

Royal Contract 811

Chapter 811: To continue the legacy

Her eyes focused on the papers before her, but her mind was somewhere else at the moment. It had been a hectic day with many plannings to do on top of the workload on her shoulders.

But she welcomed the busy schedule because it stopped her from thinking much about her father. It was not easy when she sat at his office, which he had occupied most of his life.

His absence had continued to haunt her, although she had every belief that it would eventually lessen through time. She just hoped it would be sooner than later.

“Are you ready for this Annual Charity Ball?” A voice by the door asked, making her lift her head from her desk to see a dear friend. “I believe you ask me to come.”

Dani could not help the smile that showed on her lips, always welcoming visitors who could brighten up her day. “Hey, Haley. Come in.” She immediately greeted her friend and gestured for her to join her.

Haley had been a great help in organizing this event. Since she did not have not much experience in such a task, she accepted all the help she could get.

Besides, this event was not just any ordinary party. It was one of the grandest fundraising affairs Ethan used to host yearly. It had supported many charitable institutions and had many benefactors also supporting the cause.

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Everyone in the industry, the high social standings, and the political world wanted to be part of this event.

“I hope so, but thanks, Haley, for all your help. I know I would be lost without you. You and Jacky have made this all possible.” She knew they were still far from over, but she could already guarantee success because of their assistance.

Therefore, she could not mess it up, especially when this was one of the legacies her father had worked hard to build.

Now that it was her turn. She believed she should at least maintain its integrity. At least for her father, she should uphold the standards her father had set for the world to follow.

Many lives were at stake since many depended on the funds raised in this charitable event. Dani knew she could not let her father down on her first act of being his replacement.

“It was Jacky who you should be thanking. That girl is a machine.” Haley praised her future sister-in-law, crediting the task to their friend since both knew Jacky deserved it.

But still, she believed that Haley also had a big part in this preparation, so she deserved the commendation despite what she said.

"Speaking of Jacky, where is she? She is not at her table." Haley asked as she placed a folder on her table, which she would assume was another proposal for the event or new benefactors who would like to partake in the once-a-year opportunity.

"I ask her to do an errand. I don't want her to be here because I want to discuss something with you privately." Dani told her friend as she closed the folder she was working on and devoted her time to her friend.

"Oh! I like secrets." Haley clapped her hands excitedly. "Does this mean that Jacky should not know anything about this?" Of course, that was what Haley would deduce from the situation.

She pulled out an envelope underneath her desk. A plan that she had been working on for a week now. "I need you to help me with this." She walked to her friend and handed her the file. "And yes, Jacky should not be part of this planning."

She knew that Jacky was the best at organizing things. She had proven that time and time again. But not this time in her new project. Dani did not want Jacky involved or near it.

"That is interesting," Haley responded, looking at her full of curiosity. She knew that she and Jacky always worked closely together, so for her not to include her friend in this was intriguing.

Haley started skimming on the papers she gave her. It had everything, up to the tiniest detail she wanted for her new project, but she needed it accomplished soonest.

She preferred that it was ready by the time of the Charity Ball. "Do you think it is possible?" Dani asked her friend, who was still studying the file.

Her friend was not a miracle worker, but she believed Haley could pull this through with her connections. Compared to her, she admitted there were things that she would never be good at, but she was great at delegating.

"Hmmm!" Her friend looked like she was still contemplating the situation as she closed the file before looking at her.

Eventually, her face changed into a wide grin. Then she clapped her hands as if a child who was just given a big Christmas gift but only realized it after it registered in her brain.

"Ok. I can work on this too." Haley finally agreed, taking the file and shoving it in her bag before anyone else saw it. "Give me a few days. Then, I will give you an update."

With that settled, they returned to their actual business of dealing with the problems of the Annual Ball. Organizing such a big event did have issues popping up at the last minute. With almost short of a week, they had to finalize everything.

"So, do you think the decorations would work, or should we scrap it and find a new one?" Dani asked Haley, who had been in charge of the venue.

"Upon my review, I think we should change while we still have a little time," Haley suggested while she agreed.

In her opinion, it was the right thing to do. But since Haley had a better grasp of these things, she would leave it up to her to make the final decision.

"Hey, you started without me." Jacky accused the two of them as she walked into the door of her office, carrying a few more files that she had asked her to do.

"You have already done enough, so we thought we should at least contribute." Dani teased her friend, but honestly, compared to them, Jacky had put on more work on this than them.

She deserved a little break from working too much, carrying most of her load because she believed that as a friend, she should.

But she had enough. She did not like that people were tiptoeing around her, thinking she might break at any minute. She admitted to being in pain from her father's death. And she would continue hurting for a while.

But it did not mean she would break down at every chance she might think about him. But she could not also blame them because love could make people do crazy things and pain something insane.

"Anyway, I saw Sebastian earlier. Do you mind if I give him an invitation?" Jacky asked Dani, who quickly looked at her. "He wished to meet with you, so I told him I would discuss it with you first."

Well, she remembered him. He was a nice guy and would have been perfect for Jacky, but it just was not meant to be. She did not know that they still communicated.

"Of course, set it up so I can see him again and hear what he had to say." Dani excitedly told Jacky.

She believed that the more got involved in this Charity event, the better. But they were already expecting a pack of participants from both the private and public sectors.

"Sure. I will discuss it with your secretary." Jacky informed her as she joined them in discussing the rest of the planning for the event.

"What about your Mom? How is she doing? Would she be joining us in this event?" Haley interrupted them, her eyes landing on a family picture on her desk. It was the three of them when she was a bit younger.

Her mother was the one who usually organized this for her father. If Jacky was great at this, her mother excelled in it. She created many fabulous and exciting Charity Balls over the decades. Something that many talked about for years.

"She is doing great, but I know she is still in pain. So, I did not ask her to do this. But she promised that she would attend to support our family in this event." Dani explained to her friends.

She could tell her mother was going through a tough time, although she did act like she was ok. Still, she did not trust that she could handle such a big task.

She still believed that dealing with an event of this magnitude might consume her with too much grief. It would constantly remind her of her father, who would not be there to join them.

But she had faith, just like her, her mother would be able to pull through. She would eventually accept the loss of her husband and continue to live for herself and their family.

"I know your father and mother would be so proud of you for doing this," Jacky told her, knowing that the Board almost canceled this event, thinking they should not do this with Ethan gone.

But she had fought for it.

She promised she would keep doing what her father had done. It was what had made his company great. It was not always about what he could gain but what he could give.

She remembered how much she hated her father for being a power-hungry, grabbing man, but only to realize that she was wrong about him. Those were lies that his enemies smeared against him.

In truth, he had been the complete opposite. He was not perfect, but he had tried his best to be an honest and generous man. A real-life great father that she would always be proud of and thankful to have in her life.

Now, it was her turn to continue the legacy her father had started.

Chapter 812: A home full of love and happiness

"Angela, what are you doing up there?" Eida shouted, surprised and shocked to see her standing on a stool, trying to reach something in the upper cabinet of the kitchen. "You should not be doing that. You should have called me."

Hurriedly, she stepped closer to her and assisted her down before she fell to the floor and broke her back and neck. She doubted if Angela would survive such a fall in her fragile state.

"Don't be overly dramatic. I can still climb the roof if I want to." Her friend stubbornly said with a sweet smile on her lips as she sat on a chair at the dining table, slightly catching her breath.

How could anyone be mad at this woman when she made it impossible for everyone to do so with her adorable smile? Eida could only shake her head at her and her mischiefs.

Now, she understood why Evan was so crazy about her. You would love her even if you wanted to be mad at her. Anyway, she was just happy she had the chance to know this wonderful lady.

