed and offered his hand as greetings.

“She is on her way.” He answered but only nodded at Gerald without touching his hand.

He turned his attention back to Ethan, looking in their direction, not speaking but observing the exchange. If Ethan was back to his old self, he would not have missed that little exchange and would be asking him about it later.

“Well, I am happy to see you.” Laura continued as she returned to her seat, and so did their new darling son.

He could see that Ethan might be smiling, but he was still in pain. He was trying hard to hide it, maybe for Laura’s benefit. But he feared that it was worse than what it was.

“I am happy that you are smiling again.” Alex countered, even if the cause of that smile was Gerald.

He was concerned that she had been so stressed out by this event that she might find it hard to recover from depression.

On the other hand, he could see in Gerald's facade and those fake smiles that he was up to no good. Gerald had shown his true colors to him, but he seemed to be playing with the rest of the family with his good boy act.

He could only wonder what he was planning next. But he would prepare for him. He would not stand by and watch him destroy this family because of his twisted vendetta against his father.

"Well, Gerald has been entertaining us with his childhood stories," Laura explained as she giggled again, probably remembering something funny.

"I am happy to hear that." But Alex was not buying any of his act. "How are you feeling?" He finally shifted to the patient, who sat quietly on the bed.

"As expected, like I am in hell," Ethan whispered as Alex leaned forward toward him. Presumably, he did not want his wife to hear his complaints.

Then, he smiled again when Laura turned in their direction. It could not be easy to pretend everything was good when he felt like a truck ran down on him.

"Do you need anything?" Alex asked again, hoping that he could at least alleviate his pain.

He moved closer and touched his arms, assuring him that he was there to help. But Ethan only shook his head, no. He guessed the doctors had already given him what was needed.

"Did I miss a family reunion?" Dani walked into the room, straight to his side. But her eyes did not miss the other man in the room. "I am happy to see you here... Gerald." It took her a few seconds before she decided what she should call her brother. "Mom." But instead of going to her, she just blew her a kiss.

At the moment, her priority seemed to be with her father as she leaned forward to kiss him on his forehead. "How are you feeling?" She asked concernedly, holding firmly on to his hand.

"As of now, I need a machine to answer that damn question, again and again," Ethan answered philosophically, rolling his eyes to his daughter, which was understandable. Everyone who visited him must have the same questions over and over again.

He could not help but smile at his answer. "He must be tired of answering that question. But he seemed fine." Alex decided to answer his wife instead. He could tell that Ethan was avoiding the question.

"You should be grateful that many cared enough to want to know how you are feeling," Dani responded with a tender smile, relieved that her father was back to his old self.

But he could only wonder if he was indeed getting better. He was afraid that this might be a temporary thing. The eye between an enormous storm, just waiting to make its devastation.

But he still hoped he was wrong from what he was reading about the situation. He still needed Ethan in his plans. He was the only person who could help him in the choices he had to make for his future and his family.

"I am very grateful that my only daughter, my two sons, and my darling wife are here. That is all I need." Ethan enveloped his daughter's hand in his and pulled it to his lips to kiss it.

Alex was happy to see his wife smiling at her father's effort. But when he turned slightly in the other direction, he saw Gerald was also looking at them with a grim expression, but he quickly smiled when Laura spoke.

"We only want you to get better." Laura stood up from her seat and walked toward them.

Laura settled on the other side of the bed, across from them. Soon, even Gerald walked and stayed at her side. To an outsider, they looked like a perfect family.

But he knew better when one was rotten and was about to destroy the entire bunch. But how could he tell Ethan about his son when he seemed to carry a heavier burden than him.

Chapter 774: Devastating news

As expected, rain followed a bit later. Evan ran from his car towards the entrance of the hospital. Thankfully, the media had settled down after the Royal Family had released their official statement about the accident.

But, for him, the dilemma was not yet over as he served as the messenger of terrible news. Sometimes, he wondered how he ended up in this position.

Why did he come back to his hometown in the first place? Suddenly, he missed his peaceful life back home, in the city where he had already started a new life.

"Evan!" Someone at his back suddenly called to him. "It is Evan, right?" The man stopped before him as he caught up with his long strides.

Well, for an aging man, he seemed to be in shape. He could only wonder if he would grow as old as him or die young because of his bad habits.

"Yes, Count Thomas. What can I do for you?" Evan asked as they continued to walk on the long hallway towards the elevator that would lift them to the upper floors of this building.

"I will cut to the chase and be frank with you. I heard that you are close to my son and Alex as well. I wondered if they ever shared with you anything about the Kingdom." The Count casually asked him as if it was no big deal.

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However, he could see that his answer would very much matter if he had an idea of what the Count wanted to know. But as their friend, he knew many of their secrets but should he tell Lance's father about it.

"Your son is a close friend of mine, but in terms of what you wanted to know, I am not sure if I will be much of a help. Lance is a very private person who never liked sharing much." Evan finally answered him.

In terms of Alex, well, the Count would have to hear it from Alex himself and not from him because he would never share what was not his secret to tell.

"Then, I guess you are a good friend." The Count replied to his statement.

Somehow, he wondered if it was a test or something, but he put it aside as they entered the elevator. He focused on what he had to say to Lance, keeping his silence inside the small space.

But how could he talk to him when his father loomed over him? He needed to discuss something with Lance without anyone else in the room, especially not his father. He had to find a way to be alone in the room with his friend.

"But there is one more thing I need to ask." The Count finally spoke again. It was not loud, but being confined in a small room, it seemed to echo in the metallic walls.

"What is it, Sir?" He was curious again if he would insist on knowing about his son's activities. But somehow, he could tell it had nothing to do with his previous question.

"How do you know Ms. Eida Harlowe?" Count Thomas finally asked what he thought would be his next question. "What can you tell me about her?"

He remembered that the Count had seen him, together with Amelia and her friend. But he could easily say that he only met her.

"Don't bother to deny it since my investigator told me she is currently staying at your grandmother's apartment." The Count continued when he probably noticed that he was thinking about what he would say.

He should have expected that from the Count since he would not rest until he had all the facts in his hands. He seemed very determined to take Eida out of the picture and would not stop until he did.

"Well, she is a friend of Amelia while my grandmother is a dear friend of Amelia. I have no personal connection to them, except getting caught between this incident." He honestly admitted since that was the truth. "If that was what you are asking."

Whatever happened between him and Amelia did not correlate with what was happening with Eida and Lance. Therefore, he had no idea what the Count would want from him.

"Ok. Anyway, I know that Lance would be asking for your assistance. He would want you to look for Ms. Harlowe, but I need you to do your friend a favor." The Count seemed to be talking in riddles as he stared at him.

Finally, the elevator doors opened to the top floor. It was where Lance was staying. He could see that several Royal guards were guarding the hallways again.

But before he could get out, the Count stopped him. "What is it that you want?" Treating this encounter as another of his business deals.

"It is not what I want but what Lance needs." The Count looked him directly in the eyes.

He might look intimidating, but he had dealt with more frightening men than him before. His tactics would never scare him. However, his grandmother's wrath terrified him more.

"And that is?" Although, he could already tell what he wanted to say.

"At the moment, he thinks that Ms. Harlowe is his world, but Lance would eventually realize that she is not the right person for him." The Count held him by the shoulder before continuing. "I need you to convince him that she is not coming back."

He was not surprised by the Count's words. He was expecting something in those lines coming from him. But it seemed it was similar words Eida wanted him to say to Lance.

He could already surmise what happened in the encounter between Eida and the Count. Somehow, the Count convinced Eida to turn her back on the man she loved.

He could only wonder what the Count had said that was so compelling that Eida would sacrifice her happiness and the chance for her child to have a father.

"If it would come from you, then he would believe it." The Count finally let go of his shoulder and walked out of the small space. "I hope you will do this for him." Count Thomas added.

Then, he was once again alone, staring at the back of the Count, who walked like he was not carrying a secret. He followed closely behind, trying to figure out how he would tell his friend his devastating news.

Chapter 775: Gone for good

Evan stared at his friend, who was currently peacefully sleeping. At this point, he was glad that the machines around him had already stopped beeping, meaning his friend did not need them anymore to breathe or monitor his heartbeat.

Count Thomas had finally left, seeing that his son was resting. He said that he would return later. He believed that the Count left intentionally, allowing him to talk to his friend alone about what they had discussed in the elevator.

Still, he wondered if he would be doing the right thing. He still believed his friend deserved to know that he was about to become a father. But it was not his place to tell him about that?

"Why did I end up in this situation?" Once again, he mumbled as he gazed outside the hospital window, watching the view of the dark sky but barely seeing anything

But, his mind was somewhere else.

It was back in the apartment, on the balcony, having a heated discussion with a pregnant woman. He was trying to plea his friend's case.

When he heard that she had no plans to see Lance, he could already guess she had given up. He suspected her conversation with the Count had convinced her to back off.

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But why would someone who loved his friend would easily do that? It did not make any sense unless she accepted money from the Count. He had seen many cases of this.

"You know he deserved to know about the baby even if you are not interested in him anymore," Evan spoke to her, slightly annoyed about her decision.

He had handled cases like this before. Although he had never thought much about it before, this was different. He, somehow, had a personal take on this since it was his friend's child that was on the line.

He could not allow this woman to take his friend's child away from him. However, when he saw her teary eyes, he knew he was wrong about her.