"Anyway, what are you looking for anyway?" Eida asked, hoping she could help. "Let me get it for you." Then, her eyes searched the room. "Where is Bea?" She asked, looking for her nurse and assistant.

"She went to buy a few ingredients for me," Angela answered the mystery of the missing woman. "And I was looking for a baking pan. I think I saw Amelia placed it in there." Pointing to a top cabinet where they kept the most unused kitchenware.

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"I wanted to bake something for you guys before Amelia leaves," Angela added, which explained why she was making a fuss.

She made a mental note to put everything Angela needed on the lower counters and cabinets so she would not need to climb up to reach for anything next time.

She did not want anything to happen to her when no one was looking. She was lucky that she had no work today, or Angela would have been alone. She dreaded what could have happened to her if she did not find her in time.

"I know you have been independent for a long time." She had heard that she had lived alone since Evan had left her. "But we are here to help each other." She reminded her that asking for help was ok. Maybe it was time she also said that to herself.

She reached for the pan and the other things Angela needed, helping her in the kitchen. She might not know anything about cooking, but she could still help if Angela gave her instructions.

Besides, she should learn more about household chores now that she was about to become a mother.

"I know this is not my business, but living alone is difficult. It can be lonesome most of the time. Raising a child, especially on your own, would not be a walk in the park." Angela turned to her, reminding her too that she was not alone.

She believed Angela would know what she was talking about since it was based on her experience when she raised Evan. But she would not be completely alone because she would have her friends to help her.

Although she had to admit there would be some point when it would be just her and her child. Eventually, she could not depend on them forever. She hoped she would be ready by that time.

"I know that. I appreciate that you are here to help us out. At least help me out because I know I will be lost if it was just me, raising this baby." She finally admitted her fear.

She believed she would need guidance from someone who already had been through the same experience. She might have acted tough all her life, living her independent life, but when it came to this baby, she trembled in anxiety and fear of the unknown.

She worried about how she would raise this child. She was afraid that she would not be a good mother and end up messing up her child's life.

"Don't worry. It is why I am here. Besides, it is nice to be needed again." Angela pulled her into a reassuring hug. "You will be alright."

Then, someone clearing her throat interrupted their moment. "Is everything ok here?" Finally, Amelia walked to the kitchen, raising her eyebrows at the two of them.

"Yeah, I am just helping Angela with her baking." Eida quickly answered, finally letting go of Angela. But her friend did not look convinced.

Still, she did not want Amelia to worry about them and cancel her trip because of them. She could already see that her friend was packed up and ready to leave.

"Are you sure the two of you will be fine without me?" Amelia again asked, suddenly hesitating to go.

Amelia's friend called her last night, asking if she could assist in a fundraising event. She usually volunteered to help in such activities, but now she was reluctant to leave them, wondering if they would be ok for a few days without her.

Although Evan was due to arrive on the weekend, Amelia seemed to prefer to watch them. So, she had to remind her that Bea was there to take care of them. It would not be just the two of them.

Besides, she believed that Amelia had already put her life on hold for her. It was time that she took a break and enjoyed doing what she loved to do, which was to help others, not just herself.

"Don't worry about us. We are two big girls. Of course, we are going to be ok." Angela answered as she continued to work on her baking, not at all bothered by her friend's smothering.

Finally, Bea arrived with the recipes Angela needed. She could hear Amelia giving strict instructions for Bea to keep an eye on them while she was away.

Suddenly, she felt like Amelia was the mother hen who was finding it hard to leave her chicks. She could not help but smile at her friend's thoughtfulness.

She was so lucky to have these two landing in her lap, worrying about her. Things had been easier for her because of them.

"Come on, Amelia. We will be just fine. Do what you love to do and save the world from starvation." Eida pushed her friend to the door. She even helped her with her luggage.

"Wait!" Amelia shouted, stopping her. "My flight is still a few hours later. I don't have to leave right away." She complained, halting her from shoving her out of the door.

Honestly, she wanted her to leave immediately before she again changed her mind about going. Anyway, she just hoped she would not worry too much about them because she would need to learn how to care for herself and her baby at some point in time.

"I am sorry, I got carried away," Eida responded with a laugh, which echoed inside the room.

"I can still help Angela with her dish before I leave," Amelia told her, pushing her luggage to the side and walking back to the kitchen, where Angela was laughing with her private nurse.

It seemed that they were talking about something else when they suddenly stopped.

"What are you two laughing about?" Amelia asked Angela, who had a big grin on her face. Then, she turned her head to Bea, who remained silent, afraid to answer.

"You," Angela tilted her face to stare at Amelia, looking away from what she was mixing, and admitted without hesitation.

But her smile did not vanish from her lips as if she found the situation amusing.

"Why?" Eida asked, curious about what was happening with Angela. "What is so funny?" Bea was still chuckling on the side as if they had some internal joke they were not sharing.

"We all know Amelia doesn't want to leave. It had nothing to do with us. But I bet it had something to do with someone visiting on the weekend." Angela teased her friend, which earned her a glare.

"Admit it. You are looking forward to Evan's weekly visit. Now, you are afraid that you will miss him." Angela continued teasing her.

“No, I am not. I could not care if Evan comes here or not.” Amelia quickly denied Angela’s taunting. “I am just concerned that you two would break your backs without me to stop you.”

In truth, Amelia had a point, but Angela seemed adamant about taunting her so she would leave and would not worry about them. At least that was what she thought was happening.

But watching the scene before her, it was funny to see them bickering like this. Somehow, it made the house alive and full of chaos. She knew it was nothing but a friendly bantering as they continued to bake, but she was enjoying it nonetheless.

Suddenly, she realized something. She wanted this for her child. She wished for her to grow up in this house, which was lively, noisy, and full of life.

She hoped she could give her unborn child not just a roof over her head but a home full of love and happiness, enough to fill her with whatever was lacking in her life.

Chapter 813: As a friend or a loyal subordinate

Visiting his cousin was heartwrenching. Seeing him in agony was not easy, knowing how much he cared about his physical well-being and how cautious and responsible he always was as a driver.

It was unfair that he should suffer this way, but Alex was still thankful that he was at least alive and on his way to recovery. Soon, he would be back on his feet, but he doubted he would ever be the same.

More than the physical pain, he found his cousin tortured mentally and emotionally because a woman he loved had left him, watching Lance push himself to his limit to walk again.

Alex had that experience before, and it was not easy to recover from such pain. But Lance’s situation was far worse than his since the woman he loved left without even saying goodbye, no explanation, but a truckload of questions.

In his case, he was lucky he met Dani. She helped him move on with his life. He wondered if Lance would be fortunate to have a second chance for happiness. He hoped.

“A few more.” Jake encouraged him to move his feet, raising his legs so the muscles would not grow stiff and the wounds would heal faster.

But Lance could only take so much. Alex could see the excruciating pain in his expression with every movement he made, but he needed to endure the pain to recover faster.

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“I think we are good for the day.” Jake finally announced, releasing his friend from his physical workout.

Slowly, Lance returned to his wheelchair, exhaustion evident in his stance. Alex believed that whatever his cousin had undergone. It was more tiring in comparison to running a hundred-meter dash.

“Thanks, Jake,” Lance uttered, returning to his senses as he took several deep breaths to relax his body. “I am sorry if I am a bit rough today.”

“That is ok, man. I know it is not easy to be in your situation.” Jake tapped him on the shoulder before facing him. “He is all yours.” Jake turned to him and shook his hand before leaving the room.

"Dani, send her love and her wishes for your full recovery. She would have come with me. But she is a bit busy with the Charity Ball." Alex told him as he moved closer to him.

She would have come with him to visit, but her fundraising event took most of her time. But she promised to join him next time.

"I am sorry that you have to witness that." Lance faced him, turning the wheel of his chair in his direction. "It is just so frustrating to be stuck in this position. But tell Dani, thanks. I do miss her and Jacky."

Alex could not even imagine what Lance was going through. He was hospitalized back then, but not as bad as his condition.

"I just want to see you back on your feet." Alex moved closer and sat on a nearby chair, pouring two glasses of water and handing one to his cousin.

He took the other one and drank almost half of it, feeling the need to freshen up after his long flight. When he arrived, he went straight ahead to visit him.

"Me too," Lance answered after drinking the water. "Judging from the look on your face, you did not have any luck." His cousin went straight to the point as his eyes studied his expression.

Then, he looked down at his feet. Anger and disappointment covered his face. He could tell his cousin was counting on him to give him something to look forward to, but he also failed him.

He wished he had answers for him, but unfortunately, he had no good news to tell him. When Lance called him and asked to look for the reporter, he immediately hired his best investigators.

"I am afraid we have no lead until now. Eida must have found a way to change her name. Whoever assisted her knew how to hide her." Alex explained to his cousin, who looked like he was ready to explode.

It was the only possible reason why no one could find her. If she had used her social number, passport, bank accounts, and other credentials, she would show up somehow in the system.

But she seemed to have just vanished into thin air. The intriguing part was when they searched her name in the government database. A different person showed up.

It also told them that the person was already deceased. The bank accounts had been closed. Based on the records, it had been years since it had the last transaction.

"I need to get out of this chair and find her." Lance looked quite desperate, but he could not blame him. "I need to find her."

Someone he loved just disappeared as if she did not exist. Millions of scenarios must be playing on his mind at the moment. But there was nothing else he could do but try his best to help him. But at the moment, he had no answers.

"I understand how you feel, Lance." Alex moved closer to his cousin, trying to comfort him as he struggled to stand up.

If he was reluctant to feel the pain earlier, now he seemed not to care as he pushed himself out of the chair. However, his muscles were not yet strong enough, as Jake had said earlier.

It still needed time to heal, so Lance fell, unable to carry his weight. But fortunately, he was there to catch him, putting him back in his chair.

"Nobody vanishes like that," Lance uttered, his voice full of anguish. "I need you to find her. I need to know that she is safe."

His heart wished there was more he could do as he watched his cousin break down and cry. It was the first time he had seen him this way.

"I promise. I am doing everything I can to find Eida." He hoped he could deliver on that promise, seeing that it was the only thing pushing his cousin to get better.

The hope Lance might still find her and get her back safely into his arms. Alex knew this feeling. Every day that he was away from his wife. All he wanted to do was go home and be with her again.

Eventually, Lance calmed down. But Alex was glad that he was able to release his pent-up feelings. He must have bottled it up since the accident, not having anyone to share it with other than him.

The Count, Lance's father, was not exactly the kind of man who would accept any form of weakness. He always believed in strength, wealth, power, and position in the elite society.

"What about the Kingdom? Are you ready to reign as the new heir?" He knew Lance did not want to talk about it. But it was a topic that he needed to discuss with him.

It was also one of the reasons why he flew here. He did not want his cousin to feel obligated to take the throne because he declined it.

Truthfully, he wanted Lance to be King because he believed no one else deserved it more than him. But if his heart was not in the right place, he was afraid Lance might not become an effective leader of their land.

"I always wanted to be King if you will not take it. I know that I can rule it better than Edward or Philip can. But since meeting Eida, my priorities have changed." Lance confided in him, appearing to be glad that he was there.

It had been a while since they talked seriously. Maybe far too long. Alex was also glad he made this trip and had a chance to have a meaningful conversation with his cousin.

"I only want to be with her. I knew that once I married her, the Council would disqualify me from the position since she did not come from a reputable lineage." Lance recounted his plans.

"Yes, I am quite aware of that," Remembering his same dilemma when the Council was forcing him to marry from a list.

"But I don't care about the Council. Or where she came from because I only want to be with her. I love her." Lance continued as if that was the only thing that mattered to him at the moment.

"I only want you to think of what would be best for you. I know what would be best for our people. That is you." Alex believed that he would not want anyone else to be his King.

But then again, he did not want to force Lance if his heart was not in the right place. "But I still wish you will choose from what you think is what you want." Alex gave him the same advice that his father gave him.

"What I want is Eida?" Lance said without hesitation.

But Alex knew Lance was still not thinking with his right mind. He hoped, in time, he would decide according to what he believed would be best for him.

"But what if you never see her again?" He knew it was the question Lance never wanted to hear. But it was a possibility that he also needed to accept. "I think you should also consider that."

He never wished to be the bearer of horrible news, but he did not want his cousin to waste his time searching for someone who had no wish to be found again.

He never met the girl, only heard stories about her. He also discovered those accusations made by the Count. It could be true, or the Count planted those evidence.

But it did not matter what the truth was. But the fact was, Eida was gone. The possibility of finding her was near impossible. But he still left the decision to Lance once his mind had cleared.

Whatever Lance would choose, he would be there to support him, either as a friend or a loyal subordinate.

Chapter 814: Not just a kingdom but a home

As her eyes stared at all the imposing columns, the dominating walls, and the massive chandeliers that hung over the magnificent ceilings, she could not help but feel in awe of her surrounding.

It was perfect for the Charity Ball. The one she had been organizing for weeks. A fundraising activity to help many people in need, not only in their community, by raising awareness and money. But hopefully in many more other places too.

Then, a thought came to her mind as she saw the double doors to the ballroom open wide, revealing the throne room. Indeed, it was massive and grandeur. One of the best rooms she had seen before in her entire life.

But it was not what bothered her. Something else crossed her mind. Why was she here?

What if Alex decided to take the crown? What if they had convinced him that he was still the rightful heir? Then, it would force her to move to this place and be their queen, sitting beside her king.

Did she want to be someone who just sat around and did nothing but hold her husband's hand while he ruled the land? But her father said she was as capable as her husband in ruling her kingdom.

"What about what I want?" She asked, suddenly confused about why she was all alone in the middle of the large floor with a bright light focused only on her and the massive throne on the stage.

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The rest of her surroundings was just a blur as her vision only saw darkness around her. Where was everybody? She asked, seeing and hearing nothing around her.

"Where are you, Alex?" She kept looking at the throne, dreading that her husband would suddenly appear sitting on it, wearing a shiny golden crown with gemstones that dated for centuries.

A family heirloom that passed to several generations from one king to another. An object which symbolized leadership, power, and commitment to their people.

"But you already committed your life to me. You said I will be your queen in our home, not this kingdom." She mumbled in the air, reminding her husband never to take the responsibility that was not his in the first place.

Then, all the lights turned off, blinding her in the darkness. She struggled in the dark, hoping to find her way into the light. But she could still see nothing.

Then, she heard his voice. So, soft and gentle like he was whispering in her ears, waking her up. "Open your eyes, my Princess." He called to her. "This is not your world."

She wanted to understand what was happening, but the words only repeated a couple more times until the voice faded. She was alone again.

"Don't leave me, Dad." She finally shouted, gripping him in the darkness, but all she felt was the air around her. She was alone as her eyes fluttered open, revealing an empty bed beside her.

It did not feel like a dream, but it was neither a nightmare as she stared at the ceiling, trying to analyze her weird vision. Was she manifesting some fear because Alex was not here?

Slowly, she rose from the bed, sliding off and standing on her feet. She knew that returning to sleep would be challenging, especially when Alex was not around to comfort her.

Her dream did not manage to shake her. However, it made her think about it. She moved closer to the balcony, wanting to feel the fresh breeze, but it was too cold to step out of the open air.

Her eyes settled to look at the billboards littering the skylines, the bright lights from the tall skyscrapers illuminating the entire city. Permanently, they had replaced the moon and the stars in the night sky.