"I love him so much." She said as tears started dropping in her eyes. "I am doing this for him."

He could sense her pain. He could tell that what she said was genuine, but still, he did not understand how her decision would be for the betterment of his friend.

How could she say she loved him, then leave him just when he needed her the most? It just did not make any sense to him.

"Please, do not tell Lance about our baby." He could still hear Eida's voice inside his head, but nothing he said could convince her to change her mind. "But I am going to need your help, Evan," Eida asked him, to which he had no choice but to agree.

How could he say no to a pregnant, crying woman?

He still had no idea what the Count said to Eida. She would not tell him. However, concluding from his observation, it could not have been good. And it was enough to persuade her to run away.

Presently, he had no idea how to handle his situation. As a lawyer, it was easy to keep information about his client, but as a friend, it was the worse feeling ever.

So, he decided to ask Eida for a dollar. A retainer's fee so that she would become a client officially. Now, he had no option but to keep her secret as an attorney and client privilege.

"Hey, how long have you been standing there?" His friend asked, probably seeing him when he finally woke up. Immediately, he shoved his memories to the back of his mind to concentrate on his friend.

In truth, he had no idea how long he had been unaware of his surrounding. He was so lost in his thoughts that he barely noticed the time.

But he turned around and faced his friend, moving forward so that Lance did not have to strain his neck to look at him. He could see that he was still in pain. He did not wish to add to it.

"Long enough to notice that you have been sleeping all the time." He jokingly responded as he sat across from his bed. "But seriously, how are you feeling?" Making casual conversations.

He could still see several bandages across his body and a fiberglass cast that was supposed to help his legs and arms to heal faster.

Although many of his minor injuries had started to subside, he was still far from recovering his health back. He still needed therapies to help him with that.

But he was thankful that the worse was over.

But was it over?

"Like shit," Lance eventually answered, closing his eyes when he tried to move as his face frowned in pain. "Everything hurt like hell." He answered him as he attempted again.

This time, Evan stood up to help his friend find a more comfortable position. He could not imagine what he was going through since he had never been in that same situation yet.

But he hoped he would never have to experience such pain. But as always, fate had a terrible way of showing up at your doorstep when you least expected it. Suddenly, what was once great could turn upside down in an instant.

"Don't worry. The doctors guarantee your full recovery. You only have to endure for now." Evan hoped his words would help alleviate the pain he might be feeling.

But more than that, he hoped his friend would be ready to hear the sad, terrible news he had to tell him. Suddenly, he could not help but think, what if he was in his friend's shoes. What would he do?

But then again, how could he end up in the same condition as his friend when he hardly knew how to love, when he could not even fathom entering a committed relationship.

"I am not talking about my injuries. I want to see Eida. Have you found her yet? Have you talked to her? When is she coming to see me?" Lance fired his questions.

Although he had answers to all of them, it was not easy to say them. He felt like the words were stuck in his throat, refusing to come out. He dreaded hurting his friend more than the physical pain he was already suffering at the moment.

"Well, have you seen her?" Lance looked at him impatiently as if every second he did not answer him was more pain inflicted on his body.

He stepped away from his friend and started pacing the room. He looked like a lawyer, ready to state his closing remark in front of a judge and an entire jury.

However, compared to his cases, this was more difficult than anything he had ever handled in his entire career. He seemed tongue-tied, unable to come up with his opening line.

"Yes. I saw Eida." He finally admitted, figuring that sugar coating the situation would not help their case. "But she is not coming."

"Is she ok?" Lance asked, concern written all over his face. "Is she sick?"

"No, she is never coming to see you." Evan reiterated the words, hoping that he would finally understand this time what he meant. But when his brows knitted together, appearing confused.

He added to clarify his words. "Eida is gone for good."

Chapter 776: One regret

Ethan looked at his family, happy to see them all together. However, he could also feel the tension between his son and his son-in-law.

He was sick, not senile.

He noticed how Alex refused to shake Gerald's hand, a very unusual behavior of his son-in-law, so he could tell he must have his reason. A solid one.

Still, he enjoyed hearing his wife laughing at Gerald's stories. He also loved hearing that despite what happened to his son, he still had some good memories of his childhood with his mother.

He still could not help but blame himself for what his son had gone through because he was not brave enough to face what he had done. He did not clean up the mess he made and allowed his son to suffer in the end.

"Do you need anything?" His daughter asked, standing by his side while his wife and Gerald returned to their seats, continuing their exchange of stories.

On the other hand, Alex just stood behind his wife, probably waiting for an opportunity to talk to him.

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"I think I have everything I need in this room." Ethan finally answered, smiling at his daughter, who moved forward to hug him. But she was careful not to hurt him as she gently kissed him on his cheeks before moving away from his hold again.

He hoped that he could spend more time with his family. Enjoy more similar scenes like this. But, he could feel that his time was running out.

It was like the universe was telling him to get his shit together while he still had the chance. He might never get another one. But he wished it was enough because he doubted fate would grant him another extension.

"Anyway, how are Fred and Katherine?" Ethan asked, hoping to divert the attention from his condition. At the moment, he needed to think of how he would resolve the issues he might be leaving behind.

Alex was surprised by his question, but he quickly bounced back. "My parents are well. They sent their good wishes for your fast recovery."

Of course, he was glad to hear that. He did not want to leave his family without anyone other than Laura looking after their kids. He was confident that the Duke and Duchess would always be there to guide these young ones until they were ready to be on their own.

But, he did worry about Gerald. He had been on the wrong path for so long that changing his ways would be difficult. But he was hoping that it was still not too late.

"I am glad to hear that," Ethan happily answered. Still, his eyes kept wandering to his wife and his son. "When you visit them, please also send my regards," Ethan told Alex and Dani.

"I am sure they would appreciate hearing that from you once you see them." Alex countered, appearing still hopeful that he would recover from this.

"I am sure they will." He also answered, but he doubted his words.

"Do you mind if I have some time with Gerald?" He knew he was tired and would rather sleep, but he needed to make an effort to talk to his son.

He could tell that his wife, daughter, and even Alex were anxious to talk to him. But he felt it was Gerald who most needed his undivided attention. He was the most lacking his time compared to the rest of them.

"Of course," Laura was the first to answer, standing up and moving toward him. Well, she understood him the most compared to his kids.

She kissed him on the lips before stepping away. "Dani and Alex, come on. Let us leave them for a while." His wife encouraged the couple to go with her.

Dani was reluctant to leave him, but he could tell that she understood him. But Alex's eyes showed him he still did not trust Gerald, even one bit. He understood his son-in-law's concern, but it was the risk he had to take.

Gerald was still his son and would always be a part of him. Now that he was part of his family, he would never forsake him again. It was unfortunate that he would not be there for him for long.

"This is odd." Gerald was the first to break the silence as he stared at him when the others had left the room. "I thought that you would ask me to leave."

Gerald moved closer to the bed, studying him, probably trying to read his intentions. But he would be disappointed because he had no other agenda.

"Well, I need to talk to you first," Ethan answered his son.

He was ready to die because he had already seen that his family would survive without him. But when Gerald came into the picture.

He realized his son was the last missing piece he still needed to fix. He had to glue him into the puzzle so his entire family would finally be complete.

"I am here, so what do you have in mind," Gerald answered him casually as if he was talking to a client rather than his father. But that was only natural since he could not force him to accept him as his father.

"I love you, son." Saying it repeatedly to him would not change the fact that he robbed him of his identity all this time. But he swore he would make up to him until his last breath.

"I wish I could tell you the same thing," Gerald responded with regret. Well, he hoped that was what he read in his eyes before he casually changed it to indifference.

At least, it gave him hope that his son still had a heart. That someday, he still might change for the better. But for now, he understood that it might take more than his proclamation of love to make him see that there was more to life than hatred.

"But if that is all you wish to tell me, I guess we have nothing else to talk about," Gerald spoke again before he could find the words he wanted to say to him.

"No, I want to discuss something with you." He breathily said. He realized that talking was already taking a toll on his remaining energy, but he still had a few things to tell him.

He was glad that Gerald kept silent, just waiting for him to finish. He was both impatient and curious about what he had to say.

"I wish to shout to the world that you are my son. I do." Ethan continued, watching his son's expression that remained stoic. "I wish to tell everyone how much I love you."

He could feel the tears threatening to flow down his cheeks, but he held it as much as he could. "But I am leaving that to you. The decision is yours if you wish to acknowledge me as your father."

Ethan wished he could say some profound words that would convince Gerald that he had a family he could depend on, but no word came into his mind.

At the moment, all he could wish was to have his son in his arms. But when he turned around without saying anything, he knew he had missed that chance.

As he watched his son's back walk out that door, he knew somehow he had failed as a father to him. He would be his one regret he would have to carry to his grave.

Chapter 777: An open book

Lance woke up hopeful that despite his condition, things would get better. But to hear his friend tell him that the only person he wanted to see was gone. That just put a nail in his coffin.

He felt his world go crumbling down on his feet.

"What do you mean gone?" He had to ask again, unable to accept his words.

He wanted to think that he might have misunderstood his friend's meaning. Well, it was what his heart wished to believe.

"You know what I mean. Eida left and had no plan of returning." Evan repeated, probably hoping that he would finally accept the inevitable.

Of course, his brain grasped fully what his friend said. His mind could fully function again. But his heart refused to acknowledge that the woman he loved had left him.