If she could see the street, she would see that people and cars were still busy moving on the city streets despite it being in the odd hours of the night.

"I miss you so much, Dad," Dani uttered, remembering that his voice woke her up. The first man who had believed in her even if she did not believe in herself. "Yes, that is you, Dad."

She uttered, letting the air in her lips touch the glass before her, forming some moisture in them from the cold temperature outside.

Suddenly, she drew two curved lines that intersected in the middle through the mist on the glass window. It formed a heart that showed how much she loved her father.

He did not answer, but she already knew what his response would be. He loved her so much too. That was more than enough for her.

Then, she grabbed her phone from the nightstand, ready to call the other person she wanted to hear from, even if it was the middle of the night or early morning.

"Hey!" She quickly uttered when the line connected. She moved to the chair next to the window and sat, making herself comfortable.

"Is everything ok?" He quickly asked, concern already notable in his voice. "Are you alright?"

She could not blame him for asking that, seeing that he was probably asleep. Still, she just wanted to hear his voice, even if they were miles apart.

It was very seldom that she had slept on that bed without him by her side. It was one of those nights that she missed him dearly.

"Yeah, I am fine. I just had an odd dream that woke me up. But no need to worry. It was not a nightmare." She promised him, knowing that he might worry about her.

It was the last thing she wished, knowing that he was not there to have fun but helping with his family's issues. She would have joined him, but she had her crisis to deal with at the moment.

But what was about the dream that had her troubled? She did say that she was willing to stand by him with every decision he made. Why was she suddenly dreading that he would accept the kingdom handed to him on a silver platter?

"That is good to hear, but it still bothered you. Do you wish to share it with me?" She could hear the breathy air that escaped his lips. She would guess he probably yawned, trying to wake himself up from his sleepy state.

"I think my dream could wait till you return home. I already feel sleepy just hearing your voice." Honestly, she was not lying.

Although the dream had bothered her, just knowing he was there, hearing his calming voice was enough to make her relax and believe that he was only sitting next to her.

"What about I tell you a story while you lie down and we both fell asleep." Alex proposed as another yawn escaped his lips.

She could only surmise that he had been busy and as exhausted as she was.

Maybe his suggestion was worth the shot. Anyway, what would they lose?

"Ok. Just let me return to the bed." She told him, cradling the phone between her neck and shoulders as she let the robe slide down her shoulder and off her body.

Then, she returned under the blankets, letting the pillows support her head, and talked to her husband again for their storytelling time.

"Ready." He asked as he hummed slightly on the phone as if thinking of the story he would tell.

Suddenly, her mind remembered her father, who would read her some bedtime stories to make her sleep. But there were times that he would change the story written in those fairy tales.

"It is kinda getting boring telling the same stories, over and over again." Ethan would tell her, and then a new tale would be born. She smiled at the thought of her father, remembering him very fondly.

"Ok. So, what tale do you have in mind?" She asked him, yawning too, already feeling tiredness in her eyes.

"Well, let me see." He partially cleared his throat before continuing. "A prince fell in love with a commoner. A forbidden relationship not condoned in the kingdom." He started.

She listened attentively at first, finding the story interesting, but soon her mind drifted off, thinking of her dream again. She kept asking herself what was about it that had her confused.

But, the lull of his voice and her exhaustion had finally worked their magic as her eyes closed, slowly making her float to a deep slumber.

But before her mind could completely shut down, something clicked. As if an idea formed and answered her many questions. It was not that she did not want to rule with her husband.

She loved working with him or simply supporting him with what he did and his plans. However, she realized one thing though. She did not want to rule anywhere else but in this place.

This city was her home, the only place she wished to stay, to build a family and raise their kids.

"I love you, Alex." Her voice floated in the air, hoping it had reached his ears.

"I love you too, Dani." His voice assured her that he heard her loud and clear. It was what made their relationship great. They were in sync with each other.

In addition to that, she knew Alex also shared the same feeling as her. It was the reason he never wanted to be king in their land in the first place. Because her husband also fell in love with this place.

It was called the city that never slept for a reason.

Because it made their blood boil, exciting them to no end, providing them opportunities at all hours of the day and night. It was a place that was alive not only in their hearts but through their soul.

This brightly lit city was not just a kingdom but a home.

Chapter 815: A rare chance encounter

Her eyes gazed at the window outside. Everything seemed the same, but she knew the place was different from where she came from a few moments ago.

She had been in and out of this place several times before. But she had never been comfortable staying here for longer than a few days. Maybe because staying in a hotel was not a place she could call home.

"Hey, Amelia. It is so nice to see you again." Her friend greeted her immediately as soon as her foot touched the solid ground.

Her friend had insisted on fetching her personally at the private airport even when she clearly stated that she could manage to drive herself to her hotel.

However, she was still glad to see a familiar and friendly face in a place where she hardly knew many people. Anyway, it was nice to be back doing what she loved the most, helping people.

“Hi! Haley,” Amelia responded with an enthusiastic smile. “I am also happy to see you.” Hugging her friend. “But you did not have to go through all this trouble.” As she watched the airport personnel load her luggage into her trunk.

She could have taken a car rental or a taxi to the hotel where she would be staying. Honestly, she did not have to fly in a private jet.

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She was used to flying economy or business class. She was not picky with food or her mode of transportation. As long as she could reach point B from point A, she was ok with that. But her friend would not have it any other way.

“Of course, I do.” Her friend answered, grabbing her arms to guide her to the passenger seat before going to the other side of the car.

They had met in one of the charity events she had organized and had kept in touch since then. Although not as often as they would like, they still managed to update each other even once in a while.

For the last few weeks, her friend had called her about this event, but she could not say yes back then, knowing that she still had other responsibilities with Eida and Angela.

But Eida learned about this event and convinced her to take it. They insisted that they would be fine without her. Now, here she was.

“It is the least I can do in exchange for your help,” Haley explained as she drove the car out of the tarmac and into the street.

After a while, they entered the city, where Haley had to maneuver her way in the slightly heavy traffic. She remembered this place and the same scene, although she could not say she missed it.

In truth, she did not form any lasting memory in this place that would make her remember being here and wanting to return. She would not say her experience here did not leave a lasting effect on her, neither good nor bad.

Maybe this time, it would be different since this was a charity event that always made history every year. This time, she would be a part of it with her friends. They would be making history.

Thanks to Haley and her friends who had sought out her help. She might finally have something to tell her future kids about how she had been part of history in this place. Not that she had not made any mark in the world. But nothing in this place. Something that would want her to remember and keep coming back for more.

“But I am not asking anything in return for my help.” Amelia countered, not thrilled that her friend was giving her extra special treatment.

She usually volunteered in this event, not asking for anything as payment. She had more than enough to live comfortably in this world. And she did not desire much luxury, so she did not need to earn at all.

All she wanted was change. If she could affect someone positively, it was more than enough achievement for her. If she could make a man a better person, she would die contented with how she had lived her life.

“Precisely. That is why I need to do this.” Her friend blurted out as if that should answer her unspoken question. “But I heard that you took a long vacation.” Haley looked at her, changing the topic of conversation, surprised by this news.

She could not blame her when she hardly took an absence from her charitable work, not even to visit her father. So, a long vacation would sound odd for someone like her.

“I did, and I am still on vacation,” Amelia told her friend, sitting comfortably in the car while waiting for the traffic to ease up.

Her eyes studied the street, figuring out what had changed since she was last here. But she could hardly remember anything. Maybe nothing or everything. She could not tell.

But maybe it was time she explored what this city had to offer than wait for something to happen. Eida was right about her. She was too afraid to try something new that she never knew what she was missing.