But why? That was unclear. He needed an explanation coming from her.

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"Did she say why she was leaving?" Lance asked his friend, hoping he had some answers.

He was sure that Eida loved him. Despite what she said that night, he could tell she was lying. Words were no match to her actions.

The only fault he made was that he believed her at that time. If only the accident did not happen, he knew he could have salvaged the situation.

He could have convinced her that what they had was real. She did not have to leave him.

"She said she did not love you." Evan indifferently said as he walked closer, looking straight at his face. He stared at his friend's eyes, hoping to see a hint that he was not telling him the truth, but he could not find one.

Still, he refused to believe Eida again. He had to find her, but how when he was confined in this bed, unable to move.

Evan and Amelia. They would help him find her.

"Where did she go?" Lance hoped that Evan might have an idea so that he could talk to her. Make her see that she did not have to leave and that they could still make this work.

"She did not say. She asked that you stay away from her and not try to find her." His friend answered him, but it was not what he wanted to hear.

"No, you are lying," Lance shouted, unable to control himself.

Suddenly, he winced in pain when he tried to move out of his bed, only to fall back on the mattress with a thud.

He did not plan to take his anger with his friend, but Evan sounded like he was not on his side but hers. "Don't you see, she is lying to herself." He mumbled in between his pain. "She loves me." He said defeatedly.

His loud voice probably alerted the guards posted outside as they rushed inside to check on them. A few seconds later, nurses also entered the room.

"Is there a problem here, Sir?" One of the guards asked, looking from him to his friend.

"No, there is no problem." Evan took charge of the situation. "The Prince was just in pain." He added.

Lance finally waved his hands to the guards and the nurses to leave his room. He did not want to see anyone else except Eida. But how?

Then, the last person he wanted to see entered the room just as the other people exited. "What is going on in here?" His father asked as he continued further inside the room, looking from him to Evan questioningly.

"Is this your doing?" Lance turned to his father. His voice was loud enough but not too loud to disturb the people outside, just like earlier.

He groaned again, not only in pain but in his misery, knowing in his heart that his father had something to do with this. Eida did not just stop loving him. His father must have done something to scare her away.

"What did I do?" His father asked innocently, seemingly baffled by his question. But he was not falling for his act.

His father was a good man. He could not deny that. He would do anything to serve his people and do what would be best for their Kingdom.

But it was also his major flaw. He believed that his family, specifically him, would be the best candidate to take the throne. Although he had lived his life serving their Kingdom, he still believed there was more to life than just becoming King.

He could only surmise that his father never approved of Eida for him, driving Amelia down his throat for him to marry because of the false promise of the throne.

"I know you have something to do with Eida leaving me." He voiced his suspicion, not caring if Evan was in the room.

It might even be possible that Evan might be more aware of what was happening around him. He had been unconscious for a while. Many things could have happened during that time.

But he would get to the bottom of this once he was well. He would find Eida and set things straight. He was not going to give up on her.

"Eida left because she knew it was the right thing to do. She did not love you." His father calmly answered him. "She was only using you for her story." He continued, walking straight into the side of his bed to stare at him.

His father did not deny his charge. He did have something to do with what happened to him and Eida. He could see it in his eyes, the contempt in their depths.

"You should be thankful that I discovered it while it is not yet too late." His father persisted, not waiting for him to respond to his accusations about the woman he loved.

"You are lying." He countered, unable to fathom how his father could say those words about Eida. She would never do that to him.

"I am not. You can investigate if you want, but evidence would show that I am telling you the truth." Count Thomas responded to him, standing firm with his words.

"I will do that. Once I am out of this bed, I will find out about the truth." He swore to his father.

"I am only looking out for you and your best interest. I hope you will see that." His father shook his head as if he was disappointed with him for not believing his words.

"I know you always have, but this is my life. You should stop meddling with it." Lance spoke again, desperately imploring his father to understand him.

"Ok, but let me just say this last piece of advice before you shut me out of your life." His father moved forward and held his hand. "I love you, son. It is the only reason I pushed you hard to achieve your dreams."

"But..." His father was about to say more when he paused as he looked into his eyes. "Eida is not the right girl for you. I hope that you will see that. You will discover things about her that might hurt you, and I only want you to prepare for that."

His father did not even flinch at his words. He seemed convinced that he was only looking after him against Eida.

But Lance knew everything he needed to know about her. He doubted he would find anything more about her that would shock him.

Eida's life had always been an open book to him, so he had nothing to worry about if he discovered something new about her.

Chapter 778: Laughing was better

Amelia looked at her friend, wondering what was going through her mind at the moment as she noticed the plane climb to a higher altitude.

Evan had let them borrow his plane and arranged their flight schedule so no one could trace Eida and her whereabouts. He would have come with them, but he still had many unfinished businesses to attend to before he could leave their hometown.

She had no idea how Evan managed to organize everything in just a few hours, but Eida was now flying under a new identity. Based on him, it would be hard for anyone to trace who she was.

"Are you sure about this?" Amelia asked her friend, who silently watched the view outside her window. Luckily, she was barely showing any signs of pregnancy, so she was not experiencing any discomfort from traveling long hours.

At least the plane was full of amenities. So they could fly comfortably. It even had a room at the back where they could rest if needed.

She was used to this comfort, but since she left her father, she had learned to live a somewhat ordinary life. She even flew coach when necessary.

"Yes. It is the right thing to do for myself, my baby, and Lance." Eida answered as her eyes were full of determination.

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She could tell that Eida had herself convinced she was doing this for the good of everyone.

However, she could also see that her friend was lying to herself. Eida could fool everyone else but not her. She had learned everything she needed to know about her friend.

"You know I don't believe that." She countered, unable to contain herself from speaking her mind. "I also think you are only fooling yourself for accepting that crappy excuse."

She was through trying to tread on eggshells around her friend, afraid that she might hurt her feelings. Because as far as she could witness, she was already doing that to herself. She did not need any help from them.

"I don't care if you don't believe me. But it is the truth." Eida insisted, refusing to look at her as she continued to gaze at the clear sky outside.

How she wished that what they felt was as beautiful as the view beyond their windows, but it was worse than having a dark, cloudy sky with a storm brewing on the horizon?

"You know what I think." Amelia unbuckled her seatbelt and moved out of her chair, standing on the aisle just in front of her. "I think you are full of shit."

She placed her two-fisted hands on the side of her waist and faced her friend, not planning to back down. She would point out to her friend that she was making a mistake by doing this.

She believed there was still time. They could turn back and forget about all her plans.

"I think you are so scared to face the truth that you would run away rather than confront Lance about the problem." Amelia vehemently stated, pointing her finger at her.

She could not stand that her friend, who she idolized because of her strength, would suddenly give up the fight. Besides, she gave up Lance because she believed it was their destiny to be together.

"Amelia. You have no idea what you are talking about, so I suggest you sit down and stay quiet." Eida asked her, but Amelia was not through with her.

"Well, too bad for you because we are spending a lot of time on this plane. You will hear whatever I would say even if you don't like it." She told her friend as she buckled herself on the available seat close to her.

Then, she shifted in her seat until she was facing her. "What did the Count tell you? Don't you bother to lie to me because if you haven't noticed, I know him better than you know him?" She said with her eyes narrowing at her friend.

"What he said was only the truth? I will only destroy Lance's life and this baby as well. That is if I would pursue wanting my selfish desire to have Lance in my life." Eida quietly said as her eyes welled up with tears threatening to fall.

Amelia could only imagine the conversation between her friend and the great, almighty Count Wellington. Sadly, the wealthy and powerful people did not usually fight fair.

She could already guess that the Count had all Eida's dirty past dug up, investigated, and even her possible future completely mapped out before her friend.

Somehow, the Count was no different from his father, who would use dirty antics to get what they wanted. Luckily, she had managed to get out of her father's clasp, or she would be suffering the same fate as her friend.

"No!" Amelia adamantly responded. She could not believe that her friend would listen to his lies. "You are more than what happened to you in your past. You should never think that you are no better than the rest of us."

"Stop! Amelia." Her friend finally turned around to look at her. "I know that you mean well. You think I am doing this because I am letting the Count win. But this is more than that."

Eida closed her eyes, wiping the tears with the back of her hands. "I am doing this for myself and my baby more than anything. I know this is what is best for the two of us."

"I know Lance loves me in his way, and I love him. But we are not meant to be. Someday, he would move on, and I will also do that, and everything would be right for all of us." Eida grabbed her hands, squeezing them tightly before her.

"Stop judging me for my decision, but if you could not, I think it would be better if I do this alone." Her friend concluded, giving her no chance to answer.

But what could she say to that? Her friend needed her, and she could never turn her back on her. But her friend was right. Eida was old enough to know what she was doing.

No one could dictate what she needed to do and what would be best for her and her baby. She guessed she should stop criticizing her decision and help her as Evan did.

"Ok. I will stop. But know I will never leave your side even if you keep pushing me away. I will be there for you and this baby." She moved a little closer, leaning in front of her friend.

Then, with one of her hands, she touched her friend's belly, excited to know that she would soon be a godmother. Well, of course, she was not settling for anything less.

"Just promise me one thing." Amelia stared at her friend's eyes, not even blinking for a second.

"What is it?" Eida looked at her with curiosity, probably wondering what she would be asking from her.