“Then, we are lucky that you came to put a hold on your relaxation to help us.” Haley smiled at her but banged her hands on the steering wheel, clearly frustrated with the traffic.

She did not correct her friend about her assumption that she was on a real vacation. But spending time with Angela and Eida had been fun.

In some way, these last few weeks had been relaxing indeed. Maybe except for the part that she had to see him on the weekends.

“One thing I hate about this place is the traffic, but I love this city,” Haley admitted as her eyes searched for another street to avoid the build-up ahead. “You think a wealthy city like this could at least fix their traffic problems.”

She could only agree with that, also not liking that they were in the middle of the street, stuck in traffic, wasting precious time they could have used to do good work.

“I have heard that you are finally good with your brother.” News in the grapevine was fast in their world.

Every tiny detail could suddenly blow up out of proportion once the spotlight focused on a person. Lately, the focus was on his brother, who was about to get wed.

“Well, finally, he acknowledges my presence. Thankfully, he is marrying a wonderful lady and not some bitch. You will like her once you meet her.” Haley expressed her excitement about the event later.

She would dine with the organizers as a meet and greet and discuss the final arrangements. The event was just a couple of nights away. They wished it to be perfect.

She could not blame them since they had large shoes to fill. Their previous predecessor, the great Ethan Hamilton, and his wife had truly set the bar high last year.

“Will Ms. Laura Hamilton be joining us tonight?” She asked, knowing that she was one of the people she idolized.

She had met Laura several times before, but it had been a while since she had talked to her. She would have come to Ethan’s funeral, but she had been busy with the situation between Lance and Eida.

Suddenly, she wondered what was happening to Lance. The last news from what Evan said, Lance had a hard time recovering from losing Eida. But his physical recovery was doing well.

She made a mental note to visit her friend when things slowly settled down. She could not risk him finding Eida in her hiding place because she had been reckless and had led him to her.

She did not want to break her promise to Eida, even if Lance was also her friend. She believed that Lance would survive this, but Eida and her child might not. Eida needed her support more.

“I am not entirely sure. But Laura pops up from now and then to help.” Haley said as she finally turned on more moderate traffic towards their destination.

She asked her friend to drop her off at the hotel, hoping she could rest for a few hours before dinner. It was not easy to travel even if she had been used to it.

“I hope I can see her too.” Amelia could only imagine the pain of losing someone she loved. It must be terrible.

Losing Lance was painful enough for her, and he was not even hers, to begin with, but to let go of someone she loved forever. That must be hard to accept. Then, her mind started thinking of him.

Suddenly, she wondered if she would bump into him, knowing he was staying in this city. She was just not aware of where. Well, she was not interested in every detail of his life. Where he lived was not her business?

She was happy that Evan would not be here during the weekend because he would visit his grandmother. She would not have to constantly worry about bumping into him in this part of the world.

At least that was what she wanted to tell herself.

But honestly, it did not look like she was looking forward to that as her eyes unconsciously started scanning the place. In truth, she hoped to get a glimpse of the man she did not wish to see. Either, on the street, in the hotel lobby, or anywhere her eyes landed.

Unfortunately, the city was too vast, and the world was too big for a rare chance encounter with the man she longed to see.

Chapter 816: Danger signs

Haley was the first to arrive at the hotel, where the Charity event would transpire. Her friend, Dani, had given her the responsibility of dealing with some of the final touches for the event.

Now, she had to guarantee everything would go without a hitch. “Thank you for going through the plans with me.” She shook the hand of the manager of the hotel as they finished up their meeting.

So far, everything seemed to be going according to her plans as the manager excused himself to attend to his other responsibilities. Now, all that was left was to wait for the other guests to arrive in a few minutes.

"Ms. Rosley. I hope you still remember me, Gerald Brown." A man walked to her table and reintroduced himself. "I am a friend of Daniella Hamilton."

Of course, she remembered him. Yes, she recalled that Dani had introduced them back then. A man like him was hard to forget. Besides, he was featured a few times in the news due to his contribution to the community.

He was not a celebrity. But he had earned a spot in the limelight a few times. Honestly, he had garnered her interest a few of those times.

"Hello, Mr. Brown. It is nice to meet you again." She greeted in return as she looked up to see his face. She accepted the hand that he offered and shook it firmly.

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She had noticed him earlier when he entered the establishment. Many women did turn their heads at him, not because he was famous, but because he had this aura around him.

"You can call me Gerald. I hope you would not mind if I call you Haley." The man said as he continued to stand before her. "I hope I am not interrupting anything."

"No, you are not. I am just waiting for my guests." She responded as her eyes landed on his face. "Of course, you can call me Haley." Suddenly, finding him fascinating.

Frankly, she thought he was hot even before, but that was because he did look great in his suit, showing off his well-built physique. His face was not cute, but manly handsome with its square jaw and subtle beard darkening his chin.

He had this presence of danger around him, a sort of a bad boy image. It was probably because of the tattoo on his skin. She noticed it at the back of his neck, above the collar, and at his wrist.

She could only wonder what else was hiding underneath his clothes. But that was a thought she did not like to entertain as she focused on her task.

"I heard that you are helping out in the Annual Hamilton Charity Ball." He continued as his eyes appeared to be studying her face.

"Yes, I am. Do you wish to participate in any way in our cause?" Haley excitedly asked, but a little awkward as his eyes never left hers.

She welcomed anyone who wished to volunteer for the event's success, whether by joining them in the organizing, donating to one of their fundraising events, or both. Every help counted.

"Honestly, I am thinking about it," Gerald answered as his lips curved into a wide grin. "Do you think I can still help?"

"Of course. Why don't you join us tonight so we can talk more about it?" She offered the seat beside her, thrilled that she could encourage another soul to help with their fundraising event.

"As much as I want to, I have to decline. I already have a meeting going on over there. I just thought of dropping by for a second for a quick chat." Gerald excused himself, pointing to a group of gentlemen sitting on the other side of the room.

"Oh, that is too bad, but I am sure we can make another arrangement so we can discuss it further." Haley offered, feeling a little disappointed.

She was sure that a man like him, with his reputation and influence in the community, could bring a lot of help to the event.

"I am available for a late drink if you are up for it. I just had to finish with my clients. Then, I am free." Gerald suggested as his gaze focused on her face and ended on her eyes.

Something about his eyes excited her. The way he had looked at her sent chills in her bones. But that was normal when a hot-looking man seemed to take an interest in her. At least, that was what she was telling herself.

But it did not mean he was interested in her or she was with him. It was just a normal body reaction as far as she was concerned. This interaction was just like a business deal but for a good cause.

"What about tomorrow around lunch, my treat?" She countered. "I am not sure with the time we will finish here, and it might be too late." She told him, making an excuse, doubtful that a late night out with him was a good idea.

"You see, I will be out of town early in the morning and probably be back the next day. Tonight might be the only time I can discuss this with you." Gerald looked at her looking disappointed too.

"I..." She was about to decline the offer, but he interrupted her.

"What about I give you my card and if you think you still have time. Just give me a call." He took his wallet out and pulled out a small piece of cardboard, handing it to her.

"Well, let me see. But I am not making any promises." She usually did not go out with men for a drink.

A dinner date was ok, and a late night cap afterward, meaning a drink or a coffee, not necessarily a space on her bed. She did not sleep around, preferring meaningful relationships over sex.

Not that she assumed that he was interested in her in that way. After all, he only invited her because of this fundraising event. It was not a date, like a romantic date.

"I assure you, I don't bite." He jokingly said, probably seeing the hesitation in her, giving her a boyish grin that probably had girls swooning around him.

She could not tell if he was seriously joking to lighten the mood or if that was some sexual innuendo, promising her something more.