"I am going to be this child's godmother, or I swear I will personally take that child from you and deliver her or him to Lance's doorstep." She threatened her.

But something in Amelia's expression made Eida laugh. Soon, Amelia was laughing too.

Well! She wanted to see her smile, but laughing was better.

Chapter 779: A cold heart

She had been in her office most of the morning working on her cases, but now it was time to leave. She checked her watch and realized that Alex would be picking her up soon.

"Jacky, can you come inside for a moment," Dani called her friend and assistant.

Jacky immediately entered the room, looking at her with curiosity as she paced around the room. She placed a few of the files she had already finished signing on the table near her friend.

Then, she took those files that still needed her attention, planning to bring them with her. She arranged to stay at the hospital with her mom and work on her other case in her spare time.

Her heart refused to accept that her father was still not out of danger, as the doctors explained. But her logical mind wanted her to prepare for the worse.

He might seem fine now, but his heart was unstable, and anything could still happen to him. The doctors feared that another unexpected attack could be fatal this time.

"Do you need anything else?" Jacky asked as she took the files ready to be distributed to the other associates. "For what it was worth, I hope your Dad gets better."

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She smiled at her friend, wishing the same thing for her father. But it was now out of their hands. Even the doctor could not do anything about it.

No matter how much money and power they had, it was not enough to guarantee her father's recovery. Even science could not help him. Only a miracle could save him now.

"I hope so, too," Dani said, taking a deep breath as she prepared to leave. "Anyway, if there is an emergency, just call David, and he will reassign my cases to the other associates."

David asked her to go on leave for a few days until her father was better, but she knew she could not just abandon her cases. So, she agreed to a compromise with him.

Besides, she could tell that her boss's hands were full without Evan at his side. She suddenly remembered Lance, who was also in the hospital.

But she was glad to hear from Alex that he was getting better and expected full recovery. Still, it would not be an easy struggle for him to recuperate from that accident.

"Don't worry about anything here. I will handle everything." Jacky assured her as she walked out of the room, carrying the other files.

She was also about to leave, grabbing her bag, but she had to turn back, remembering she had left her phone on the table. When she turned around, Gerald was already standing by the door.

Then, Jacky stood behind him, too late to warn her about his arrival. But she did not mind if he stopped by since she wanted to talk to him.

She was curious about what he said to their Dad because when he left yesterday, her father seemed different. But her Dad kept saying that he was ok.

"I hope I did not catch you at a terrible time," Gerald said as he continued to block her way.

She stared at the man who had quite a few similar features to their Dad if scrutinized closely enough. They might have the same blood, but she wondered if they carried the same heart.

"Well, as you can see, I was supposed to be on my way out." Showing him her things in her hands. "But if this is important, I can give you a few minutes."

In this office, she still considered him the boss. Although she answered directly to her other bosses, David and Evan, Gerald still had a higher position than her.

"This has nothing to do with work but had something to do with Ethan," Gerald told her as he pointed out that it was still just as important.

She had no choice but to turn around and sit on her desk again as he occupied the empty chair before her. Besides, she was interested to hear what he had to say.

Still, it was not lost on her how Gerald had addressed their father. When there were families around, he called him Dad, but when it was just them, he reverted to Ethan.

It suddenly made her wonder if this was just a game to him. Because to her Dad, his acceptance was everything to him. His forgiveness would mean the world to her Dad.

"What is it?" Dani did not want to preempt his words by giving a statement. She wished first to know what he had planned before giving her comment on the situation.

She also wondered what it was between Gerald and her husband. She did feel the tension between them. But Gerald left early, so she did not catch what it was.

Alex seemed to be tight-lipped about it too. Her husband barely mentioned Gerald's name in any of their family conversations. But she hoped she could get to the bottom of this before it became too late for everyone.

"Ethan, I meant our father, asked me to choose whether to tell the world about our relationship," Gerald informed her. "But I decided to keep it within the family for now. I only want to give you a heads up."

He adjusted his seat and made himself comfortable while looking at her. But his eyes seemed to be unsure. Something she rarely saw in him when they were working on a case.

Usually, he had everything sorted out. Mostly, he was in control of his situation. Therefore, finding a hint of hesitation in his eyes seemed extraordinary.

However, as much as she did not want to trust Gerald, he was still now family. She would still wish to give him the benefit of the doubt. She still hoped that he would change for them.

"I could not force you if that is what you wish to do." Dani finally answered her brother. "But I wish you would reconsider that despite whatever you felt about us, we are now your family."

Deep in her heart, she wished she could get through to him. She had no idea if that would even mean anything to this man.

A mafia man raised to have a cold heart.

Chapter 780: Sweet, manipulative, mischievous cupid

"What is bothering you?" A delicate, familiar voice spoke, approaching behind him. "You look like the world is on your shoulders." Then, a gentle hand touched his shoulder.