But truthfully, his words had her heart beating wildly in her chest. Or maybe it was the smile. Suddenly, she wondered if she was attracted to him for real.

Her mind suddenly sounded alarming bells in her head, warning her that this gorgeous man before her had danger signs all over him.

Chapter 817: A hook-up for a night

Her eyes roamed around the numerous shops, restaurants, and other small establishments scattered around the place. Traffic seemed to crowd the street with cars honking, impatient to get on their way.

Several people walked on the pavement, probably on their way to work, home, or somewhere they had to be. She found herself among them, trekking the busy sidewalk, rushing on the unfamiliar street to meet a friend.

Until.

She was lost, wandering around the place, circling back and forth but only to end up in the same spot where she started. Where was she going?

“Amelia.” A familiar voice called to her. When she turned around, there he was, staring at her.

What was he doing here? He was not supposed to be here.

She was confused. She searched her mind for an explanation, closing her eyes for a second. But when she opened them again, she was now in a large room, crowded with people in beautiful gowns and black tuxedos.

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What was going on? Then, she remembered something.

Of course, she was attending the party as her eyes looked down at the beautiful gown she wore.

When her eyes roamed around the room, they landed on a pair of eyes staring at her.

There he was again. But in an instant, he vanished.

Suddenly, like magic, he stood before her, holding her hand, swirling her in time with the beat of the soft music. He was dancing with her in the middle of the ballroom while everybody watched them.

“What are you doing here?” She asked while her body followed his lead, letting him control the tempo of their movement.

“I am here because you wish me to be here, Amelia.” He softly said her name. She could feel her heart beating wildly in her chest upon hearing his voice, feeling his body against hers.

She did. She unconsciously wanted this man to be present with her in this unfamiliar place, building memories together. Maybe if she could not have him in the real world, at least in her fantasy, she could have him.

Somehow, she never wanted this night to end. Or whatever this was. Then, she pushed herself on her toes when the music finally ended, planting a soft kiss on his lips.

In return, he took charge of the kiss, covering her lips with his as his hands began exploring her body. She moaned loudly, feeling the burning desire deep inside her, wanting it to be satisfied.

Thud!

A loud sound echoed around her, but the pain made her realize it was her.

“Ouch!” Instinctively, her hands touched her back after feeling the pain from the impact of falling from the bed and landing on the carpeted floor.

She gradually opened her eyes, realizing that it was all a dream. But that was not all she had discovered or finally accepted. She could not deny, not anymore, how much she wanted that man.

He had haunted her dreams at night and continued to do so even in her waking hours. She could not stop thinking about him no matter how much she had tried.

“I am tired.” She mumbled.

She was tired of fighting her feelings for him, exhausted of denying how much his presence affected her. She wanted him, and that was her fact.

But should she settle for a one-night stand or a short affair with him? Should she be happy to have a few moments with him rather than not having him altogether?

But is it worth risking her heart, hoping he might change his views about wanting a relationship with her?

Was it better to feel the pain of losing him someday instead of just watching him and doing nothing now?

But her musing abruptly stopped as her phone rang, filling the air with its shrilling sound. “Where are you, Amelia?” Her friend shrieked at the phone, making her look at it as if she was still dreaming.

But when she saw the time, she knew she was back in the real world. “I am sorry, Haley. I think I overslept.” She shook her head to clear her mind. “I will just get dressed and be right down.”

Fortunately, she stayed at the same hotel where the event would happen. She did not have to go through traffic to reach her destination.

She would be a few minutes late, so she was not worried. Her friend was only exaggerating, probably feeling the pressure of organizing such a big event. But she was confident that they could manage this event just fine.

She had done countless of these events. Therefore, this was just a piece of cake. But of course, the success of this event would all depend on the cooperation of everyone involved.

In a few minutes, she was greeting her friend, Haley. Then her friend introduced her to the people who would be working with them. It would take time before she could memorize their names, but she was good at faces.

“Are we ready to work on these finishing touches?” She asked the entire group, but she noticed that her friend was slightly off when she failed to answer with the group.

But everyone else seemed enthusiastic about their current progress. There were a few glitches that still needed fixing, but it was not something that should cause alarm.

On the other hand, her friend seemed to be somewhere else. She could account for her absentmindedness to the stress of dealing with this event, but she could also consider that she had another thing bothering her.

"Are you..." Before she could question her friend, asking her about what seemed to be her problem, her eyes fixated on a man in a suit, recognizing him undoubtedly.

He walked straight to the other end, not looking in her direction. But despite not seeing his entire face, she would recognize him even by looking at his back.

Moreover, she also knew her eyes were not deceiving her as she followed him. She believed, without a doubt, that he was in the same room as her and not just part of her dream.

She watched him stop at a table, almost hidden from her view. But before he disappeared, a woman stood up and hugged him, kissing him on both cheeks.

"That could be a friend." She mumbled, reassuring herself, knowing the girl could not be related to him because he was an only child. He had not much of a family except for Angela.

But what if he was here for a date as her mind suddenly insisted. She checked her watch for the time, and it was not that late for a dinner date and a late nightcap.

"What did you say?" Her friend must have heard her, but her mind must be busy with something else than processing what she said.

"Nothing." She responded. "I just said that I think we are all good here." She could adjourn the meeting early since there was nothing much more to discuss.

"Then, I guess we can now conclude this meeting," Haley announced to every volunteer and guest who attended the gathering. "Enjoy your remaining night." She told them before facing her.

"I have to leave. What about you? Are you going back to your room?" Haley asked her as she grabbed her bag and checked her phone.

"I think I am going back to my room to get some more rest," Amelia told her friend as she followed her at the exit. "I will see you tomorrow." She faced her friend since they still had a few things to discuss before the big day.

"Yeah, I will see you then." Haley kissed her before proceeding to the exit of the hotel while she turned one last time to stare at the far side of the room.

Her eyes landed again on the man and the girl sitting before him. It was clear that they were laughing and enjoying their dinner as she watched them from her hiding place, just beyond the window at the exit.

Amelia could only wonder who the girl was. But she doubted if they had a relationship. Then, a thought occurred to her.

Of course, she was not jealous. Why would she envy that girl when she knew they could not have anything more than just sex.

Suddenly, she could not help it. She tried to imagine herself in her shoes. Could she be like her, a hook-up for a night?

Chapter 818: Living a double life

She felt guilty as she said goodbye to her friend and rushed to her car. She knew she dumped most of her work on her since she had been slightly distracted during the dinner meeting.

In her defense, she was only thinking of the fundraising as she thought of him. It would be a loss if she missed the opportunity to get his assistance.

“Should I call?” She muttered under her breath, still uncertain.

She stared at the card she took from her pocket as she sat in her car. She debated if she should call him and take his offer for a late drink or go home and forget about him.

It was not like he was a serial killer. He used to be Dani’s boss. A very reputable man and highly regarded by this community. Besides, this was for a good cause.

“A drink with him would not be that bad.” She concluded as her fingers started dialing his number.

He must have been expecting her call, or it was fortunate that he had his phone in his hand because the line connected immediately.

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She noticed him finished his meeting and left the restaurant earlier than her. He could be anywhere by now or at home resting. She wondered if he was still available for tonight. But he did say to call him.

“Hi, this is Haley Rosley.” She quickly introduced herself. She could not understand why she suddenly felt so nervous. Then, her mind reminded her that he could still be a dangerous man.

She barely knew anything about him for her to go out with him this late at night. He was still a stranger as far as she was concerned. She made a quick mental note to search for him on the internet for more information.

She could ask Dani, but that would seem like too much background check. Besides, she did not want her friend to think she was interested in him, remembering that Dani had been bugging her about getting a love life.

“Hello, Haley.” He quickly greeted her but did not say more as he waited for her to tell him why she called.

“I was wondering if you are still available for that drink. I know it is a bit late. But I would like to discuss the Charity Ball with you.” Haley explained to him the reason for her call.

There were only a few seconds of silence before he answered her. “Sure, I would love to meet with you and discuss this further.” She could hear a slight hint of excitement in his voice, which she attributed to his willingness to participate in this endeavor.

“That is great.” She answered with equal enthusiasm, hoping that this night would be fruitful.

"Where will you like to meet, or will you prefer I pick you up in your place?" He offered, giving her a choice.

She thought about it, but most of the bars she knew might be closing soon, so it would not be advisable to go there. But she was not at home, so meeting him would be better.

"I will leave it up to you. Just tell me the address, and I will be there." She suggested since she could not come up with any other option.

"I know a club that closes late, not far from the hotel. But it would be loud in there. My apartment is also nearby. It is much quieter there, so we can talk better." He proposed, but neither seemed appealing to her.

But as they said, choose the lesser evil. "Maybe we could meet at the club." At least there would be many people there. It could not be that noisy in there.

As soon as she parked the car on the pavement, she wondered if she had made the right choice. First, her attire seemed out of place as she walked toward the club entrance.

Second, she was too old for this place. Not that she was old, but she had outgrown her time of clubbing and having too much fun. Those were her cherished memories of her young life, but that was her past.

Still, she could not help but wonder if the bouncer at the front would even let her in, seeing the long line of people waiting for their turn.

"I am here to meet Mr. Gerald Brown." She announced to the big, burly man in a black shirt and coat. One look at her, surprisingly, the man opened the door for her.

She was not unfamiliar with this kind of place, but it had been years since she had been in one. Memories of her young life flashed before her eyes as the music blared in her ears, and flashes of light slightly blinded her as she moved further inside.

She proceeded to the bar, where she would wait for him. But she barely stepped a few more feet inside. A man stood behind her and greeted her.

"Hi, Haley. I hope you did not have a hard time looking for this place." The masculine voice spoke to her near her ears as his breath slightly tickled her skin.

She was slightly startled by his sudden appearance, making her jump a little, but she was not afraid since somehow, she recognized his voice.

Still, his nearness sent a little jolt in her body, maybe because she was startled. Then, he appeared before her, wearing that dashing smile, and his eyes seemed to dance and sparkle from the flashing light.

She found herself slightly mesmerized.

"No, I am familiar with the area." She shouted over the noise. She was not sure if he understood it, but he nodded his head. He held her elbows in his hand as he guided her to the far side of the bar, which was less crowded and a little less noisy.

“Joe, two drinks.” He said to the man in the bar, but he only nodded in understanding without asking what they liked.

“He seems to know you. Do you frequent this place?” She could not help asking, suddenly curious about him. He did not seem the typical type who liked to hang out in this place.

She had read his bio on the net. He was a well-respected lawyer in one of the best law firms in this city. He seemed a serious, no-nonsense guy who defended the weak masses against the oppressing elite.

“I drop by in this place occasionally.” He answered her, handing her a drink that did not look familiar to her. “It is one of his specialties.” Pointing to the man called Joe.

“Unless you don’t drink any alcoholic beverages.” He suddenly raised his eyebrows at her.

“Of course, I drink on occasion. I am just curious since I have not seen anything like it.” She was through experimenting with alcohol, learning her lessons on the side effect of getting drunk during her teens.

She preferred her drink to be neat and pure, but she might as well try this one. She doubted it would be worse than anything she had before.

“I assure you that is one of the best selling in this place.” He raised his glass to her, which she believed was a scotch, neat drink.

But as she sipped the drink and found it delicious, her mind still wondered what Gerald was doing in a place like this. This place seemed quite a contradiction to his public image.

Was he one of those people who was living a double life?

Chapter 819: A dangerous man

Her eyes roamed around the room, checking the decorations, finding them updated with a modern design, but she believed she could do much better. But more or less, the scene was no different from what she remembered.

Drunk youngsters, maybe in their late teens, pretending to be mature enough, and working adults crowded the dance floor, gyrating their bodies to the booming music, having the wildest time of their lives.

“So, when you said it would be loud here, you were not joking.” She slightly raised her voice for him to hear her words. The same went for him every time he had to say something.

Or the other option was to come closer and lean near his ears, so there would be no need to shout. But that seemed too intimate for someone who only was here to talk business.

“I told you, but I do want to see you.” The way he said it somehow sounded differently in her ears, but he quickly added. “I do want to help with your cause.”

She quickly returned to business mode, not wanting to be distracted by his baritone voice, the choice of words he used, or his enigmatic eyes.

“I am glad to hear that,” Haley felt more relaxed when she talked about business or the foundation.

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She was not shy or naive, nor afraid of men or relationships. But she had chosen to set aside any form of an affair until she found the perfect man who could satisfy her conditions.

She did have her fair share of relationships that did not work for one reason or another. But many of those men only wanted money. They were only after the wealth of her father.

"So, tell me more about this event since I only heard good things about it but had never participated in one before," Gerald ordered another round of drinks since he already drank his while she still had half of hers left in her glass.

"I hope you are not thinking of getting me drunk." Haley pointed to the drink placed before her.

"Of course not, but I don't want you to accuse me of not being a gracious host. I invited you here, so the least I can do is provide good service." He spoke to her, leaning over again nearer her face so as not to shout.

But like earlier, she could not help but feel the chill of his voice as it crawled underneath her skin and up her spine. The alcohol seemed to have no effect of warming her body against him.

"Noted." She raised her glass to him and drank the rest of the content on her first glass, hoping that would calm down her nerves.

She was not a drinker, but she could still hold her alcohol. Therefore, she was not afraid of a few shots. It would not make her fall flat on her face that easily.

"Anyway, about the fundraising..." She talked about the fundamentals of their organization, the people involved, how it worked, and the benefits of joining their cause.

He seemed genuinely interested as he listened and put up valid questions that she answered in her best capacity. Honestly, she liked to talk more to those philanthropists who did not want any recognition in exchange for their help.

If Gerald had been helping many foundations, as Dani had mentioned, she would assume that he never took credit for it since his name did not appear on her radar.

Some investors only listened halfheartedly to what she would say but still wrote a check, not because they wanted to help from the bottom of their hearts. They only required the distinction and the benefit it would provide for their interests.

"What about you? I heard that you are quite an accomplished architect." Gerald slightly changed the topic, finishing up another drink and signaling for another round.

"I am good at what I do if that is what you asked. I like creating things from nothing or remaking something that already existed." Haley proudly told him, slightly uninhibited by her words.

Maybe she felt more relaxed around him after talking and sharing a few things for a bit. But it could also be the alcohol talking since she had consumed more than her fair share.

She had always been proud of what she had achieved for herself. Not because of her family name. But because she had worked hard to earn her spot in the architectural world.

"What about this place? Do you think you can recommend anything to improve its style?" Gerald waved his hand, indicating he was talking about the club.

"Well..." But her words were drowned by the loud sound blaring in the speakers around them. She could hardly hear herself speak, what more him.

"I am sorry, but I think they were about to have a dance-off." He shouted in her ears, but she hardly understood most of the words, but she saw what he was pointing out.

She noticed the crowd converged in the middle of the dance floor, creating chaos as they shouted and danced to the loud music.

"Come on." She vaguely heard him say before she felt his hands wrapped around her wrist as he pulled her out of the bar and across the room, avoiding the rowdy group from bumping into them.

"Where are we going?" She asked, hardly able to catch her breath as her feet followed him wherever he was taking her.

"Somewhere quieter where we could continue our conversation." He shouted over his shoulder as they continued on a narrow path. And then climbing up the stairs, going somewhere.