Of course, he did not need to turn around to know who she was. But he appreciated her concern as always. She had never failed him before, even when they were far apart.

"I thought you were still outside. I did not hear you come in." Evan looked at his grandmother but returned his attention to the view outside.

The balcony was his favorite spot in this apartment. It somehow gave him the freedom of being part of the outside but still being inside the house.

It was where he could think more clearly since he had no obstructions from his view or distractions from other people. Somehow, it usually calmed him down.

"How could you have noticed me when your mind is floating in the air?" Angela moved closer to him, standing beside him on the railings, probably trying to figure out where his eyes were going.

"I guess you are right. I just had too many things going through my mind." He admitted, blowing a big sigh as if that should help him release the tension in his shoulders.

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"I am here if you want to share. Sometimes, talking about it could help." His Grandmama sweetly said, tapping him on his back. "But first, let me prepare you some lunch. You must be starving."

Slowly, Angela walked back inside the apartment, leaving him to contemplate her words. But he could not help but gaze at her retreating back, wondering where her wings were.

Sometimes, he wondered if his great grandparents naming her Grandmama Angela was just a coincidence or did they already see that she would be a real live angel in many of their lives.

"Thanks, Grandmama." Evan casually said. He knew she still heard him as she waved her hands before disappearing to the other side.

First thing first, what was his main issue? Was it Lance who was now demanding to know where Eida went? Was it Ethan who still was on the brink of death? It could also be David, who was starting to express his wish that he returned.

However, his mind insisted there were still some other issues besides that. He just refused to admit it to himself. Why? Because it was hard to face the truth.

"Lunch is ready," Angela shouted from the inside, disrupting him from his musing. He shook his head, trying to dispel his thoughts before facing his grandmother again.

She had a way of reading him like a book. It was hard for him to hide anything from her, especially when she started questioning him. He was a lawyer, but his grandmother was a better litigator.

As always, his grandmother had never lost her touch in the kitchen. No wonder Eida and Amelia loved her. It seemed she put some potion in her cooking that made everyone smile after tasting them.

"Eat up. You are too skinny." Angela reprimanded him as she placed more food on his plate.

He suddenly believed it was better if two women were there. Amelia and Eida managed to get her attention away from him. Now, she had no choice but to pick on him.

"Grandmama, I am slim and fit, not skinny." He tried to explain the difference. "Anyway, David is asking that I return to my job. I am thinking of bringing you home along with me."

He knew, like the other times, she would reject his offer. She never liked leaving this place, saying there was no reason for her to move. Besides, all their memories were here.

He understood that, but he could not come back here either. He never felt that he belonged in this place. He had found a new home where he would grow old and die. But he could not keep flying just to check on her either.

"Ok," Angela spoke up after swallowing her food and sipping her water. Then, she wiped the few drops of liquid that moistened her lips with the table napkin.

He suddenly looked up at her, confused. He stared into his grandmother's eyes, trying to fathom if he had heard her correctly.

But nothing in her eyes suggested that she was joking about what he asked. She looked dead serious as she dropped the napkin on the side of the table, facing him.

"You will come with me. As in permanently." He reiterated his condition. "I mean not just for a vacation but live with me for good."

His grandmother smiled at him. Then, she extended her hand, tapping his hand on the table before pulling it onto her lips. "Just give me a day to settle all the things I will leave behind and pack up my things," Angela told her without reluctance this time.

"Why?" He suddenly asked, unable to understand her sudden change of heart. He was expecting a bit of a fight from her, not this easy surrender.

"First, I am old. It is getting harder to live by myself and lonely. Second, I am sorry for making you fly halfway across the world to see me." Angela patted his hands again.

"Third, I want to see you get married. I hope soon." He was about to object, but his grandmother silenced him by raising her hand. "Wait. I am not through. I know you like Amelia."

"I like her for you. But I am not forcing it if that is not what you want. Still, an old lady could dream." Angela continued with her innocent smile. "Anyway, I know you don't need me anymore."

His grandmother had that far away look that indicated she was thinking of the past. Probably her youth or those times she had spent with his grandfather and his parents.

"I always need you. Not in the same way when I was young but in other ways." He stood up from his seat and hugged her from behind, kissing her on the top of her head.

"But those girls would need me more. I want to be there for them. Do you think that is ok with you?" Angela tilted her head to him, staring into her eyes. "That is my only condition for coming with you."

Well, he was not expecting that. He assumed that after he had helped Eida with her new life, he did not have to see her anymore. That went for Amelia, too.

But apparently, he would still have to see them because of her innocent-looking grandmother, who had a tiny glint in her eyes. He suddenly wondered if his grandmother was purely an angel or a sweet, manipulative, mischievous cupid deep inside.