She knew she should not go along with him. But either she was drunk to think clearly, or she was too curious about what he was about to show her.

But she believed it was the latter since she could still recite the alphabet clearly in her mind, forward and backward. They continued to walk until they stopped outside a door.

"What is this place?" She asked, a little confused as she watched him open the door with a key card.

Why did he have a keycard? And where did he take her?

"This is my place." He said as the door opened to a clean-looking apartment, fully furnished with a modern, slick design.

She was not expecting that as her eyes wandered around the room, checking if it was safe to enter. Was it a little late for that? Her mind chastised her for her impulsive behavior, but she still ignored the warning sign as she let her curiosity take over her.

"So, when you said you have an apartment nearby, you referred to this room above the club." She stepped into the spacious place, inspecting it, finding the place fascinating.

"Yes, I own this place, among other things." Gerald followed her inside, closing the door behind him.

"Why don't you make yourself comfortable while I pour us another drink?"

"Make it scotch neat. I think you have that." She was tired of drinking the fruity drink the bartender gave her back in the bar.

"Ok. Give me a second." He moved to the other end of the room while she sat down on the long, black leather couch in the middle of the room.

Suddenly, she realized that this man was full of surprises. He was a mystery she was finding intriguing. But her mind insisted that she should heed caution because he could still be a dangerous man.

Chapter 820: In the spotlight

"What do you think?" Gerald asked, walking towards her, handing her a glass, and situating himself on the lone chair not far from where she sat.

He placed one of his arms across the backrest and crossed his legs, making himself very comfortable as he waited for her answer.

"I think you are a man of many secrets," Haley responded, saying what was already playing on her mind aloud. It was out of her lips before she could stop it or even filter it.

There was nothing else she could do but stare into his eyes and hope he would not notice it. But nothing escaped him as his lips turned to a wide grin.

"I was asking what you think about the place. But that would work too." He teased her, making her realize they were supposed to talk about the club.

He was earlier asking what she would recommend about the design of the place. However, she was too preoccupied with daydreaming, mistakenly answering what she thought of him.

His eyes focused on her face as if he was studying her. But she could still see the amusement on his face, probably finding her answer hilarious.

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"Oh, I only meant I did not expect you to own this place." She tried to recover and get out of her slip-up. "Anyway, I don't think we are here to discuss my career and services."

She did not want to bury herself in a deeper hole, so she tried to divert back to their earlier topic. "But rather how you can help with the fundraising." Getting back to the matter at hand.

She did not want to give him the satisfaction of knowing he was getting under her skin. In addition, she had to stop thinking of him as a man, an attractive man.

She was here to talk business, the Charity Ball, and nothing more. Again, she reminded herself that this was not a romantic date because she was not interested in him and the same with him.

"Honestly," Gerald muttered as if contemplating his words. "I am not interested in talking about the Charity Ball anymore." His smile grew wider as if he found their situation fascinating as he continued to observe her reaction.

She wondered what he was thinking and planning, suddenly growing concerned for her safety. What was she thinking coming up with him in this place and meeting him at this late of the night?

"What do you mean?" Now, she was confused as alarming bells sounded in her ears. But still, she did not want to jump to a conclusion.

She kept debating with her mind that he was a reputable man. He would not do anything that would jeopardize his career and reputation.

Yet, instinctively, her eyes darted to the door, ready to bolt at any minute if he tried anything funny. She knew a few moves that might disable him, and then she could make her escape.

But she doubted she could inflict much damage on him, seeing the bulkiness of his body. He might not even flinch if she punched him in the face.

"Before I met up with you, I already gave my donation to the foundation. I have my team arrange everything." Gerald explained to her as he finally stood up and refilled his glass with alcohol. "Do you want more?" He offered to fill her glass, but she quickly declined.

She needed her senses intact and not clouded with intoxication. Luckily, she was still sober, or she might be unable to do anything if her host attempted anything untoward.

"What?" Haley was lost for words as she tried to process what he told her.

"I ask if you want more." It seemed they were not on the same wavelength as he misunderstood her question.

"No, I don't want a drink. I was asking about your statement. You already donated." She stated incredulously. It was not a question anymore but more of a confirmation.

"Yes." He quickly responded. "So there is no need to sell it because I already bought it." He clarified further, hoping that would clear whatever she did not understand.

But his words did not ease her mind, not one bit. He might have helped with the fundraising event, but what did he want from her. Why invite her to this place? What did he need from her?

Why was she here now?

"Then, why am I here?" She finally repeated the question aloud, though she dreaded what the answer might be. Many scenarios were already crossing her mind, and none were appealing or calming.

But more importantly, why was she still sitting her ass on this leather chair and not running away as fast as her feet would take her.

But how far could she run with her high heels? Could she even get to the door without him stopping her?

It was either she was making excuses or could only mean she was still interested to know what he had to say while she remained sitting and doing nothing.

Stupid body, not listening to her mind.

"I can see you are panicking, but there is no need. In truth, I wanted to discuss the foundation but then again, what was there to discuss when I knew it was for a good cause." Gerald drank half of the content of his drink. Before placing the glass on the side table to look at her.

"Then, why ask me to come? Why pretend that we have something more to discuss?" She asked, unable to believe that he duped her into joining him tonight. But for what purpose.

"Because I want to get to know you," Gerald confessed, placing his two hands together in front of him as he sat across from her. "Let me start again because I did not want to sound creepy."

He suddenly ran his hands through his messy hair, letting a few deep breaths escape his lips before continuing. "I thought you were not coming, so I asked my legal team to arrange the donations. But then, you called."

"But, you can just tell me that." She countered, not liking that he lied to her.

He took a deep breath before continuing as if he was uncomfortable. "Then, risk that you would decline my offer to see me. I don't think so."

"So, you lied, so I would come and have a drink with you." Suddenly, Haley could not stop the laughter that escaped her lips. It sounded so ridiculous in her ears that she could not believe it.

"What is so funny about that?" Gerald looked at her as if she had grown horns.

How could she not find this funny when she was dreading that he was here to kidnap her and do terrible things to her when all he wanted was to date her.

"Because you could have directly asked if I want to go out with you. Like a normal person." She added the last person with some more chuckles. "Why would I say no when you seem to be a decent person?"

Still, she wondered if she would have said yes if he had asked like any other guy. Because something about him intrigued her very much but, at the same time, scared her.

"I doubt that you would have easily said yes." He still insisted that he could sense that she was not the type of girl who went out with men.

"Maybe or maybe not." She responded with no affirmation. "Anyway, since we are now in this situation, shall we still call it a business date or something else." She asked, still finding their situation unexpected.

"If you don't mind, I want to call this our first late-night drink together," Gerald said, putting a slight title to their night.

"Then, let us say it is our first date." She did not want to pretend that this was anything but that. But at least she could try dating again. "Shall we see if we are a match?"

"Ok. But honestly, what do people do on a first date?" He asked seriously, but she could not tell if he was joking or not.

It had been a while since she was also on a date, but from what she remembered, it was dinner, wine, and a lot of talking. Of course, she was not about to think of what happened after that.

"Why don't we start by telling something about ourselves." She suggested, finally taking the drink that he was offering earlier.

Maybe it would be nice to pick his mind and learn more about his secrets. But there was a risk that he might also do the same. So far, he seemed better at questioning.

Well, he was one of the best litigators in the country. What would she expect? Suddenly, he doubted she would get much out of him.

"Ok. I like that. Why don't you go first?" He said, giving her the floor. "What is it? Ladies first."

He certainly did not waste time as he maneuvered the situation in his favor, giving her no chance to counteract. "Ok, what do you you want to know?" She asked, not knowing where to start.

Suddenly, she found herself in the spotlight.